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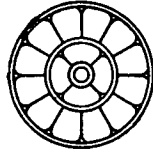
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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No.1

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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THE MOTHER ON WHAT SHE IS AND WHAT SHE DOES¹

THERE are two things that should not be confused with each other, namely, what one is and what one does, what one is essentially and what one does in the outside world. They are very different. I know what I am. And what others think or say or whatever happens in the world, that truth remains unaffected, unaltered, a fact. It is real to itself and the world's denial or affirmation does not increase or diminish that reality. But being what I am, what I do actually is altogether a different question: that will depend upon the conditions and circumstances in which things are and in and through which I am to work. I know the truth I bring, but how much of it finds expression in the world depends upon the world itself. What I bring, the world must have the capacity and the will to accept otherwise even if I bring with me the highest and the most imperative truth, it will be, absolutely as it were, non-existent for a consciousness that does not recognise or receive it: the being with that consciousness will not profit a jot by it.

You will say, if the truth I bring is supreme and omnipotent, why does it not compel the world to accept it, why can it not break the world's resistance, force man to accept the good he refuses? But that is not the way in which the world was created nor the manner in which it moves and develops. The origin of creation is freedom: it is a free choice in the consciousness that has projected itself as the objective world. This freedom is the very character of its fundamental nature. If the world denies its supreme truth, its highest good, it does so in the delight of its free choice; and if it is to turn back and recognise that truth and that good, it must do so in the same delight of free choice. If the erring world is ordered to turn right and immediately does so, if things were done in a trice, through miracles, there will be then no point in creating a world. Creation means a play of growth: it is a journey, a movement in time and space through graded steps and stages. It is a movement away—away from its source—and a movement towards: that is the principle or plan on which it stands. In this plan there is no compulsion on any of the elements composing the world to forswear its natural movement, to obey a dictate from outside: such compulsion would break the rhythm of creation.

And yet there is a compulsion. It is the secret pressure of one's own nature that drives it forward through all vicissitudes back again to its original source. When it is said that the Divine Grace can and should do all, it means nothing more and nothing less than that: the Divine Grace only accelerates the process of return and recognition. But on the side of the journeying element, the soul, there must be awakened a conscious collaboration, an initial consent and a constantly renewed adhesion. It is this that brings out, at least helps to establish outside on the physical level, the force that is already and has always been at

¹ A talk of the Mother, probably in 1952, as reported by Nolini Kanta Gupta

work within and on the subtler and higher levels. That is the pattern of the play, the system of conditions under which the game is carried out. The Grace works and incarnates in and through a body of willing and conscious cooperators: these become themselves part and parcel of the Force that works.

The truth I bring will manifest and will be embodied upon earth; for, it is the earth's and world's inevitable destiny. The question of time is not relevant. In one respect the truth which I say will be made manifest is already fully manifest, is already realised and established: there is no question of time there. It is in a consciousness timeless or eternally present. There is a process, a play of translation between that timeless poise and the poise in time that we know here below. The measure of that hiatus is very relative, relative to the consciousness that measures, long or short according to the yardstick each one brings. But that is not the essence of the problem: the essence is that the truth is there active, in the process of *materialisation*, only one should have the eye to see it and the soul to greet it.

A PRAYER FROM THE RIGVEDA FOR THE NEW YEAR

O FLAME! Master Strength! O Leader! You gather around you all the peoples of the world and bind them together. You burn bright in the high seat of revelation, you bring us all the riches

Come together, all of you, speak in one voice, know with one mind, even like the gods who, of yore, knew with one mind and together had their share of enjoyment. Together may they utter the mantra, may they unite together, may their mind be one, their consciousness mingle. I utter the same mantra with you all, equally I make the offering. May your yearning be one, may your heart be one, may your mind be one, so that your union be perfect.

(Mandala X, Sukta 191, Translated by Nolini Kanta Gupta)

SOME OLD CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

1

Is an Avatar subject to the laws of Karma like ordinary mortals? The mind, life and body of an ordinary man are formed as a result of his past Karma. But the Avatar descends from above. by what laws, then, are his mind, life and body formed?

The Avatar gets them just as other men do. What have these things got to do with his being an Avatar? They are only a certain movement in Nature—in his lower *Prakriti*. If your idea is that the Avatar is something miraculous and that he is not subject to the laws of Nature, then you have only a conventional notion of the matter. He is not miraculous in the methods he adopts. He also, like other men, accepts the human limitations. If he did not, he would cease to have any meaning for men.

But how is his Adhar, his natural being, prepared?

The preparation of his adhar takes place, as I said, in his lower *Prakriti*, leaving his soul free and unaffected. If he were to use his freedom he could grow twenty arms and ten eyes! But he does not do so and prefers to behave less impressively. Krishna says in the Gita that he has been taking birth always since the beginning of time. You must get rid of the idea that God is ever aloof from the universe. He is everywhere, you must remember; he is always here in the universe. Only he has to manifest his divinity. What may be spoken of as being above is in fact the inner reality of what may be spoken of as being below—they are not two separate things but just the within and the without. The Supermind, for instance, is the true inner self and nature of mind, life and body.

Was Buddha an Avatar and did he live in the Supermind?

His aim was not to produce supermen. An Avatar aims at transforming the earth-life into a dynamic image of the Truth, whereas Buddha wanted to realise all this as the impermanent shadow of the Permanent and to leave this in order to remain always in the Permanent—in the state of *Nirvana*.

But surely his vital and physical parts did not live in Nirvana?

Evidently not.

Then, were they subject to ignorance? And if so, they could drag him down to birth again.

He could have abandoned these parts.

So he could become free, I believe. Is that not so?

What do you mean by freedom? Birth is a bondage so long as one is in the mental consciousness, for then it appears to be that. But if you look at it from above, then there is no such thing—one is not at all affected by birth and death. If one is consciously poised there, one need not flee from the natural instruments.

Then Buddha could not have achieved perfection of his nature?

His ideal seems to have been to enter ultimately what the Upanishad calls the Higher Ignorance. The human mind can occupy itself with only certain mental absolutes—it cannot adapt itself in experience to the infinite movements of the Divine Consciousness. It may confine itself to the absolute of the silent Brahman, or to the absolute of the infinite Power—Mahashakti. It generally excludes the rest of the Infinite. Many exclusive movements like these are possible, but looking from the integral point of view we may say that the true ideal is to manifest the Divine as integrally as possible, without trenchant exclusions.

In the Jaina philosophy there is an idea that in this age the body will not be capable of bearing the Supermind

As to that, we shall see. .. Besides, the Jaina philosophy is concerned with individual perfection. Our effort is quite different. We want to bring down the Supermind as a new faculty. Just as the mind is now a permanent state of consciousness in humanity, so also we want to create a race in which the Supermind will be a permanent state of consciousness.

2

You said once that the symbolism of the Veda was to a certain extent conventional—for instance, the typification of Light and Truth by the Cow. The same may be said of the symbolism of northern Buddhism or of ancient Egypt or of the alchemists and Rosicrucians. But is there any one symbolism which could be called universal, having a reality independent of the mental measuring of words and images?

If such a symbolic representation exists, it ought to be based on true correspondences between the different planes, and the symbols themselves must be universal in character.

Numbers are said to form such a symbolism. 2 is supposed to correspond to the law of polarity in its different aspects, 4 to will and creative action, 5 to individualised consciousness contacting the universal and unfolding its powers, 8 to Karma, 9 to life and psychic evolution and so on. 6, for example, represents divine creation. Has this idea any true foundation in the supramental realities which are the first laws of the cosmos, realities which shape mentally into such concepts as polarity, Karma, psychic evolution etc? And taking for granted that these realities are, do numbers represent them correctly?

Well, numbers do have special properties signifying self-existent and eternal laws ruling the whole manifestation.

Is this what made Pythagoras and other mystics see in them the highest abstract images of the law of being?.. But what is the exact difference between Symbol and Reality?

A symbol, as I understand it, is the form on one plane that represents a truth of another. For instance, a flag is the symbol of a nation. .. But generally all forms are symbols. This body of ours is a symbol of our real being and everything is a symbol of some higher reality. There are, however, different kinds of symbols:

(i) Conventional symbols: such as the Vedic rishis formed with objects taken from their surroundings. The cow stood for light because the same word 'go' meant both ray and cow, and because the cow was their most precious possession which maintained their life and was constantly in danger of being robbed and concealed. But once created, such a symbol becomes alive. The rishis vitalised it and it became a part of their realisation. It appeared in their visions as an image of spiritual light. The horse also was one of their favourite symbols, and a more easily adaptable one, since its force and energy were quite evident.

(ii) What we might call Life-Symbols: such as are not artificially chosen or mentally interpreted in a conscious deliberate way, but derive naturally from our day to day life and grow out of the surroundings which condition our normal path of living. To the ancients, the mountain was a symbol of the path of Yoga, level above level, peak upon peak. A journey, involving the crossing of rivers and the facing of lurking enemies both animal and human, conveyed a similar idea. Nowadays I dare say we would liken Yoga to a motor-ride or a railway-trip.

(iii) Symbols that have an inherent appositeness and power of their own. Akasha or etheric space is a symbol of the infinite all-pervading eternal Brahman. In any nationality it would convey the same meaning. Also, the Sun stands universally for the supramental Light, the divine Gnosis.

(iv) Mental symbols, instances of which are numbers or alphabets. Once they are accepted, they too become active and may be useful. Thus geometrical

figures have been variously interpreted. In my experience the square symbolises the Supermind. I cannot say how it came to do so. Somebody or some force may have built it before it came to my mind. Of the triangle, too, there are different explanations. In one position it symbolises the three lower planes, in another the three higher ones. So both together make the well-known sign. The ancients liked to indulge in similar speculations concerning numbers. But their systems were mostly mental. It is no doubt true that supramental realities exist which we translate into mental formulas such as Karma, Psychic Evolution etc. But they are, so to speak, infinite realities which cannot be limited by these symbolic forms, though they may be somewhat expressed by them. They may as well be expressed by other symbols, and the same symbol may also express various ideas

3

You once described the Asuras as representing the dark side of God on the vital plane. Does this dark side exist on every plane? And if so, are there on the mental also corresponding beings of this sort?

The Asuras are really the dark side of the mental plane. Mind is the very field of the Asuras. Their main characteristic is egoistic strength and struggle, which refuse the higher law. The Asura has self-control, *tapas* and intelligence, but all that for the sake of his ego. On the vital plane the corresponding forces we call the Rakshasas which represent violent passions and impulses. There are also other kinds of beings on the vital plane which are called the Pishachas and Pramathas. They manifest more or less in the physico-vital.

What are the corresponding beings on the higher planes?

There are no Asuras where the Truth prevails, except in the Vedic sense—"the Divine in its strength." The mental and vital Asuras are only a deviation of that power.

What are the corresponding forces on the physical plane?

They are obscure beings, more forces than beings, what the theosophists call the elementals. They are not strongly individualised beings like the Rakshasas and Asuras, but ignorant and obscure forces working in the subtle-physical plane. What we in Sanscrit call the Bhutas mostly come under this class. But there are two kinds of elementals, the one mischievous and the other not.

You said some days back that some forces of disease are individualised while others are not.

I never said that. What I might have said is that there are conscious forces behind diseases.

You also said that some diseases feed upon the vitality of men.

It is not disease that feeds on man's vitality. It may be a vital being sucking up man's vitality and the result may be a disease.

Does not disease originate in our breaking the laws of Nature?

What do you mean by 'laws of Nature'? What are these laws?

When a man acts through desire he may do things which he is not compelled to do by his nature: for instance, over-eating, lust etc.

There are no such universal laws of Nature. If you will ask people who have lived long lives, you will find one saying that he lived long because he has kept to what you call the laws of Nature—he has not been smoking nor taking wine. While another old man will say that he has been able to do it because he had a peg of wine now and then. Therefore there are no universally applicable rules.

But it is a fact that observing hygienic laws diminishes mortality, is it not so?

What you can at the most say is that if one keeps to these hygienic laws one has more chances of escaping from diseases. But even very strong people, once they are assailed by disease, are knocked down and in the most sudden and unexpected manner die. We extol these artificial hygienic laws because we do not know the needs of our physical beings. If you let the physical being be unhampered by vital desires or mental ideas, it would choose the things which it really needs.

Is it not a sort of instinct that animals possess to a greater degree than man?

You may call it an instinct, but when you become fully conscious it is no more an instinct but the complete consciousness in the physical plane. It is, however, true that animals have it more than man, but even in them it is not fully awakened. With regard to food, for example, they make a more correct selection than man. . . But what you call laws are merely habits. I have seen people who used to conform to all the so-called hygienic laws and yet did not escape diseases. They used to eat without desire only for the maintenance of the body and yet they grew sick. There is really speaking a vital balance which each one has to find out for himself; because it is not the same for all. And even when, provided there is

no bad heredity, one has secured the vital balance, all that can be said is that one has the greatest chance of escaping diseases; for, even that does not give one absolute immunity.

Why do Yogins pay so much attention to their food?

Not for the sake of observing hygienic laws Their aim is to reduce the needs of the body as well as to weaken the *rajasic* tendencies They only take food having *sattwic* properties. And though their food is vegetarian, still all vegetables even are not included

Is it possible to live without food?

Yes. When I did my fast of twenty three days in 1912 I very nearly solved the problem I could walk eight hours a day as usual, do my mental work, practise my sadhana, and I found that I was not the least weak at the end of the twenty three days But the flesh began to grow less and I did not find the way to replace it, to restore the very material reduction. When I broke the fast, I did not observe any of the usual symptoms. It was possible to take food normally again without any trouble Gandhi's method of fasting seems to me most unwise, announcing beforehand and allowing all sorts of people to put forth a host of suggestions ... I tried fasting in jail also, but that was only for ten days I used to sleep once in three nights. I lost ten pounds in weight, but I felt stronger on the whole I could lift weights which I could not before And as to not sleeping, it was not for conquering sleep that I kept awake but because the pressure of sadhana was very intense and I liked to do sadhana rather than sleep.

But do you believe it is possible to live entirely without food?

I believe it is possible Only I did not find the way at that time It is possible and not so difficult to supply the vital energy of the body almost indefinitely; only the very material part of the body seems to require food

Is it possible for man to get vital energy from animals? I know of a man who used to ride every day on horseback and he said that he derived vital energy from it

Yes, it is quite possible You can even draw it from a man without riding him You can draw it from living matter also But the easiest process is to draw it from the universal vital forces. They are there all around you. Two methods can be used: the one is to exert your force and draw the vital energy, the other is to remain passive and allow it to flow into you Formerly I used to draw it myself but nowadays I merely open to its flow.

NOMINATION LETTER FOR THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR SRI AUROBINDO IN 1950

BY THE CITIZENS OF INDIA

The name of Sri Aurobindo was proposed for the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950, by Madame Gabriela Mistral, the Nobel Laureate of Chile, and seconded by Miss Pearl S. Buck, the Nobel Laureate of the United States of America. A statement supporting Sri Aurobindo's nomination was signed by many leading citizens of our country.

The President,
Svenska Akademien,
Stockholm, Sweden.

1949

Dear Sir,

Sri Aurobindo is held in deep reverence in India and other parts of the world. We, his countrymen and admirers, look up to him as one who shares the vision of the Great Ones of all ages and who belongs to the galaxy of 'just men made perfect' With his divine, cosmic vision and a life breathing forth the fragrance of holiness, Sri Aurobindo has given us a glimpse, unparalleled for its profundity and sublimity, of the occult significance of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagawad Gita. Through his writings he has revealed to us once again the pathway of experiencing the Real and the Eternal. This pathway is the Integral Yoga, the simultaneous divinisation of consciousness and matter in the various dimensions of the human personality. The story of the grand strategy of Evolution through which the Supreme Being fulfils Himself in the multifarious forms of manifestation constitutes the core of this universal drama of the Becoming Poetry has become, in Sri Aurobindo's hands, an instrument of articulating the celestial music, the ecstasy of the Infinite, and the whole system of Sri Aurobindo's thought is a superb edifice, a majestic summation of the Laws of the inner and the outer worlds in which the Eternal continues to exert pressure on all orders and aggregates of Life to ascend heavenward in an orchestration of a unified, co-operative movement, thus helping man to divest himself of the separative, egoistic, communalistic and nationalistic tendencies and to regain a living faith in the ideal of unity of all life

Sri Aurobindo's profound and penetrating analysis of the fundamentals of Indian Culture and his vision of India's glorious destiny of being the meeting-place of the best of the East and the West have awakened us to the opulent spiritual heritage that belongs to us and the part that India has to play in the destiny of mankind. We look up to Sri Aurobindo as belonging to the family of

the Seers and Sages of the world whose line has never ended and whose majesty of soul will continue to shed lustre on all parts of the world and at all times

It is, therefore, a source of great pleasure to us to bring to your attention his contribution and to commend to your favourable consideration the proposal to award the Nobel Prize in Literature to Sri Aurobindo

Yours faithfully,

Hon. Shri Gopalswami Ayyangar, *Minister for Transport, Govt. of India*

Hon. Shri N.V. Gadgil, *Minister for Works, Mines and Power, Govt. of India*

Hon. Shri Jairamdas Daulatram, *Minister for Food and Agriculture, Govt. of India*

Hon. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, *Minister for Industry & Supply, Govt. of India*

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His Excellency Shri Mangaldas Pakvasa, *Governor of Central Provinces and Chancellor of Nagpur University*

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His Highness the Maharaja of Rewa, *Rajpramukh of Vindhya Pradesh Union*

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 Shri Jamshed Nusserwanjee, *former Mayor, Karachi Municipality*
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Source: Barasat Gate Cultural Association Souvenir published on the centenary of Sri Aurobindo's return to India from England in 1893 and Swami Vivekananda's voyage from India to the United States to attend the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in the same year

THE LOVE KINDLING HOPE'S STAR

COULD I believe you have reserved
 For me a nameless hour
 When I shall see the sun, original and splendid,
 Rising after a bath from the sea of night,
 Recognise your smile wandering from lips to lips
 And hear your flute opening closed buds?
 Would you tell me my days of hard travails
 Are not vainly spent, they have
 A richer harvest than my mind would conceive?
 I would rather urge you not to hurry
 Lest I lose the sight of your marvellous hand
 Sweeping away majestically the mists and the clouds.
 I have more of them now in my firmament
 But seeing your eyes I feel
 They are but perfumes of my Puja room,
 Duty-bound to teach me alphabets of love.
 Some call me a fool, a pagan, a hypocrite,
 I listen to them in silence
 And whisper to you in my inner self:
 Who can elude your inexorable net of love—
 The love kindling hope's star?

SEIKH ABDUL KASAM

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME OLD PERSONAL LETTERS

YOUR experience of being transported to another time or life seems to be a happy mixture of present and past, the reminiscence of a contact with the Mother in a bygone life mingling with the memories and hopes relating to her Ashram of today. Your red sari in the vision is symbolic of the living expression you are seeking of your inmost heart—that “crimson-throbbing glow” (your fellow-Catholic Coventry Patmore’s words) in which dreams of the Ideal burn and beat. Your meeting your brother William in this vision is not surprising, for behind his physical and mental limitations in the present life is his evolving soul which must have grown not only in spite of but also because of the unusual state in which it outwardly found itself. The soul’s ways are strange and often inscrutable. Before it leaves a body it chooses its own next incarnation, the nature of which would answer to the need felt by the departing soul for a certain kind of new experience. Of course there are Karmic effects too of one’s doings, but the ordinary idea that good fortune now means reward for past good deeds and current misfortune spells punishment for old wickedness is too school-masterly and superficial. At times the soul accepts difficulties to serve as a short cut to its progress.

I saw the film *Gandhi*. It was extremely well acted and produced, driving home very vividly the extraordinary moral force of the man. Some telling incidents of his life were somehow left out. Some blunders of his, too, didn’t figure, the greatest being the rejection of the Cripps Proposals which, according to Sri Aurobindo, had come on a wave of divine inspiration and on behalf of which Sri Aurobindo sent a special message to Cripps and a personal emissary to the Indian Congress. If accepted, they would have brought about a united front by the Hindus and the Muslims and, by a firm co-operative experience in government, tended to prevent the fissure which led to the tragic break-up of the country into Bharat and Pakistan some years later.

What you write about yourself and me is full of inner truths. That “beautiful white glow or flame” in the centre of your forehead each time I was in your thought images the true Amal who has to manifest some day the reality caught in those two verses in a poem of his—

Flickering no longer with the cry of clay,
The distance-haunted fire of mystic mind—

the reality at which Sri Aurobindo hinted when he gave me my Ashram name “Amal Kiran” meaning “The Clear Ray” I picture this ray to be something like that streak of all-penetrating white light which Indian spiritual mythology sees

issuing from Shiva's "third eye" in the centre of his forehead. It is natural that you should feel the Mother smiling, for surely it is the true Amal that the Mother kept always in gracious sight, overlooking all the obscurities which were present in me but which I never sought to hide from her and tried my best to submit to her for dispersal

I am glad you have qualified for intenser care as well as for greater understanding of the ailing who come to the emergency department. Most probably your new job reveals a field for which your new name—"Kṛipā"—has acted like an "Open Sesame" "Kṛipā" in place of the old "Catherine" is what has come through me from the Mother's overflowing love and compassion not only to kindle in you her true child but also to act through you to spread her warm wide being to the world you live in and kindle everywhere happiness and harmony and health and holiness.

These four h's are things that are modes of the Mother's "warm wide being" already present in the world's depths. The Divinity high above in the Transcendent is also there within us and within the universal existence. That is what is implied by the phrase you have quoted from Sri Aurobindo: " . . . this consciousness, this supreme reality which is behind all existence, which is the source and the substance of all " To bring forward the Wonder which is "behind"—the stuff of the Spirit from which all has come and of which all is secretly made—that is the great task, and the metaphysical basis of the vision inspiring such a task is what you "don't so readily find in Christianity" or rather in your "history of religious pursuit" Teilhard de Chardin was born with an intuition of Indian spirituality that he called "pantheism" and grossly misunderstood because of the Western pantheistic philosophy that excludes the Transcendent. He always fought with himself because of conventional Catholic scruples and never achieved the synthesis of the true Indian spirituality which, from the time of the Rigveda, held that the Supreme Being kept three-fourths of Himself above and sent one-fourth below to make the cosmos. Conventional Catholicism makes out the cosmic one-fourth to be merely a creation "out of nothing", a product which does not have the very substance of the Supreme Being in a temporarily covered and gradually manifesting form. there is a rather confused understanding of the Pauline affirmation of Him "in whom we live and move and have our being".

(14.9.1983)

From the tone as well as the contents of your letter I can judge that you and your wife are going on steadily forward. There is a poise full of a quiet happy receptivity—a sure sign of a touch on you from both the infinite Self of all and the true individual soul, the Divine Immense and the Divine Intense, the peace of the Beyond and the joy of the Within. The Beyond tends to put an end to what Sri Aurobindo calls "time's unrest" and to bring an unshakable freedom as if one

stood out of the universe in a vast background. The Within does not break away from the heart's pulsations. It counts, as it were, the moments of time but through them it listens to the magically changing rhythm of a secret flute and echoes the ever-nearing footsteps of some Perfect Form whose beauty does not belong to us yet but still gives us the feeling that we have always belonged to it.

Your dream-experience carries the stamp of this Within. The car of a special type which you never saw before and which was coloured blue and white is the movement of Yoga assimilating the passage of time and representing by its colour Krishna's light which Sri Aurobindo has also termed his own light—a whitish blue. No wonder the "heart-stirring music" that came out of it bore the mantra "Rama...Krishna" and, by that soul-intimate sound, cut you away from your ordinary relationships and through a snatch of trance brought you the sense of your being's truth, your most real You-ness which is dedicated to the Perfect Form I have spoken of and by this self-giving shares in its blissful beauty.

(15.9.1983)

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As soon as I received your letter I fished out the issue of *Mother India* in which I had published from the *Times Literary Supplement* an article just right for soothing your wife's nerves and yours. As the book reviewed in it has been published from the States I would advise you to buy it to get a fuller treatment of the viewpoint sketched in the article. Nostradamus has become a sensational theme, just as the Revelation of St John has been. All kinds of terrifying prophecies are sought to be read in the latter, especially in America. One of the most fantastic interpretations is about the Anti-Christ. Poor John Carlos of Spain is cast in that role by one school of interpreters. The whole scheme is connected with the biblical vision of the Second Coming of Christ. I have studied this question very closely and can prove that Jesus prophesied his own return to take place fairly soon after his death. In the Gospels as well as in the Epistles of Paul we have the suggestion that in the first century A.D. itself the Second Coming will be experienced and the resurrection of all the believers will occur. Paul adds that those who are alive from the generation contemporary with him will also be transformed in the twinkle of an eye and be lifted up into the heavens in the wake of the dead who will arise in new spiritual bodies. Paul at first believed that the great event would be witnessed in his own lifetime. Later, owing perhaps to a decline in his health, he held that it might happen soon after his death. No doubt, Jesus says in the Gospels that nobody, not even he, knows the exact day and hour; only God the Father knows them. But this in no way contradicts the declaration on several occasions that they would be in the very near future. In the latest book in the New Testament—II Peter—which assuredly belongs to the first half of the second century A.D. there is a lament that the

unbelievers mock the believers because the prophecy has not yet come true. And a defence is attempted with an Old-Testament saying that to God a day can be like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day, implying that any delay cannot be used to give the lie to the prediction. But there is no going back on the prediction in its essence—namely, that the Second Coming will be soon. The delay is surmised to be giving the unbelievers the full chance to voice their derision triumphantly and thus be wholly ripe for the punitive divine wrath. Thus there is not a shred of scriptural support for the various modern scenarios of doomsday. People who have not unprejudicedly studied the New Testament indulge in all those semi-science-fiction predictions. Similar seems to have been the case with the students of Nostradamus. The author of the book reviewed in the article “Oracle to the Cock of France” has given the most dispassionate and penetrating look at the verses of Nostradamus and made them applicable only to his own time.

What is said about the west coast of America by Nostradamus’s interpreters is not quite inaccurate in general. This part of America rests on a geological “fault” and the possibility of an earthquake at some time in the future is there but the utterly catastrophic view which has been put forth Nostradamusly is, without doubt, sensation-mongering. The same holds for the prediction of a 27 year war in the near future. I would attach no importance to this bit of futurology. I don’t say the future is bound to be all smooth, but no passage of time throughout history has ever been such. What we have to cling to and what should give us an optimistic vision is the Mother’s assurance that a luminous spiritual age awaits us and all that happens before it will be turned in the best way possible towards its arrival. Now that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are not in their physical forms, the age spoken of may be far, but it will certainly come and nothing like a Third World War will be able to prevent it. I even question the possibility of such a war. The most dangerous time, according to the Mother, for a world-wide conflagration was before what she has called the Supramental Manifestation in the earth’s subtle-physical layer came about on the 29th February 1956. After this manifestation the history of the world underwent a change and the direction was set for a grand progression towards the evolution of the Superman. Perhaps the Mother has to be reborn in order to accelerate things, but her work and Sri Aurobindo’s will go on in any case. The very fact that nobody has read in Nostradamus any hint of this work shows that he could not be a genuine prophet—and even if there be frightening prospects in a world which has acquired nuclear power without a deepening or heightening of consciousness, it is perfectly true, as said in *Savitri*, that

One man’s perfection still can save the world.

Your wife and you should live calmly and courageously, have whatever children

you want without the fear that you would be ushering them into a disastrous world, choose whatever location suits you and keep your faith in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother ever bright and inwardly dedicate to them all that you do.

The dream you had in early August this year figures the dangers of an inwardly unprepared mankind possessing—in words again from *Savitri*—

The riven invisible atom's omnipotent force

and at the same time discloses the knowledge-illuminated saviour Shakti of the Mother. The dreamer in you has been more like the Nostradamus pictured by his commentators than the real 16th-century chap whose predictive eyes did not in fact range beyond the circumstances of the France of his day.

At your mention of "the learned Parsi Behramji Pithawalla" I could not help smiling. Where has this person picked up something from the Parsi scriptures relating to Bombay? These scriptures date from the B.C.-period and can have no reference to any modern city unless fanciful conversions are made, as in Nostradamus's text, of old terms into new significances. Even the latest traditional glosses on the scriptures like the *Dinkard*, go back to the early centuries of the Christian era, the Arsacidian or Sassanian times. Behramji Pithawalla's information seems to have flowed out of a Pitha (wine-shop) rather than from the Avesta.

You may address me by any affectionate form you like. I don't mind being "uncle." But along with it use my original name or my Ashram appellation without any honorific suffix. please don't append "ji" or "da." Don't let my ripe old age misguide you into making me ridiculously venerable. Rather than be considered venerable with "ji" or "da", I wouldn't mind the invariable malapropism of my erstwhile Bombay landlord, the late Ardaser Dubash—as when with a spontaneous consistency of verbal misapplication he referred to an honoured guest at one of his parties—Father Sola, the St. Xavier's College's Rector (Head)—as "That venereal old gentleman who is the rectum of St. Xavier's College." (16.9.1983)

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My inordinate delay in replying to you must have engendered all kinds of thoughts in your mind. "Amal is ill—or even gone permanently out of his body—or else he does not want to have any relation with me or, again, he is absolutely stumped by the dynamic doctor's arguments which I have relayed from here."

In a general way the last idea is near the mark. Though "stumped" is not the *mot juste*, what the doctor has dynamically dosed you with is connected with a subject on which the wisest thing to do is to be driven into silence. Arguing will

be of little use. Different points of view are possible—and the best resort is to take refuge in the words of somebody much more illumined than ourselves. If Sri Aurobindo and the Mother direct us or permit us to eat this or that kind of food, we must accept their guidance. Along with that guidance goes their advice not to be rigidly bound to any idea or develop doctrinaire fanaticism.

The general rule for the Ashram is vegetarianism as practised in our Dining Room. But the Mother freely allows eggs and even some meat at times, not to mention fish. We follow her wisdom and do not enter into controversies over these matters any more than over that other issue, service to society. We serve society to the extent that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother wish. Surely they do not want us to live only for our own egos. While ultimately concentrating on self-dedication to the Divine by both an inner life and an outer one, we do works in the world involving benefiting our fellow-beings. Most of these fellow-beings are our fellow-sadhaks and working for their good is certainly tantamount to a kind of social service. The Mother always appreciated unselfish behaviour as well as the doing of a job for others as perfectly as possible. Those who practise slapdash work just because what they do is apparently for the egos of fellow-sadhaks forget the central truth of work here, the truth for which the Mother encouraged an active life, the truth that we serve the Divine in a person and must therefore do our job for him or her sincerely and efficiently.

Our basic aim is not social service as such but to be more and more in contact with the Divine by Yoga. Since Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is integral, it must lead to living harmoniously and creatively in the midst of the world. In the manner and in the measure the Divine wants us to do so we must carry on and not bother about general theories of what man is born for. Similarly, in our eating modes we must attempt to live as the founder of the Integral Yoga ordains, and desist from discussing general attitudes such as the single-tracked mind of your medical disputant pushes upon you.

If somebody does not wish to follow Sri Aurobindo and the Mother because of some general attitude, leave him alone. Just say that you have offered your life to them and you will do as they direct, irrespective of whether your doings conform to one or another position taken up by people. Only those who believe that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother possess a greater light than the mental consciousness will be real followers and they will not argue their heads off about subjects your friend is fond of fighting over. We are not there to make converts by entering into all sorts of controversies. We are willing to discuss broad philosophical issues but we must not get entangled in faddist problems.

(14.1 1984)

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Quite a number of notes you have struck in the three letters I have with me. But

three in particular are felt as tones and undertones and overtones. There are light and joy on the surface—that is the poet responding to the magic and mystery of the world, the touch of bright nearnesses, the call of hazy distances. All these are what I name “tones”, the varied spectrum of waking life. But at one end of the spectrum is the infra-red and at the other the ultra-violet. The former I point to as “undertones”, the hidden cries and groppings, the restlessnesses of a dream-life which glimpses elusive idealities. You have caught a sense of it with impressive originality in the poem entitled “Lonely Restlessness”. Usually the sea is described as full of turmoil and agitation on its surface and the depths are said to be calm. You have reversed the scene. A happy laughing movement rather than unrest is your sea’s outer being, a kind of calm that is sun-shot and a-glimmer. Below is the great unease, the ever-searching solitariness. Not that pleasure is absent, not that the thrill of beauty is lacking. The Divine is felt here at diverse play no less than in the many-coloured outer appearance, but here are subtle and secret ways that do not lead to tangible goals. The lurings of these ways you designate “the touch that hurts and delights”, the more-than-human which is not easy to bear because of its strange enrapturing excess of loveliness. You get scattered sips of nectar which set you always seeking, the full sweetness cannot be drained. The only solution is to go from the dreaming inner to the tranced inmost, where hides

the petalled fire
Rooted in godlike rest.

What I have labelled as “overtones” is, in my spectrum-image, the ultra-violet. It is not the Divine below or behind or within: it is the Divine beyond—to us a superconscient sleep, not just the sweet essence of things that is found in the soul but the vast heaven of honey overflowing to infinity. Perhaps none of us has made his home there but all of us have known vague drippings, through some tremulous opening in our heads, from the golden charity pouring at all times out of the spiritual empyrean whose physical image is—à la Fitzgerald’s Omar—“that inverted bowl we call the sky” (3 6.1986)

AMAL KIRAN
(K.D. SETHNA)

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SRI AUROBINDO AS I SAW HIM

A TALK BY NIRODBARAN

AT PITANGA HALL, AUROVILLE, ON 14TH AUGUST 1993, 4 P.M.

WELL, brothers and sisters, your invitation came to me as a mystic surprise, and I accepted it readily. I am very thankful to you, as well as grateful, for giving me this opportunity to meet you, thankful, because today, as you know, is the eve of Sri Aurobindo's birthday—a very auspicious occasion; grateful, because your invitation has made me think of Sri Aurobindo very often, pray to him to give me inspiration, to make me ready and to prepare me so that I may truly convey to you something of what Sri Aurobindo was. A constant remembrance for about a month is something which is a blessing. Most of the time we forget our gurus, but on these occasions we do remember, and, as you know, remembrance of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo goes a great way in our life. So I am grateful to you for giving me this opportunity, which I believe has been ordained by Him—that's why I called it a 'mystic surprise', not a human surprise—there was some touch of Sri Aurobindo behind. Whether I shall be able to communicate to you what I want to, now depends on Him. If I fail, it is his failure [*laughter*], if I succeed it is his success; I have nothing to be proud of, and I have nothing to be ashamed of, because He has brought me here to serve His own purpose—I never thought of it. So the entire responsibility devolves on Him alone: don't blame me [*laughter*], or don't praise me either.

My friend Mr. Franz has given you some background to this talk. I may say something more to place you in the context. It is a very short introduction, just to give you the necessary details, because some of you may not know what the Ashram life was like when we came here—in the 'thirties

Ashram Life in the 'Thirties

After Sri Aurobindo's great realisation in the year 1926—we call this the descent of the Overmind or Sri Krishna's consciousness, to be exact, in the physical—he went into seclusion, leaving the charge of the Ashram in the hands of the Divine Mother. This withdrawal was imperative for his further sadhana; but in order to keep in touch with the world or earth, with the inmates, and in direct communication with them, correspondence was substituted: we, the inmates, were asked to write to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo about our daily condition of sadhana, all our troubles and difficulties, in mind, vital and physical, so that, by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's help, directly or subtly, we could be benefitted. Mind you, most of the inmates knew very little about spirituality or sadhana—one of them was myself. It was almost like an infant class. Sri

Aurobindo used to spend eight or nine hours a day over this correspondence. We were free to write about everything in our inner or outer history, and he was going over it and giving his answers. In addition there were three silent 'darshans'—on Mother's birthday, His birthday, and His Realisation-day. These were silent darshans—a time when the sadhaks could see the Mother and Sri Aurobindo together and do their *pranam*, receive their direct blessings, and receive also experiences communicated to them in subtle ways. It was at this time I came. There were about 100 or 150 members in 1933; most of them were of the common literate class—only a few were cultured. I too began to write to him about my sadhana, about which I knew very little indeed. There were also cultural activities at that time—prose and poetry written as a part of sadhana. During this correspondence course, for some mysterious reason, I developed a personal intimacy with Sri Aurobindo. I asked him the reason for this intimacy; he said, "Look into yourself." He gave me the privilege of asking questions on various subjects—except politics. Politics was taboo. Still I was able to extract from him here and there something about politics. Anyhow, he used to address me at times, "My dear sir", "My dear fellow", etc. When I wanted to develop the literary faculty he not only gave me inspiration, but even corrected my infantile works, swearing at the same time at my wrong rhythm, metre, in English poems. He used to swear "Damn it", "The Devil"... can you imagine Sri Aurobindo swearing like that? In this way he made me a poet, saying "Now a poet is born". But during the darshan, he was a different person altogether. There we saw him—it is my personal impression, others may have other impressions—as our god Shiva, impersonal Shiva majestically sitting in simple grandeur, with an ineffable mien.

This is the background. Now I can start with the subject. The subject is: "Sri Aurobindo as I saw Him".

Sri Aurobindo's Accident

He had an accident. He went into seclusion in 1926 and remained in seclusion, corresponding with us in this way. But in 1938... During this time war-clouds were gathering in the West, most of you know about it: Hitler was on the rise, he had become almost a maniac, he wanted to conquer the whole world, and he had become a terrible menace to civilisation. So what happened? Sri Aurobindo knew that war was bound to break out, but for one reason or another, for his spiritual purposes, he did not want it to happen immediately, he has said, if you can believe it, that he pushed away the chance or danger of war breaking out in 1938—postponed it by one year. And it happened in 1939. But while pushing it back he had to pay a heavy price—the accident. The accident took place when he was going to his bathroom in the middle of the night. He fell down—broke his right thigh-bone. His accident gave us the

opportunity, at the cost of serious danger to him, to enter into His sanctum. That was an opportunity, a golden opportunity for us, to see him, to come in contact with him, and to speak with him. So now I come to my subject: what I saw.

I have seen him, heard his voice, have served him, received his grace, have lived with him day and night, for twelve momentous years. I have observed in those days all his outer mode of life: steady, unhasting, poised, serene, everything emerging from a wide consciousness—that was my perception: an impersonal supreme Purusha. I had the firm conviction, or I had the great impression, that he was a wonder, something unique.

Now his entire life that we have seen over these twelve years can be roughly divided into two categories: the main one is the impersonal aspect, and then there is the personal, or personal-impersonal, aspect. I will explain to you why I say this. First of all, for the impersonal aspect, I will tell you what I saw. I will not explain, I will give you some very living pictures, one after another, as we have seen them.

Sri Aurobindo's Impersonality

The first picture that presented itself to us was this: Some of us were called after he had the accident, to help him, to serve him, medically or otherwise. It happened, as you know, on the darshan day, in the early morning. People had come from all parts of India, and even, as some of you may know, Miss Wilson, the daughter of President Wilson. She was somehow attracted to Sri Aurobindo and she had come to see him; and on that very day his accident happened. She was very much disappointed, she had come with so much hope... however...

So when we were called, we saw him lying on the floor of his room like a helpless child. It was very pathetic. It came as a big shock to us. And he had been lying there for about two hours, or more. For there was nobody else except the Mother on the same floor, in the other wing. He did not shout, he did not call, he did not make any noise. He had been there, we were told, for about two hours, until the Mother came. How did she come? The Mother told us she had an inner communication—she felt that something was wrong with Sri Aurobindo; so she came, and then she sent for us.

But the picture that we saw . you can imagine: his body was rather massive and he was lying flat. His right thigh was fractured No noise, no movement. The Mother came, asked him... he gave only one or two monosyllabic answers: "Yes", "No". . like that. We were all surprised and shocked. This is the first thing. His body—I did not know whether it was an illusion—was glowing. And he was very beautiful to look at... as I said, he was lying there like a big baby, a big bonny baby. Before the doctors came,—it took a long time,—and for that long time he was lying on the floor, the Mother was asking him, "Is it paining you? Where is the pain?"—putting him one or two such questions.

When the doctor came he was removed to the cot. . the cot some of you have seen there... He was quite heavy. But he did not make any sound at all... He was confined to his cot for about two months. During this period he was almost totally silent—no groaning of pain or anything. something like that [*gesture indicating silent immobility*], all the time—except for natural calls. For one month—it was something exceptional indeed,—he hardly spoke at all, simply remained like that. Later on, when he was all right and we were talking with him, he divulged the secret. If you can believe it, so much the better; if you can't, it doesn't matter. He said, "I was trying..." It was a terrible pain, as some of you may know how excruciating bone-pain is, particularly these big bones, he said... "I was trying to transform this pain into ecstasy." Spiritually, it is done, he said it is possible; but such an excruciating, severe pain, he said, he had not had before, but finally he succeeded: that excruciating pain became transformed into *ananda*.

This is the first picture that we saw.

His Writing

Afterwards, when he became all right, after two months or so, the Mother asked him, now, since he was all right, to start some work. She was always encouraging people to work and did not like people to lie inert. She made everything ready and set him at a table. That is the Mother's way. Now he started writing. What did he start with? He composed some sonnets, then he started on *The Life Divine*—because there was a demand from the Calcutta Centre people: they said "*The Life Divine* is in demand, so we should like to have from Sri Aurobindo, as a first book, *The Life Divine*" He started work on *The Life Divine*—rewriting, revising and adding new chapters, sitting on the bed, or at the table. And we saw a really wonderful way of writing: he has told us that he was not writing from imagination or thinking, and the Mother has also said that everything used to come down from a silent plane into his pen. He went on writing and writing like that until the three volumes of *The Life Divine* were finished—not looking up anything, not consulting any book, he went on writing and writing. The Mother has said, as some of you may know, that in the beginning, during the period of the *Arya*, he used to simply sit at the typewriter and write, typing on, typing on... That is a phenomenon beyond our imagination, but that is what we actually saw with our own eyes. I had very much wanted to know how he wrote... there was an example, an illustration before me.

After that he started his poetic *magnum opus*, his wonderful epic *Savitri*. He began to compose it in the same way—went on writing and writing. Those of you who have read *Savitri* will know the second book "The World Stair"—13 or 14 cantos, all these he finished—as a first book—in that way, without consulting anything, his hand moving on and on as if a machine had been set in motion... This is a wonder—without any exaggeration, in all simplicity.

And he was impervious to all the reactions of the body. Heat did not affect him, hunger did not affect him.... He was above the demands of the body. During the hot season—you know the Pondicherry heat, perhaps you feel something here—he was sweating, the whole body was wet with perspiration; and as he was sitting on the bed, the bed-sheets were all soaked; he was not aware of it. One could say that he was not living in the body at the time. The Mother used to come with a drink, she would be standing nearby but he was oblivious of it. Then suddenly he would notice her and say, “Oh!” The Mother gives him the tumbler, he takes it, gives it back. The Mother gives a smile and departs. He goes on writing.... We were there watching, but he did not notice us. We were moving about like shadows.

That was the impersonality of Sri Aurobindo—the hallmark of his being or consciousness. This was about his writing.

About his eating ... The Mother took care of his physical needs. She used to serve him, while he would eat very silently and slowly, unless she broached some subject. By the way, all his movements were very slow, very deliberate—even in his speech as if he was thinking what to say, though actually he had gone beyond mere thinking. Everything about him was conscious. Only I don’t know yet how he fell down—but there he has given a reason; I don’t think I need to go into that.

These are a few important pictures about his way of life. Mind you, I had no inkling of his internal life. Now after his food, drink, other pictures... War had broken out: Hitler mad with power, ambition, destruction... overrunning one country after another. We were all calculating, wondering what would be the next move. One evening as I entered Sri Aurobindo’s room, he simply gave me the news: “Hitler has invaded Holland—we shall see.” Three words. “We shall see.”

And that brings me to say, too, that in his words he was very, very reticent. He wouldn’t say one word more than necessary. So he simply said, “We shall see.” Which means a lot.

Then, in the early morning hours, he used to sit on the bed, quiet, calm, concentrated into himself, looking in front, as if in meditation, those hours were for concentration, sitting simply without any fuss. At that time he had finished his writing. . proofs were coming from the Press, he had to see them. So he told me, “I should be left alone during this time, unless there is something very urgent.” These were his few words. Sometimes the Press would give an urgent red signal. “This is very urgent.” Then I used to go very stealthily, softly, from behind. He would not look at me but ask, “What is it?” . I’m giving you some impressions of the impersonality that He was.

There were many other examples. After the war broke out, the Cripps Mission came to India. Sri Aurobindo sent a message to the leaders of the Congress Party—of course uncalled-for, which he did not usually do—to accept Cripps’s offer. I don’t know what happened in Delhi. We had some news: they

rejected Sri Aurobindo's advice offhand. The news came to him. Sri Aurobindo said with a small smile: "I knew it." That's all. There was no other reaction: "I knew it. I have done some *niskama karma*." *Niskama* means without desire for fruit, that is the Gita's karmayoga. Only a sweet smile at the corner of his lips. Impersonal... this is what we call impersonal.¹

Let us hear now what the Mother had to say about Cripps's offer. She said something to this effect:

"One should leave the matter of the Cripps Offer entirely in the hands of the Divine, with full confidence that the Divine will work everything out. Certainly there are flaws in the offer. Nothing on earth created by man is flawless, because the human mind has a limited capacity. Yet behind this offer there is the Divine Grace directly present. The Grace is now at the door of India, ready to give its help. In the history of a nation such opportunities do not come often. The Grace presents itself at rare moments, after centuries of preparation of that nation. If it is accepted, the nation will survive and get a new birth in the Divine's consciousness. But if it is rejected the Grace will withdraw and then the nation will suffer terribly, calamity will overtake it.

"Only some months ago, the same Grace presented itself at the door of France, immediately after the Fall of Dunkirk, in the form of Churchill's offer to her to have joint nationality with England and fight the enemy. Sri Aurobindo said that it was the right idea, and it would also have helped His work immensely. But France could not raise herself above the ordinary mind and rejected it. So the Grace withdrew and the Soul of France has gone down. One doesn't know when the real France will be up again.

"But India with her background of intense spiritual development through the ages, must realise the Grace that is behind this offer. It is not simply a human offering. Of course its form has been given by the human mind, and it has elements of imperfection in it. But that does not matter at all. Have faith in the Grace and leave everything to the Divine who will surely work it out.

"My ardent request to India is that She should not reject it. She must not make the same mistake that France has done recently and has gone into the abyss "

But the next day or the day after it, Congress announced that it had rejected the offer. The Mother was quite unperturbed. She only said, "Now calamity will befall India."

The events that followed in India right up to now need no mention. We have been paying all along for our mistake.

(To be continued)

¹ Editor's Note The five paragraphs which follow were not part of Nirodbaran's talk. He has added them in order to complete with the Mother's declaration Sri Aurobindo's attitude to Cripps's offer

SOME EPISODES FROM THE LIFE OF “AN EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

(Continued from the issue of December 1993)

Experiences on the Way

I ASKED my Lord, “You seem to have said that those who die here in the Ashram will be under your protection and bear your seal on their brows.”

He answered, “Does it mean that any rogue or *goonda* will enjoy that benefit equally with a *sadhak*? That is absurd. What I meant was that we would try to make the dead people’s passage through the subtle regions less painful and more smooth. That passage is very difficult. It is absurd to think that any crook or dishonest person will have our protection because of his death here. That can’t be because there is a Law of God for all things. I can’t go against that Law, can I?”

“It is said that those who die in Benares enjoy that protection—”

“Certainly not the vicious *goondas*! There are plenty of them, I believe, who are dying there without any concern for their after-life. Would they also get this protection?”

“I would like to know about X. It is said that when she died you put your seal upon her brow. The Mother was very much surprised to see it, it seems, for she had nothing uncommon in her. Is it not true?”

“Of course it is true.”

“What about Mridu? She was, I’m told, a bumptious *sadhika*!”

“Do you know how many thousands of births she had to pass through before she came to the Ashram? Besides, she was not a rogue. She had genuine love and *bhakti* for me. Moreover, do you think it will be possible for a rogue to die in the Ashram? People who die here may have defects in their nature, but their soul is certainly of a higher order. So their soul will have that protection.”

My Friend Tripti

I used to suffer from a strange malady. Quite often I would have fainting fits and lie down unconscious for hours. Doctors could not detect any cause for it. One day I had just recovered from such a fit. My son had brought our food from a restaurant. After eating his share he went to his office, leaving my share on the table saying that I could take it at my convenience. We had no servants. When he returned from work in the afternoon, he found to his surprise the lunch had not been touched. When he asked me about it, I said that there was not a bit of

strength left in me to get up and walk to the table. He was quite in a fix. What was to be done? Just at that time arrived my friend Tripti. "What's wrong?" she asked. She was shocked to see my haggard face. She said, "I was going in my car to visit my sick sister. Suddenly I heard a voice whispering in my ear, 'Go to Esha!' I have never before heard any voices. It startled me. It was so distinct! Now let us go to my place. If your son has no objection you will stay there till you have recovered." A few tenants were called from below. With their help I was carried down to the car. I stayed with my friend and her family for about six months. They had me examined by a physician. He could not detect anything wrong. "A thorough examination will be needed," he said. X-ray, E.C.G. etc. were done. A dark spot was visible in the X-ray in one lung. When the doctor asked if I had T.B., I told him the history of my blood vomiting and of a 'hole' in the lung. "That may be the cause of this fainting. When you get exhausted for any reason, some part of that lung fails to do its work due to the shortage of oxygen and you lose your consciousness."

I returned home apparently in good health. But again the ghost of my illness reappeared. The whole body would shiver without any definite cause. My uncle then suggested, "Since here you don't keep well you had better go to the Ashram. You have yourself said that your Thakur wants you there." I refused, for I felt no call to go there. "Just because I keep well there, it is no reason for me to treat that place as a health-resort," I objected. Nevertheless, I did notice that when I thought of Pondicherry during a tremor it would stop. Funny indeed. Was it an indication that I should settle in Pondicherry? I wasn't sure. Finally, I took the decision to go. Tripti accompanied me. I stayed on for many months, while Tripti came away. But due to some serious inner upset I had to leave too, and resolved not to return.

So, back to Calcutta. My son and I, we two, as before, but most often I by myself, since he had his office and his own life to lead. I still had not taken up sadhana seriously.

After a few months that old trouble reappeared. This time uncle brought me my meals from his place and fed me.

Once I was lying unconscious for some hours. My son had gone out of town on business. When I came to, I managed with great difficulty to phone my friend Tripti and tell her of my distress. She came posthaste, and was stunned to see my condition. She took me to her place again, after phoning my son and sending a message for him to come back immediately. Son arrived and from the street saw the topmost flat of our house, where we lived, quite dark. He felt broken-hearted and thought everything was over. After a long while he met a resident of one of the lower flats. You can imagine his relief when he heard what had really happened. He was told to go to my friend's place. He came, learnt the story in detail, then in a firm tone said, "Ma, better go to Pondy." I was stung to tears and said, "For five years I served my mother. She never uttered to me such rude

words. And you, my son, want to get rid of me for this little inconvenience!" He answered, "Listen, Ma, you were healthy then. When Didi-ma was ill you could do the needful, you had no other work, while I have a job and am most of the time away. You have these frequent fits of unconsciousness. Who is there to look after you? If something happens to you, God forbid, imagine my condition. The entire world will blame me. If you have an ordinary illness now and then it doesn't matter, but you have a sickness which baffles the doctors. When your Thakur is calling you, you had better listen to him. Perhaps because you don't, this punishment is the result. Who knows! See this friend of yours, what hasn't she done for you in spite of her many wants and inconveniences?"

My son's remonstrances opened my eyes. I felt that he was quite right. I should not stand in his way. I decided finally to leave Calcutta, though much against my wish.

As soon as I had taken my decision and was trying to buy a flat in Pondy, most unexpectedly a woman-friend turned up one night in my flat and said, "I hear you are looking for a flat in Pondicherry. I have bought two. If you like you can have one of them." The offer came as a godsend. I was, needless to say, deeply moved and wonder even now how His Grace acts from behind without our knowledge. I jumped at the offer and, well, here I am in my corner flat, living free from that mysterious malady!

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

THE BOOK OF JOB

A NEW COMMENTARY

*Vipadaha santu naha sassvatatra tatra jagadguro,
bhavato darśanam yatsyāt...*

Maha Bhagavata (Book I Canto 8 Verse 25)

May calamities be ours always at every step, O World-Teacher!
Through them alone we can have a vision of Thee!

Introductory Note

WE read in the *Talmud*,

Greater is that which is written of Job than that which is written of Abraham. For of Abraham it is said only that he feared God, but of Job that he feared God and eschewed evil ¹

However, there is something said of Abraham that is not said of Job,

And when Abram was ninety years and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God, walk before me and be thou perfect.. And Abram fell on his face. God talked to him...²

Even on earlier occasions God had talked to Abraham though he had not appeared before him. God did talk to Job but after causing Satan to bring upon him unbearable suffering, psychological as well as physical, and after allowing his consciousness to be churned by a discussion with his friends and thus making it possible for him to be ready to hear Him and realise His infinity.

Both Abraham and Job are said to have feared God But let us take the exact context in which Abraham's fearing God is mentioned. God asked Abraham to take his only son whom he loved to a particular place and offer him there for a burnt offering. Abraham did not question or hesitate and obeyed God to the letter. It was when he was ready to kill his son with a knife in order to burn him, that God's angel called out to him and said,

Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy only son from me.³

Such a fear of God or reverence for God springs from a deeper faculty than the

human mind. To such a man there is no question of “eschewing evil” because he has no evil to avoid. When God told Abraham,

Walk before me and be thou perfect...

it was obviously a different kind of perfection than the one attributed to Job.

If we read the Book of Job without preconceived notions we see that Job was no doubt perfect and upright but guided by mental ideals and not with an inner awareness and sense of certainty which make a man act with an absolute calmness and peace. The anxiety he felt for his sons on the days one after another of them held banquets for all the others reveals that he lived in the uncertain mind and not in his depths when he would turn to the Lord and leave everything to Him.

Whereas Abraham was a spiritual man Job was religious and moral. Religion and morality have their place in life. Only they do not enable a man to walk and talk with God. God seeing that Job had reached the acme of perfection at the mental level wanted to take him to a further rung of the ladder and therefore used Satan to inflict all the possible pain and suffering on him. After evolving Job, God restored to him all he had lost. Everything gained a new meaning and value after the theophany.

Looked at this way Job’s suffering becomes purposeful and meaningful. All the usual explanations, valuable as they are, do not appear completely satisfactory.

The purpose of this Commentary is to make each Chapter and verse of the Book unfold the meaning of the drama enacted by God with the very Adversary as His instrument to evolve a soul.

The Commentary

A Note. In the pages that follow a constant reference is made to *The Interpreter’s Bible* (Published by Abingdon, Nashville, Tennessee) Volume 3, with Exegesis by Samuel Terrien and Exposition by Paul Scherer. All page numbers mentioned in the footnotes are of that volume unless otherwise stated. The author is deeply indebted to the Exegesis and the Exposition in spite of his approach being entirely different from that presented in them.

The Prologue (Chapters 1 and 2)

The text of THE BOOK OF JOB I have used to comment on is the Authorised (King James) Version. The Commentators normally speak of the Prologue and the Epilogue in prose and the “poetic” discussion. They have the Hebrew text in mind. The version used here employs a rhythmic prose through-

out, a kind of prose which can rise to the highest poetic heights, become lyrical, dramatic, epical as the occasion demands but also serve the humbler needs of mere statement or intellectual argument. There are a number of English versions of the Bible, some of them more precise in rendering the original, some of them nearer the modern idiom, but none to surpass this version in the nobility of the rhythm and the beauty of expression

Those who have the original Hebrew text in mind question if the Prologue, the debate followed by the words of the Lord out of the whirlwind and the Epilogue form one integral unit. They also question the authenticity of certain portions in the text. Since the great translators have accepted the whole text as one unit we could also humbly accept it as such. Even otherwise, if we consider the theme of the Book as the evolution of a soul, the Prologue prepares us for it, the three cycles of the debate are three steps towards it, the theophany the culmination of it and the epilogue the presentation of the evolved soul who has not only regained all that he had lost but gained what he had not possessed, a spiritual awareness and a direct experience of God.

Chapter 1

Verses 1 to 5

The verses may be said to form a prologue to the Prologue since the Prologue proper begins with Verse 6 in which the scene in Heaven is brought before us. The verses introduce to us the protagonist, his character, his family, his prosperity and the religious and moral life as he leads it.

Verse 1.

The sublime work that takes us from Heaven to earth and from earth to Heaven making us pass through a whole gamut of feelings and thoughts and pushing us beyond them to a state of lofty vision begins like a grandmother's tale:

There was a man in the land of Uz

Scholars as usual with their "appetite"⁴ for facts search the maps of the old world to locate Uz. Though it could be in or around Edom to the south-west of Palestine, the question need not detain us in as much as there are things of greater moment to draw our interest and attention.

Job's character described in the lines that follow (briefly noticed in the Introductory Note) has to be clearly understood if we are to make head or tail of the story.

And that man was perfect and upright

Samuel Terrien's comments.

Job was perfect (tām) ...

The Hebrew idea of perfection referred to the physical and mental health, soundness, completeness, entirety, "roundness". A perfect man was comparable to a "finished product". Job was not only well-rounded, self-possessed and balanced but was also adapted to his social environment, upright (yāshār), by practising straightforwardness, and justice in his dealings with his fellowmen.

None can question the scholar's understanding of the Hebrew ideas. Perhaps Indian parlance could underline an aspect of Job's "perfection" as pictured in the Book a little more completely. There is, though, a wide gap between the Hindu and the Hebraic ways of looking at life. That both of them are "oriental" may imply a greater affinity between them than between the Hebrew and the Occidental mind.

Job could be called a *sāttvik* personality, a personality governed by *sattva guṇa* (*Guṇa* means a mode of nature or quality.) *Sattva* makes one live in his mind, calm and unperturbed, in a perfect harmony within and without, with the highest ideals the race has set before him. Job's uprightness, fearing God and eschewing evil, are in conformity with this picture. Nor does it contradict the Hebrew conception of a perfect man as brought before us by Terrien.

(The other two types of personality, according to Indian Psychology, are the *rājasic* and the *tāmasic* ones. The *rājasic* type is governed by *rajas* or *rajo guṇa*, the quality of passion and drive, that makes one kinetic, energetic and active. The *tāmasic* type is governed by *tamas* or *tamo guṇa*, the quality of darkness and inertia, that makes one slothful, sensuous and devoid of all sense of values. The majority of people are largely governed by *tamas* with a dash of *rajas* and here and there, if at all, with a streak of *sattva*. The different qualities are distributed in different people with various permutations and combinations. The men of action are largely *rājasic*, the best of them have a touch of *sattva guṇa*; others of *tamas*. Men dedicated to pursuits intellectual, religious and moral, the cream of society, are all *sāttvic*. The spiritual man is beyond all *gunas*; living in the depths of his soul he is entirely governed by the Divine Will. In the *Book of Job*, we may say, God wants to raise the protagonist from a *sāttvic* man to a *guṇātīta*, one beyond all the *gunas*.)

The other part of the description,

one that feared God and eschewed evil,

partly commented on in the Introductory Note is typically Jewish and that accounts for the *Talmud* underlining the idea. *Feared* means *revered* but the sense of dread is not totally absent. The conjunction between *feared* and *eschewed evil* is perhaps meant to show that he eschewed evil *because* he revered

God and held him in dread As pointed out already, eschewing or avoiding evil, for whatever reason, is different from being totally free from it

The words describing Job's character are repeated by God and disputed by Satan in the scene in Heaven; we shall return to them for a further discussion from another point of view.

Verses 2 and 3.

The verses describe the large family and the exceptional prosperity with which Job was blessed. It is needless to point out that in ancient societies large families were considered a blessing. In those societies, the wealth of a person was judged by the number of heads of cattle he possessed. Our word "pecuniary" (pertaining to money) is derived from *pecus* (Sanskrit *paśu*) meaning cattle.

Samuel Terrien⁶ comments on the numbers *three*, *five*, and *seven* in the presentation of Job's children and the heads of cattle he had: *seven* sons and *three* daughters, *three* thousand camels, *five* hundred yoke (pairs of) oxen, *five* hundred she asses, and *seven* hundred sheep. He tells us that the use of the numbers reveals the artistic fresco-like nature of the story. Pythagoras and others believed in three, five, seven (along with nine) being mystic numbers, numbers with an occult significance. Did not the Jews believe in the concept?

Along with the heads of cattle, "a great household" of servants and others was a part of Job's wealth. Our modern notions of *égalité* should not be brought in to question the propriety of heads of human cattle being considered as property.

The enormous wealth made him "the greatest of the men of the east". The reference to "east" makes it obvious that Job was an Edomite.

Verses 4 and 5

We have in the two verses a direct demonstration of Job's perfection, uprightness, fearing God and eschewing evil We see in Job's concern for his sons' virtue and in his anxiety about the possible sinfulness in their hearts the extent to which he was pious and moral.

Verse 4.

The description of the feasts held by Job's sons, one after another, shows their *tāmasic* nature They do not seem to have, like their father, any mental or moral ideals to pursue nor any worthwhile activity. From the description they, to use the trite expression, "live to eat".

Terrien⁷ tells us,

The sons of the Edomite prince were apparently unmarried, yet each kept his own house in a regal manner . so unusual was the brotherly harmony they regularly gathered for family banquets to which were invited even their

sisters—an exceptional custom as it would seem in the ancient Near-East.

Verse 5.

On the days their sons held their feasts, the pious and moral Job naturally told himself that there was the possibility of their sinning and cursing God in their hearts: how could he be sure of them with their love of the palate as the supreme value and goal of life? Terrien speaks of their unusual “brotherly harmony”. could that create the inner harmony that could prevent them from sinning or cursing God in their hearts? Was it an accident that Satan, a little later, chose the particular day, when the eldest brother was feasting the other brothers and sisters, to destroy them along with all else belonging to their father? The destruction started all the disharmony in the good man’s life. (That it led, ultimately, as God intended, to a greater harmony is another matter)

After their feasts were over Job sent for them and “purified” them of their sins. For that purpose, on the mornings of their feast he rose early and presented burnt offerings (sacrificed animals, rams, bullocks, etc.) to God.⁸ The number of offerings depended upon the number of the son (1st, 2nd.. 7th) who held the banquet in his house. Terrien⁹ notes,

Above and beyond the formal performance of a ritual or correct enunciation of a theological creed, Job’s religion penetrated to psychological attitudes and inner dispositions. He cared not only for the outer religiosity of his sons but for what they thought in their hearts.

The question of their outer religion or religiosity (perhaps not the right word) does not arise since the focus in the text is on their holding banquets As indicated above, Job’s suspicion had its grounds on the absence, in their life, of the true religious attitude he deemed so important.

(*To be continued*)

K. B. SITARAMAYYA

Notes

1 Cited by Gershom Scholem in his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* as quoted by Nathan of Gaza, the disciple of Sabbatai Zevi of the Seventeenth Century The author owes the quotation to Mr Jacob Sloan, Former Editor of *Span* published by the American Center, New Delhi

2 Genesis, 17 1 to 3

3 *Ibid* , Chapter 22 12

4 In his work, *Appetite for Poetry*, Frank Kermode quotes a passage from Paul Valéry as an epigraph which describes men with no great appetite for poetry who yet judge it and discourse upon it It is a pity most have an appetite only for facts and figures or at best for concepts which do not take us anywhere near the soul of a work

5 *The Interpreter’s Bible*, p 909 (Hereafter only page nos will be mentioned)

6 P 910

7 *Ibid*

8 P 918

9 Sri Aurobindo has something very illuminating to say on animal sacrifices (burnt offerings) mentioned more than once in the Book

“ it had a psychological significance, purification of the soul for purification was, as we know, one of the master ideas of the ancient Mysteries In India of the *Gita* and in the development of Judaism by the prophets and by Jesus, while the old physical symbols were discouraged, especially the blood-rite, the psychological idea of sacrifice was saved, emphasised and equipped with subtle symbols ” (*Birth Centenary Library*, Vol 16, p 364)

O SWEET!

I HAVE culled my dreams
 and have woven them all
 to drape Thee, Lord!
 I have strung the flowers
 of my joys and sorrows
 to garland Thee, Lord!

I have burnt my life's desires and passions
 to kindle the fire of sacrifice;
 My mind's pleasures and my body's sufferings
 I have thrown into it as a fuel of price

My soul's incense and fragrance rise
 To kiss Thy lotus-feet;
 Even my life's poison is Thy cup of nectar
 Thou liftest to Thy lips, O SWEET!

ABANI SINHA

THE RELEVANCE OF SRI AUROBINDO TO THE MODERN WORLD

A Talk given by Kailas Jhaveri at the invitation of the Consulate-General of India and the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in New York on the 14th September, 1991.

Dear Friends,

First of all, I would like to thank Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and the Consulate of India for this honour. But it is with deep humility that I can speak about Sri Aurobindo and all that he has done for humanity. And yet, it is with the greatest joy that I wish to share with you what I have received from Sri Aurobindo.

The subject I have chosen for our reflection is 'The Relevance of Sri Aurobindo to the Modern World', because Sri Aurobindo is as revolutionary and fast-moving as the world we live in. And in the vortex of the tempestuous currents of the world, Sri Aurobindo helps us to discover our own identity and the axis of stability and change so that we are not helplessly tossed about

We live in a world where in every sphere new elements of knowledge constantly rush in, breaking our traditional ideas of national, political, social, religious and cultural life. We can no longer continue to live in the dullness of a stationary and self-content life.

Progress is the watch-word of our age Progress is youth And youth is life. Progress is, therefore, our aim and necessity, even when the force of progress seems destructive because it questions the values which guided our life. We must discover what is the truth behind this force and its ultimate aim. Does it have anything constructive and rejuvenating to offer in place of what it destroys?

Those who live by fixed mental laws—social, ethical, political, national or international—are not able to adapt themselves to the demands of the force of change. Certainly, it disturbs our fixed pattern of life if we cannot assimilate it. It creates a void, fragmentation, chaos and crisis if we cannot understand and meet its challenge

Crises and chaos are, therefore, mounting everywhere, even within us For, in the name of democracy and freedom, what we see is the explosion of man's unregenerate nature. Many great attempts are made on the intellectual level by social reformers, philosophers, educationists, non-governmental and international organisations and even by religious leaders to help in resolving these crises

Undoubtedly, there is a certain awareness. And out of the ashes of destruction there will surely arise the Phoenix, the bird of resurrection.

As Sri Aurobindo points out, it is one of the vast critical moments in the life of the human race, when everything is pressing towards change and reconstitution on a newer basis than any we have yet attempted

All our means and methods to bring about the needed change are external—through the machinery of laws. But man is not a machine. Ideals and idealism are necessary, yet they are not enough. Education and intellectual training cannot change man. Life is too complex and full of potentialities—good and bad. What stand in the way of the fulfilment of our ideals are the egoistic, vital, material interests and ambitions, the in-rush of blind, unsatisfied forces from the unconscious and the subconscious parts of human nature.

For Sri Aurobindo, the problem is fundamental. In no uncertain terms he describes the crisis that mankind is undergoing at present as an evolutionary crisis, forcing man to transcend his ego-centric mental consciousness.

Human society, he says, has tried external means, but it has never seized on the discovery of the soul or on the knowledge of the soul's true nature, need and fulfilment as the right way of solving the problems that confront us.

Religion has pointed the way. Sri Aurobindo recognises religion as the effort of man's higher mind to bring its influence on our life. But religions are many and most often standardised into fixed forms of worship and ritual which invariably result in dogmas. And for these dogmas religious people even go to war.

Now, Sri Aurobindo reminds us, if you shut yourself into a stereotyped code of life, it is difficult to know the truth of the Spirit, which is beyond all codes. Spiritual truth is based on one's own experience. Spirituality respects the freedom of the individual, because it is itself fulfilled by freedom. The diversity of life has a purpose in the divine scheme of creation, and life cannot be stereotyped. This is the real difference—one of great importance—between religion and spirituality.

There is, however, an attempt to recover the truth behind the preaching and practice of religions and bring them together as so many paths to discover the one God, whether we call Him by the name of Brahman, Jehovah, Christ, Allah or any other. But this is still a mental effort.

There are, no doubt, great achievements to the credit of Mind, but according to Sri Aurobindo Mind is still an imperfect instrument of knowledge, and Nature cannot be arrested there in its evolutionary march. Mind, being ego-centric and divisive by its very nature, cannot be the highest rung of Consciousness. Its cock-eyed and narrow vision can be observed by anyone who reads newspapers and journals with a dispassionate outlook. There, one would find a medley of opposite ideas in every field of life, each of their exponents trying to prove the superiority of his own idea—all in the interest of humanity. Each idea may represent an aspect of the Truth, which is not the whole Truth. But its exponent cannot appreciate the legitimacy of other ideas and their truth because Mind cannot have the vision of the whole. Mind, therefore, cannot be a unifying consciousness.

Many educationists and psychologists realise that most of our problems are

due to the fragmentation of Man, but they do not realise that this fragmentation is due to Man's reliance on the divisive consciousness of Mind. Man is a fragmented being at war with himself in search of a force of integration and hopes in vain to find it in the highest intellectual development.

Sri Aurobindo, therefore, reminds us that Man is not just a living body with vital and emotional tendencies, a mind and an ego to the satisfaction of which his life and education must be turned. These are, no doubt, some aspects of Man and conditions must be created for their development so as to make him an efficient and useful member of the society. But this is not the whole of Man. Behind all these aspects is his living soul, "an inextinguishable spark of the Supreme Fire," of which body, life and mind are to be seen as instruments and powers. And unless Man is awakened to the light of his soul, these aspects can and will be misused as we see it done everywhere.

This spark of the Divine Consciousness in Man—his soul—must be allowed to grow into a conscious psychic being, which is essentially in tune with all that exists in Nature and is a silent leader of his evolutionary march, however veiled by ignorance

There are many paths for the discovery of the soul, which is often mistakenly confused with the heart and its turbulent emotions. The essential qualities of the soul or the fully developed psychic being are peace, calm, unselfish love, strength and joy of the union with all that is true, beautiful and divine.

The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo goes beyond the discovery of the soul and the full development of our being. It throws a searchlight on the intricacies of the different parts of our being—physical, vital and emotional, mental, psychic and spiritual, as well as the varying planes of consciousness—from the Inconscient, Subconscient, Conscient to the Superconscient—which influence our life and its activities. The aim of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo is to collaborate consciously with the aim of evolutionary Nature, which is to transcend the ego-centric mental consciousness and call down the highest light and power and bliss of the Supramental Consciousness to transform our entire being, by the conversion of its aim of life from the ego to the divine.

The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo recognises the value and the disciplines of the other traditional yogas and paths for the union with the Divine Consciousness, but goes beyond them, seeking the transformation of the whole being by a change of consciousness. Besides, the aim of Sri Aurobindo is not just an individual realisation but a collective realisation of a New World with a New Creation, a race of gods or gnostic beings with the Supramental Consciousness. There is therefore a distinct contribution of Sri Aurobindo for the realisation of the Supramental or the Truth-Consciousness by the Integral Yoga of Self-Perfection.

Teilhard de Chardin, the great philosopher with a vision of things to come,

rightly observed. "what man intensely and desperately seeks at present is that complete element or force which can nourish in him a passion to be more than what he is."

The next stage of evolution is bound to come. It will bring to us a supramental or gnostic being with the force and bliss of the Supramental Consciousness and this being will be radically different in every way from Man, the mental being, the demi-god who is a compromise between an animal and a god. For those who may be interested in the vision of the new race, Sri Aurobindo describes it in the *The Supramental Manifestation on Earth* and the last chapters of *The Life Divine*.

Great scientists have realised the gap in their thinking. Some admit that they do not yet know what Reality is and are only dealing with shadows. Well, it is not possible to know the Reality with the help of the Mind, however developed. For, mind can deal only with parts and not with the whole. Besides, it works in the relativity of time and space and therefore is incapable of grasping a Reality which is greater than the sum of its parts and is not bound by time and space.

Sri Aurobindo, unlike the great Indian philosopher Shankaracharya, does not make a division between Matter and Spirit, nor does he consider the world as an illusion. On the contrary, he brings out the hidden truths of the Vedas and Upanishads and affirms "All this is the Brahman—one without a second."

Unlike the Mahayogi Gautama Buddha, Sri Aurobindo does not preach *Nirvana*—liberation from this world of pain and suffering by the cessation of rebirth—as the aim of life. On the contrary, he affirms that the true victory is to be won in life by creating the kingdom of Heaven *here*, on this very earth.

Sri Aurobindo, therefore, welcomes the effort of Science for the conquest of Matter, saying "Housed in a material envelope, this body, and inhabiting the plane of Matter, this earth, we cannot afford to ignore Matter."

There is no division between Matter and Spirituality in Sri Aurobindo's vision of life. For him, "all life is Yoga," and no activity of life is to be excluded in the spiritual effort of humanity though the consciousness from which each action is done has to be changed. For the integrality of life, science and spirituality are to be seen as two complementary aspects of the Reality, whose divergence has to be healed and harmonised for the largest dream of the Future.

Life itself is the field of education. But the ultimates of life are spiritual and therefore they can be truly and fully lived only on the solid foundation of the Spirit. Hence through all knowledge one seeks consciously or unconsciously self-knowledge and world-knowledge so that one can be the master of oneself and the world around—*swarāt* and *samrāt*. It is only when one discovers the guiding spirit of one's life and in obedience to it one can govern each step of one's life that one can have the illumined and unfaltering will, the sure leadership; the absolute freedom, governed by the inner self-discipline, the absolute power, controlled by the joy of oneness and love.

We all accept that the centre of all teaching and learning is Man. But it is important to know what Man is: his psychology, the hidden dimensions of his personality, the possibility of his further evolution and his divine destiny. We must also know the true basis and nature of his relationship with the world around him so that we may know the problems and difficulties of his growth, the causes of his frictions and their true cure. We must understand not only the basic needs of the survival of the physical being of Man, but his true inner needs of development and his secret, profound need for spiritual unfoldment and fulfilment. The whole of life is the field of our experience, knowledge, growth and becoming. But it is important to know what we mean by life, how it is truly lived and when it is fully fulfilled.

No psychologist has yet given us such an incisive and minute analysis of the constitution of Man and his place in the world as Sri Aurobindo. In the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, each part and plane of Man's being and its complex working in the context of the forces at work in the world, are described with the perfection of a Scientist—rather, more than a Scientist, since it is all based on his own experience.

In *The Human Cycle* Sri Aurobindo has given us a comprehensive understanding of the relation between an individual and society or nation. And in *The Ideal of Human Unity*, he has analysed the political forces at work in Democracy, Socialism, Communism and discussed the values and weaknesses of each form of government. There, he has also given a comprehensive understanding of the ideal of human unity and how best it can be realised. Along with it he has supplied us with a critical analysis of the steps taken by the League of Nations and later by the United Nations, their weaknesses and their strengths.

Sri Aurobindo welcomes all efforts of humanity for peace and unity, but warns us also that intellectual effort and understanding by themselves are not enough, though necessary at a given moment to keep the ideal burning alive in the consciousness of people.

We must remember, however, that “a perfected world cannot be created by men who are themselves imperfect.” The Mother, who guided the disciples of Sri Aurobindo, clearly perceived that “to change the conditions under which men live without changing the consciousness is a vain chumera.”

What is needed, therefore, is the psychological force rooted in the depths of our being with the inner realisation of peace and unity in thoughts, feelings and actions to achieve a lasting success on the solid spiritual basis. And yet, in order to be truly effective, the spiritual realisation must be reinforced with the Supramental or Truth-consciousness which can harmonise all diversities in a multiple, complex unity.

The Supramental Consciousness, to define briefly, is a state of perfect knowledge where no error or doubt is possible. It has a clear vision—a light without obscurity—by which it comprehends the totality and the place of all its

components in their harmonious relation to one another in the unity of the whole. It is, therefore, a unifying consciousness, because, it can view all things in a multiple unity as well as in their diversities and uniquenesses. Besides, it has the capacity to embrace all possibilities not known to the Mind, but without any groping or confusion. It can “perceive each potentiality in its proper force, essential necessity, right relation with others and the proper time, place and circumstance, both of its gradual and its ultimate realisation. Above all, in the Supramental Consciousness, knowledge, the force of will and the power to effectuate its vision and knowledge are all one and united at once ”

It was to the realisation of this force of the Supramental or Truth-consciousness in himself and its descent in the earth-consciousness for humanity that Sri Aurobindo devoted his life and gave us the sunlit path of the Integral Yoga.

There is a wrong impression in certain minds that Sri Aurobindo retired to Pondicherry to escape from the political struggle for independence. On the contrary, it was Sri Aurobindo along with Tilak and others who ignited the inextinguishable fire of aspiration for complete independence in the consciousness of India by his uncompromising, fiery articles and speeches, long before Gandhiji came on the scene

Sri Aurobindo saw the independence of India as a certainty and the independence of India was achieved on one of his birthdays, the 15th August, a sign of divine sanction on the work of the true leader of India's soul for the fulfilment of her glorious destiny.

Sri Aurobindo saw clearly the forces of the unregenerate human nature, and even the consequent possibility of the disintegration of India. His deepest concern, therefore, was of what India would do with her freedom. And if Sri Aurobindo retired to Pondicherry, it was for the most dynamic work of bringing forth from the forgotten depths of the Indian culture its true spirit, its essential character and its mission so that India might take her rightful place in the family of nations and play her destined role as a leader in the ways of peace, unity and harmony on the basis of Truth

Sri Aurobindo has given us a detailed understanding of the spirit of Indian culture in *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, which must be solidly implanted in the heart of every Indian if we are to effectively survive as a nation.

Sri Aurobindo invites man to the adventure of consciousness by silencing his ego-centric mental consciousness and following the discipline of the Integral Yoga so that he may find his own “guru”—the master of his destiny seated within and rise to the Supramental Consciousness, which alone can help him to live freely, following his own path according to the law of his nature—Swadharma.

In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo traces out for us his own experience of the workings of the Omnipresent Reality, the problem of Existence and its solution, the process of evolution and the required transformation for the

realisation of the divine life.

Savitri, the great epic of Sri Aurobindo, is another example of his work written in the light of the Supramental Consciousness. It is a story of Creation from its beginning to the possibility of its glorious Future. It not only answers many questions which may arise in our minds concerning the process of the evolution of consciousness, the obstacles on the path and the way to surmount them, but it also gives us an experience of climbing the ladder of consciousness as we travel with Aswapathy,—the earthly father of Savitri,—who represents the aspiring soul of humanity and is its conscious leader.

Savitri, with her indomitable will to conquer Death and the forces of Ignorance of the obscurity of the Subconscious and the Inconscious, fills us with her vibrating force of the Truth-Consciousness as she shatters every argument of the doubting god of Death. She outwits all the stratagems of her formidable adversary, who is finally dissolved and engulfed by her Light of Truth-Consciousness, and she wins her victory of Love to bring God into the lives of men in order to lead the earth from the darkness of Inconscience and Ignorance to the light of knowledge of the Superconscience, from the falsehood of division between Matter and the Spirit or between the Earth and Heaven to the unity of the Truth of the integral Reality, from the pain and suffering of Death to the Bliss of Immortality.

It is to this adventure of consciousness that Sri Aurobindo invites us, because in his vision, “Man is God hiding himself from Nature.” And Sri Aurobindo gives us all the secret knowledge and help necessary to become as perfect as God by rising from our ego-centric, divisive mental consciousness to the unity of the Divine Consciousness.

I will conclude with a passage from *The Life Divine* in Sri Aurobindo’s own words carrying the force of a mantra:

“To know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilight or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realise the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation,—this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in Matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution.”

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of December 1993)

SRI AUROBINDO did not want a compromise between the Moderates and the Extremists on the question of Swaraj even at the cost of repression by the British Government. He also knew that the repression could not extinguish the flame of the call for Independence. He intuited that as soon as the Congress would break off, the nationalists would be mercilessly persecuted. And so it happened. Tilak was prosecuted under the charge of “exciting disloyalty and bringing feelings of enmity towards the Government.” He was sentenced to six years of imprisonment and sent to the Mandalay jail in Burma. But the banner of Independence was held aloft by the brave patriots until the Nation itself was ready to accept complete Swaraj. Eventually it was asserted at the historic Congress at Lahore in 1929.

Some months after the split of the Congress at Surat, Sri Aurobindo said, “The breaking-up of the Congress at Surat was God’s will. . . We shall not be eager for compromise to avoid trouble and persecution as sufferings are welcome if it be God’s will that we should suffer, so that our Mother India would be saved.”¹

This judgment of Sri Aurobindo proved true in the long run, and he was right in his assessment of the situation. History was with him not with Mehta, Gokhale or Dr. Rashbehari. The Surat split led to the Home Rule movement during the First World War under the leadership of Tilak and Annie Besant, and then Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement in 1920. Sri Aurobindo, because of his intuition, could realise the true cause of the Split which history could not record. So it happens that history seldom speaks the truth.

The historians could not assess what had happened at the Surat Congress. The contemporary historians differed over almost every particular. The real important question was: “Who was responsible for wrecking the Congress?” That question was never satisfactorily answered by the contemporary debaters. The Moderates put the blame on Tilak. But his close associates like Khaparde and Lajpat Rai as well as Sri Aurobindo unanimously affirmed that Tilak had no intention of breaking the Congress. In a personal letter to a disciple which was published in the year 1954, Sri Aurobindo wrote: “. . . very few people know that it was I (without consulting Tilak) who gave the order that led to the breaking of the Congress.”² Tilak himself wrote to Motilal Ghose a few weeks before the Session, “I may assure you that I or the new party, so far as I could control it, will not allow the Congress to die.”³

About the Congress split at Surat Sri Aurobindo made a wonderful enlightened historical speech at Nagpur on January 30th, 1908 where he explained the real cause of the split of the Congress, and clarified the true aims

of Nationalism and the future work of Nationalism. The speech runs:

“I merely pointed out the course our line of action should take at the Surat Congress. The motives and hopes with which we went to Surat were unfortunately not realised. But we are helpless in the matter. Several partisan papers have already begun to pass remarks such as ‘The Nationalist Party assembled at Surat solely with the purpose of breaking up the Congress’. ‘It did not want the Congress’, and ‘It had a premeditated intention of wrecking it.’ But I ask you, what advantage would the Nationalist Party derive from destroying the Congress? The Nationalist Party wanted the Congress; we required it for the purpose of disseminating our Nationalist views. What would we gain by breaking it up? Several letters have appeared about the Congress from many leaders of the old party. One of them has remarked that the Bengal Nationalists received from their headquarters a wire to the following effect: ‘Break up the Congress if everything else fails.’ We were greatly surprised to hear that such a telegram had been received. Nationalism has no headquarters in any one town. It is neither at Calcutta nor at Poona, it is spread all over the nation. The whole nation is the seat of Nationalism. Since this is so, we have to ask the moderates what is meant by the expression ‘headquarters at Calcutta’. Who sent that wire? The leaders of the Nationalist Party in Bengal—our leaders—are the very headquarters of Nationalism. From this standpoint, which of our headquarters had been left behind? If we regard the leaders as the headquarters, one of them is at Buxar at present and the other was at Surat! No such telegram was received by the Nationalist Party. The above statement is entirely false. The Nationalist Party did not want to wreck the Congress and it never did. I do not blame anyone. But I ask, What were we to gain by wrecking the Congress? It was not that Government would (not) have been pleased if we had severed our connections with the other party by wrecking the Congress. Where did we get the desire to rally round the British flag by cutting off our connections with the other party? If we consider the three issues raised in the debate of this year’s Congress, it will be possible to decide who was responsible for the wrecking of the Congress.

“Every member of any public institution started and managed by the people of any civilized nation is given full liberty to offer his opinion on any question, in accordance with the universally acknowledged rules of all public institutions. No president has the authority to suppress this liberty—this natural right of every member of society. The president is merely a servant of the meeting formed by the coming together of the people who appoint him. There are rules to regulate his conduct. No president should break these rules. He cannot stifle freedom of speech and liberty of opinion. When such is the universally acknowledged rule, who then tried to snatch away the rights of a member? Was it the Nationalist Party or the other party? Who transgressed the universally accepted rule of meetings by not allowing the leader of our party to speak, though timely notice was given by him? Did we do this? Those who say that we went to the Congress

with the intention of wrecking it should think over this question.

“Another important thing is that the Congress is an institution belonging to all Indians—to all the well-wishers of the nation. Whoever exerts himself for the good of the nation ought to get a place in this institution. Whoever has to push forward the cart of the nation, whoever is desirous of procuring happiness and such liberty as is possible for his country to get, ought to be able to enter this institution. The ideal of one may be less exalted, while that of another more exalted, and that of the third most exalted. But since ‘the good of the nation.’ is the common object of all, everyone ought to be included in that institution. One party may defeat the other on the strength of a majority of votes and establish its own superiority. If the other party has any stamina or mettle, it will live and fight. But none should try to drive away any party from the institution by taking advantage of a local majority formed according to his own wishes. It is clear that the other party had the majority at Surat. Was it not the attempt of the Moderate Party to drive away the Nationalist Party from the Congress from next year by taking advantage of this local majority? Why should the opinion of one party that such is the particular goal of our nation be fastened on to the other party? It is not that the ultimate aim of our political agitation should be one and the same for all. One may be in advance of the other. Was it not a fact that in the resolution of this year’s constitution they were going to fasten on the Nationalist Party a ‘final goal’ which was unacceptable to it? It is a mockery of the opinions of the Nationalists to make them sign a paper containing false principles of Nationalism which are not acceptable to them. Who has the right to thrust his own idea of the ‘final goal’ upon others and, if they do not consent, to drive them out of the meeting? Mr. Gokhale knew that one particular party did not accept as the final goal partial Swarajya and slow reforms. Still, in the draft he had prepared of the constitution, he tried to thrust the final goal of one particular party upon another and to drive out the latter from the Congress. The meaning of the new rule made by Mr. Gokhale was ‘Accept a certain final goal, otherwise you have no place in the Congress and out you go.’

“The third important question is with regard to the retrogression of the Congress. We, the Nationalists, went to Surat to help the Congress progress by means of spiritedness, steadiness, and self-reliance. Our desire was, and is that the fixed determination—that austere vow—which the Bengali nation has resolved upon in its helplessness might help us in our contest. Our ambition was to get tangible help from other provinces in this our peaceful but determined contest. But we found all but one of the subjects omitted from this year’s resolutions published in the name of the Reception Committee. These were subjects for which we fought so zealously in the Calcutta Congress. What then of pushing the Congress forward? We become anxious to see whether it would remain where it was. Subjects were entirely omitted, and we cannot say whether they were introduced after making sweeping changes in them and rendering them vague as soon as an objection from the Nationalists was anticipated, or

whether the subjects which were thus mutilated and with the names suppressed were put in from the beginning. But on the list which was sent to Bombay on the 25th December 1907, but which was given to us on the 26th, that is, after the opening of the Congress, we found the subjects greatly mutilated.

“Mr. Gokhale states that the changes they introduced in the resolutions of last year were merely trivial and verbal and were made to make the meaning clear and to put them in better language. It is surprising to find that a man like Mr. Gokhale says so! The resolution of Swarajya was passed last year at Calcutta. I have already told you how the final goal, which was clearly laid down in that resolution, has been rendered doubtful and insignificant by the introduction of a creed resolution by Mr. Gokhale. The resolution about swadeshi was also found greatly pruned down. What great efforts the Nationalists had to make last year simply to introduce the words ‘even at some sacrifice’. By the introduction of these words the compromise was effected last year. These words were acceptable to both parties. Mr. Gokhale says they were inadvertently omitted. We could not reconcile with the past history of these words the fact of their omission by mistake or forgetfulness by Mr. Gokhale. Last year, when the people of both parties had assembled to settle their differences of opinion, I also had the opportunity to be present. Mr. Tilak, Ashwini Babu and myself were the three representatives for our side. The opposite side was represented by Mr. Gokhale and Mr. Madan Mohan Malaviya. After a discussion between us five it was settled to add the words ‘even at some sacrifice.’

“Mr. Gokhale made such sweeping changes as would destroy the meaning of the boycott resolution and would make the weapon of boycott adopted by the Bengalis appear to apply only to English-made goods.

“... Who tried to destroy unconstitutionally the rights of members to speak? The Nationalist Party? Who made the ignoble attempt to drop out or drive out people of a particular opinion from the Congress by making rules partial to the constitutional party? The Nationalist Party? Whose desire was it to put back the Congress by making changes in the resolutions passed universally on the strength of a local majority? The Nationalist Party? These are important points. This year’s fight in the Congress was between the ordinary people and unrestricted authority. It was a fight for principle in one way. How is it possible to put up with the arbitrariness of some people in a Congress which itself passes resolutions against the oppression of Government?

“... Our Nationalist Party has to perform a very great task for the future. There are mountains of obstacles and difficulties in the way. Immense troubles will have to be suffered, hard work will have to be done and everything will have to be sacrificed, a great many will have to sacrifice their lives, then only will we be able to obtain that which is our final and exalted goal, the realisation of all happiness, the final achievement of all that is to be achieved and the desired object of all—Swarajya.

“The work which has to be performed by the Nationalist Party hereafter is

very formidable... Our dissensions were merely intellectual discussions till now. We required them to infuse life into the body of the nation,—our strength was limited, and we expended it in our debates. Nobody estimated correctly what strength we, our nation, possessed. None attempted to concentrate this power. Many do not yet believe in the existence of this power and are not convinced; many people are whisked about; for this reason the two factions have cropped up. May it not be God's intention to get the work done through our party and through it alone? May it not be God's desire to find out the extent of our powers? The present time is not for slow progress. It is one of great quickness, extreme briskness and progress."⁴

(*To be continued*)

NILIMA DAS

References

- 1 *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Vol I, p 850
- 2 *S A B C L* , Vol 26, p 49
- 3 *Letter from Tilak to Motilal Ghose*, 2nd December, 1907
- 4 *Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research*, Volume 4, Number 2, December, 1980, pp 121, 127 & 129

THE WAY

IMPRESSIONS of conscious activities day after day—
 Mental, vital, physical—all in a silent way
 Sink in the subconscious's secret gray,
 And later enact our destiny's play.

Though nothing comes here long to stay
 Yet whether it will make us sad or gay
 None with surety can ever say,
 Nor always with success hold its sway.

But why apprehend a dismal, fearful fray?
 Our present ease too it's prone to slay.
 Better be prepared for all, and also pray
 For serenity, peace, and equality—a sunlit way

GOPALDASS GUPTA

THE DIVINE'S PROTECTION IN THE FACE OF DEATH

TWO EXPERIENCES

My life has been full of hazards and dangers. Once I was face to face with death. But somehow I was protected by the Divine's Grace. I am going to recount here two of my relatively recent experiences.

In 1948 I consulted three of the best known astrologers of the then Calcutta and one practising 'Yogi' too on personal matters. About my longevity all of them predicted similarly. None of them gave me a chance of survival beyond the age of sixty to sixty-one. Even before that there were many possibilities of accidental death. But sixty to sixty-one was the last limit. It was something like—"This was the day when Satyavan must die." And now I am seventy-five!

But, to be honest, I must say that the astrologers were not much mistaken in their predictions. The hour of crisis really appeared. But somehow I was saved by the Divine's intervention.

In 1949 I came to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for the first time to have the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo on his birthday, the 15th of August. The Darshan was a revelation to me. I settled down in Pondicherry finally in August 1953.

I have had a weak heart from my childhood. I inherited it from my mother. With the slightest provocation there would be palpitation. This rose to serious proportions after the passing of our Divine Mother in 1973. In 1979, just before the February Darshan, I was admitted to Dr. Nripendra's Nursing Home which was a three-storied rented house. The Ashram's own Nursing Home by the seaside was just starting to be built at that time.

On 20th February Dr. Nripendra examined me and permitted me to go for Darshan the next day, which was the Mother's birthday, the 21st of February, along with other patients and sisters of the Nursing Home.

Next morning as I was taking my breakfast at about 8 a.m. my heart-palpitation started all of a sudden. At that time, a young man named Dinkar, an ex-student of the Ashram Education Centre, who was also staying there as a patient, was talking with me. I stopped eating, went to my bed and lay down.

"What happened?", he enquired. Just at that moment Dr. Nripendra arrived in his car. I asked Dinkar to call the doctor. The doctor used to come at about 10 o'clock on other days, but that being a Darshan-day he came early to make the necessary arrangements for our Darshan.

He examined me. His face turned grave and looked very serious. He asked me gravely: "For how long have you had this trouble?"

"From my childhood, but now-a-days, particularly after the Mother's passing, the duration of the trouble has increased to a great extent."—I replied.

Nripen-da, for by that name we called him, asked the sister to bring a glass

of water and a particular tablet. The doctor did not allow me to lift my head from the pillow. The sister poured some water into my mouth through a bent glass tube, the doctor dropped into it two tablets and left the room with a thoughtful and grave-looking face.

I had been struggling with my pain with closed eyes—for how long I do not remember—when suddenly I felt a call of nature. I looked around to see if anybody could help me to the bathroom which was quite at a distance from my room. Nobody was there, all had gone for the Darshan.

But the call of nature was so intense and urgent that I could wait no more. With much effort I got up and struggled my way towards the bathroom. When I reached there it seemed to me that I would fall and die in the bathroom itself. I remembered that two Presidents of India had expired in the bathroom. I did not cherish their fate and called upon the Divine Mother to take me back to my bed where I could die more or less peacefully. Quietly finishing the bathroom business somehow I managed to return to my bed.

The pain in my chest became unbearable and I was mentally preparing myself to breathe my last. I even thought that it was an auspicious moment for my soul to leave the body, because at that hour the Darshan was going on. But, perhaps my soul had other ideas. I felt that something from the depths of my being came forward and told the Mother: “Mother, it seems to me that I have not yet finished all that I came to do in this life, but I leave everything to Your decision, I am ready to abide by it, let *Your* will be done.”

I felt that the Mother was speaking in the depths of my heart: “When nobody is with you, I am with you; don’t trouble yourself with those thoughts, relax and sleep.”

It was precisely the hour when I was to die according to the astrologers of Calcutta. I was in a semi-conscious state for how long I do not know. Suddenly I woke up when a sister called me saying: “Get up, your lunch is coming.” I was not in a position to get up and eat lunch. I told the sister. “I can’t take my lunch, please bring me only a glass of glucose-water.”

I never spoke either to the doctor or to the sisters or to the fellow patients about what had happened when I had been left alone in the Nursing Home. When everybody else in the Ashram got the Darshan and a Darshan-message, I was a lone absentee who missed them both. But, in fact, was I? Did I not receive a very special Darshan and a very special message on the occasion?—

“When nobody is with you, I am with you.”

Now, about the second experience, which is very recent. But it has an antecedent which is quite a way behind.

I started my life of sadhana, although rather unconsciously, many years before; consciously I started Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga only in 1953 in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. For nine years I was almost free from physical ailments

except for some minor ones. Towards the end of 1961 and beginning of 1962 I noticed some eruptions on my skin which since then have been a veritable hell for me. I tried all sorts of treatment, but in vain. I thought that a process of purification had been started in my body by the Yoga-Shakti working in me. In August 1962 I wrote to the Mother about my diagnosis of the ailment. A few days later I happened to meet Nolini-da (the Ashram secretary Nolini Kanta Gupta) in the Samadhi courtyard. He called me, took me aside and told me in a low voice: "Mother has received your letter. She says that your diagnosis is correct."

In 1967 I again wrote to the Mother asking Her if my troubles were due to the hostile forces. Again Nolini-da called me and said: "You wrote to the Mother about hostile forces. But She says that those are not hostile forces but forces of transformation."

It is a long long story and I am not going into the details right now. This much I have said only as an introduction to my second experience. As a matter of fact I have had many more experiences which I hold back at least for the time being.

The eruptions are not localised in the form of dry eczema in my case. They appear in different parts of the body and sometimes disappear altogether without a trace, particularly with change of place or climate. This had happened to me so often.

After 1978 I have not gone out of Pondicherry. I have noticed that in my case the eruptions disappear during the cold season as well as the season of rains in Pondicherry. They reappear during the summer season which in Pondicherry means February to September.

During the last few years I developed cataracts in both of my eyes. As the Madurai-doctor comes here only in March when eruptions occur on my eyelids and its surrounding parts the cataracts could not be operated upon for two consecutive years. I was walking on the roads almost blindfolded. This, coupled with severe itching and burning in various parts of my body, made my life really miserable.

I was thoroughly disgusted with my life and prayed to the Divine Mother for some accidental death as a means of escape from this miserable condition. The year 1991 was a veritable hell for me. I consulted various doctors of different systems of medicine including the JIPMER skin-specialist. But to no avail. Disgust and depression sat heavily in my heart.

On 23rd September 1991, early in the morning I was in a somewhat rebellious mood. Even during Samadhi-pranam I prayed to both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for some accidental death to happen to me. After pranam as I was proceeding towards the Ashram Dining Room, in between the Ashram School and the Department of Physical Education, I had a feeling that something had dashed against my left leg near my knee-joint. I do not know what happened the next moment.

I was unconscious for about two hours. During that period I had no feeling of physical pain. I heard some words like “scooter-accident”—as if in a dream. Also I remember a cooling sensation in my head. Later I heard from others that as I had multiple injuries on my head, an icebag had been applied in order to reduce the swellings on my head before the stitches could be given. On the whole, I was in a happy state during that hour. The pain returned to my body with the return of my consciousness when I was shifted to my bed from the operation table. I could not lie flat on my back because of the pain in my chest. Later, when Dr. Datta came, he told me that one of my chest-bones had broken and pierced my right lung and it was not functioning. I breathed only through my left lung. I underwent two operations on two successive nights for my right lung to function again. My left knee was badly injured and the calf-muscles got twisted but fortunately there was no fracture or dislocation of bones. Only many ligaments of the knee-joint broke and they are not fully restored even today.

As I was limping back to slow recovery, often I seemed to hear the Mother’s voice within my heart. It spoke thus:

“You should not have asked for death against my Will. But since you have done so, I have given you a short experience which might have led to death. But I do not want you to die now. You must endure and persevere for the sake of your sadhana against all odds.”

The two experiences of 1979 and 1991 remind me of two Upanishadic mantras. The first one is—*ekam evam advītiyam* which means—“The One who has no second.” The second mantra is—*sarvam khalvidam Brahma* which means—“All this indeed is Brahman.” The two mantras are complementary to each other. It is the original One Self who has become Many in the universal manifestation.

In my experience of 1979, when in my hour of peril no human being was with me, nobody came to my help, it was the Supreme in the form of the Divine Mother who was at my side, protected me and staved off my possible death.

In the second experience of 1991, in my hour of peril, I was not left alone. So many people helped me. Some lifted up my unconscious body and took it to the Nursing Home. Then, in the Nursing Home, the sisters and doctors gave me all the help I needed at that moment. Then relatives and friends came to see me. In all of them I felt the Presence of the Divine Mother.

I seemed to hear the voice of the Divine Mother within my heart:

“See me in all these happenings and all these people. It was I who in the scooterist knocked you down—since you wanted it. Then it was I who rescued you and took you to the Nursing Home through some kindly people. Again it is I who through the sisters and the doctors am rendering all the help you need at this hour. And see me also in the good will and sympathy of your relatives and friends who are coming to see you.”

This is how difficulties are turned into greater opportunities through the intervention and grace of the Divine and, sometimes, even certain death is averted

ABANI SINHA

THE SAMADHI

ALL my salutations, all my supplications
Touched the Divine's Feet lying beneath the flower-heap,
I could hear The Mother's whispering voice
Asking me to tell Her children not to weep.

Where love smiles and devotion abounds,
Where consecrated hands take great care,
The Lord Supreme blesses from the sanctum
Forgiving human error and worldly snare.

My Lord's 'Samadhi', the heavenly tabernacle,
Lives for ever in my heart's kingdom;
When I see rows of devotees approaching,
The lotus of my heart upswings its blossom.

SURESH DEY

SURPRISED BY JOY

A REVIEW-ARTICLE

HISTORIANS have at long last woken up to the importance of oral history as an invaluable source of contemporary history. While noting down the words uttered by great souls has been an established tradition in India—exemplified memorably in this century in M's multi-volume record of Sri Ramakrishna's talks—an equally important repository of information has lain untapped in the memories of their followers. The lay reader not only craves the words of power uttered by the Master but thirsts avidly for the *rasa* of small daily happenings witnessed by disciples, of experiences others have had of Divine Grace, through which he can taste something of the bliss of being in touch with a supernal reality as it manifested multifariously and was apprehended in a myriad ways by so many different souls. This is precisely the felt need met by Shyam Kumari's two volumes¹, containing a stupendous number of 683 true stories about the Avatars of the Supramental Advent. Proof of the want she has filled is seen in the fact that the 2nd edition of the first book had to be brought out within two years of its first publication.

Maggi Lidchi, the internationally acclaimed novelist, writes most perceptively in her Foreword to the volumes that the memories of those who knew Sri Aurobindo and The Mother are a veritable storehouse of treasures beyond price that "put together form a body which can throw light, inspire and always move the heart".

Only 76 stories relate to Sri Aurobindo—inevitably, though regrettably, by far the shortest part of the volumes because the majority of those who constituted the treasure-house of memories about him are no more. One wishes Shyam Kumari had started her project much earlier! We obtain precious insights, not available anywhere else, of Sri Aurobindo's explanation of the real significance of the myth of Vasuki upholding the world, of Kaliyuga having completed 5000 years in 1906, of his unshakable serenity not only in the face of danger or in the horrid conditions in prison, but even in such matters as cleaning up his typed sheets over which a sick man had vomited. Sudhir Sarkar's account of Sri Aurobindo's dress in court shows that long before Gandhi had adopted the dress of "the half-naked fakir", Sri Aurobindo had already shown the way in living in absolute simplicity, wearing his dhoti in the manner of a mazdoor, ignoring its torn, threadbare condition even when going to a wedding, sleeping on a stretcher with a torn canvas. This reminiscence also provides rare information on Sri Aurobindo's daily life in prison such as his remaining standing throughout the night, his hair remaining miraculously glistening without any oil.

¹ *Vignettes and More Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother* [Published by the author, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, pp 177 & 201, Rs 48 each, postage extra. Available with the author.]

on it. The artist Mukul Dey's account of how he was able to draw as many as three portraits of Sri Aurobindo in 1919 at the behest of Annie Besant—with Sri Aurobindo staying steady for over an hour at a time—makes fascinating reading with the rare information provided by Sri Aurobindo himself of how the anger he felt against the British disappeared after practising Pranayama Yoga. Another account tells us how he used to smoke cigars in 1914, and how his father-in-law used to regard him as his guru.

One of the most moving accounts is that of Jaya Devi which goes straight to the heart for the transparent quality of her purity and total faith and surrender. Her vision of a teenaged Sri Krishna tying up cows in the Ashram is as gripping as the Muslim devotee Dara's vision of the *rāsa lilā*. The report of a Tamil weekly of September 1909 provides a valuable interview of Sri Aurobindo in which he confirms his seeing Vasudeva in prison as an actual experience and not a dream, of that being a result of the practice of Bhakti Yoga, and his forecast of a new age having started from 1907 bringing about massive changes in every sphere of life. The valuable memoir of the great historian Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjee regarding how the Uttarpara Speech came to be delivered leaves us regretting that he did not record his memories of working with Sri Aurobindo in the National College. This is all the more so because our appetite is whetted by the vivid picture provided by a Sindhi student of Sri Aurobindo's inimitable manner of teaching in Baroda College. Doraiswamy's memoir provides a precious glimpse of how Sri Aurobindo was guided to overcome the block he was facing in his sadhana [1914-21] by the mysterious act of a silent nameless ascetic whereby he learnt that he would have to discard all the *siddhis* he had acquired so far and empty himself in order to advance further. We are told of the occasion—very appropriately the sacred-thread ceremony in which one is re-born—on which Sri Aurobindo gave a new *gāyatrī mantra*, like a new Vishvamitra, to the seekers of this century: *tat savitur varam rūpam jyoth parasya dhīmahī / yannaḥ satyena dīpayet* [Let us meditate on that most auspicious form of Savitri, on the Light of the Supreme which shall illumine us with the Truth]. There is a lovely account of a young student being taught by Sri Aurobindo in person how to concentrate and being given by him the key to acquiring knowledge, viz. achieving stillness of the mind. In this section an extremely gripping story is that of how the birth centenary celebrations of Sri Aurobindo came about in Bangladesh despite apparently impossibly hostile conditions. It goes to show, once again, that in matters relating to the Divine there is nothing called "chance" or "coincidence".

Shyam Kumari has grouped the stories relating to The Mother under helpful headings such as "Her Guidance", "Care for material objects, plants & animals", "With children", "Help & protection", "Loving ways", "The Mother's children". The immense variety of the vignettes is the greatest plus point in this large corpus of memorabilia. Besides providing astonishing infor-

mation regarding The Mother's indefatigable working [a day starting at 4 A M and ending after 23 hours at 3 A M.], there are homely details of how precious time would be saved in the tucking-in of saris, how she would not allow any waste, how every bit of cloth, thread and string was carefully stored for use in need, how she would notice the smallest details about a *sādhak* even from a considerable distance, such as his standing on bare feet while having fever, and, above all, how every sincere aspiration was invariably answered

One has often heard of visitors relating firmly that The Mother spoke to them in their own language—Gujarati, Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, etc. It is in these volumes that we find that the answer to that puzzle lies in heartfelt sincerity of aspiration which invariably received a response from her in a form familiar to the aspirant. Many instances are given of people being granted precisely the experience they had been praying for in their hearts. They make thrilling reading.

The Mother's holistic approach to life is revealed time and again in the stories of her concern for crows, cats, chickens, squirrels, lizards, dogs, donkeys, cows, her profound relationship with trees, plants and flowers; and her objection to chemical fertilisers and pesticides as harmful to health. There is the highly significant pronouncement—getting more and more world-wide acceptance—that one sign of the New Age will be humanity learning to harness solar energy instead of depending on the fossil fuels of the dead past or the destructive energy of nuclear fission. She stresses the need to love the sun and accept it as the most glorious gift of the Creator to the world.

The account of the transformation of the criminal village of Edayanchavadi through Project Udavi to nourish and educate the children, with the birth and phenomenal success of Auroshikha incense-sticks as an offshoot, is an eye-opener to the manner in which the Divine works in the material world. An even more thrilling account is that of Mahsuva village in Madhya Pradesh, renamed "Sri Aurobindogram" weathering famine conditions miraculously and ushering in the green revolution in Rewa District.

Fascinating glimpses of the occult world are provided in The Mother's explanation of dream-symbols, of money-power being controlled by sex-power symbolised by the snake, of the curative power of music—specifically Beethoven's violin concerto in D major—as the cure for evil thoughts and feelings, of every *sādhak* in the Ashram representing a world-type who has to work out all the difficulties of that class of humanity. In the reminiscences of Udair we find The Mother's explanation of how creation itself came about and the reasons for the problems of the world. This same section carries the thrilling and engrossing account of Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's decisive action on the occult plane during the Second World War to ensure the defeat of Hitler by getting him suddenly to abandon his plan of invading Britain in favour of attacking Russia.

Precious vignettes are given of Margaret, daughter of President Woodrow Wilson, renamed "Nishtha", washing the vessels used by the Mother and of the

devotion of Dorothy Hodgson (“Datta”) in serving her. The latter reminds us of the utter self-giving of Dyuman in Shyam Kumari’s *How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother* [volume 1].

One of the loveliest parts of these volumes is that recalling memories of how The Mother played with the children, creatively using every opportunity—even the giving of sweets—to teach something. No problem of the children was too trivial for her—even things like what to do with unused bread and tomatoes, how to waken children, what type of dress would suit whom. Her remarkable patience with them is brought home vividly in the account of her smilingly bearing the repeated bruising pinching by one child and her prohibition against punishment. Any organisation working for child-welfare received her support. Crowning it all is her ringing statement to the parents, “They are not your children. They are my children. They have only been given to you to look after.”

Another revealing section is that dealing with The Mother and women: how, at certain stages of development, they are more open spiritually; how she would not have them working in the kitchen and encouraged their taking up outdoor professions; how she insisted on putting the mother’s name first in the birth register.

Both volumes contain hair-raising accounts of miraculous escapes from grievous injury or sure death in accidents and medical crises through the intervention of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Of these, the most moving relate to how the despairing patient of a devotee-surgeon is looked after in his absence, how the gravely ill pregnant daughter of a devotee away for “darshan” is saved, how the child left alone by a devotee-couple survives unhurt a fall from the roof. These accounts are all the more stirring because in each case the person whose life is saved does not even know of Sri Aurobindo or The Mother, and recognises them only when photographs of their saviour are shown to them subsequently.

To read these two volumes, with a striking cover beautifully reproducing the faces of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother is to be surprised by joy. The experience is profoundly moving, a sense of being lifted up into a spiritual ambience of ineffable beauty and radiance, evoking thoughts and emotions that lie too deep for tears. Shyam Kumari has rendered an invaluable service to all seekers on that path by collecting these reminiscences. One earnestly hopes that she will give us further volumes from this rich store of spiritual treasure.

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

THE DREAMER AS REALIST

DICKENS'S *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*

DICKENS IS on record having claimed for *A Tale* the number one place among his fictions. On October 15, 1859, he wrote to François Joseph Regineer, "I hope it is the best story I have written." A little earlier he had written to Wilkie Collins claiming the same thing in more significant language: "Heaven knows I have done my best and believed in it" (October 6, 1859). This belief is the belief in a dream of order, in a new world inhabited by a better race and above all man's future. Although it has been easy for critics to see in this work the element of sublimity and the very obvious Christ pattern, there are subtler things in the text, in the deeper structure of the text, which need to be brought to light. The whole text needs to be re-examined to justify Dickens's claim in the form of a superlative. We should try to find fresh words to characterize what exactly happens in the text instead of just repeating the words like Resurrection and Renunciation.

For, in fact, *A Tale* is a story of giving and getting. Behind the greatest self-giving lies awake the expectation of a greater glory, a greater status of life to be enjoyed in the context of a supreme loneliness. *A Tale* is a living text and the fact that it has all the Dickensian defects does not make us blind to the fact that for the first time Dickens achieves here a style to support his sublime substance. Not everywhere, but certainly at places he achieves what Walter Pater calls the marriage of great matter and great manner.

The defects of the novel are quite well-known: flat characterisation, exaggerated details here and there and an extra-idealised heroine. The plus points are no mean glories: the purposeful melodrama verging on high poetry (Bk. I, Ch. 6), the rhetorical harmony (relation between the first and the last chapters) and the very subtle portrayal of Sydney Carton, whom even the bravest admirer has denied the label "realistic".

If, knowing well that Carton is Dickens's "yearning to be", we examine the dreamer's stance of his creator we notice that Dickens is not working outside the framework of psychological realism. Critics have failed to see in Carton the shadow of Hamlet, the most confused figure in Shakespeare's tragic world. In Bk. II, Ch. 6, the author summarises Carton's past and present and curiously enough he has achieved here a glory which most critics have denied to him. That is economy. Within a brief compass, he reveals Carton's tragic alienation from man and society. Is it very far from Hamlet's alienation. "Man delights me not!"? Structurally this rejection of society is vital to the novel. After projecting the fall of Man, Dickens now prepares to show his way back. One day Carton comes back to embrace man and society which he had so bitterly rejected.

Carton has not been a real dreamer since his childhood. The best dream

comes to him quite accidentally through the power of woman's love. Despite the fact that Lucie Manette refuses Carton quite explicitly, there is a kind of energy offered to him by her. A close reading of Bk. II, Chapter 13, will indicate how there is a return of energy from the woman. At the back of his mind Carton knows very well—and Lucie's speeches to Carton also shed light on the point—that he has received something very precious, something very warm and life-giving: a very certain affection. The essential feminity is too obviously marked in the material care reserved for the loser. It is this obvious "return" that helps Carton track down his lost address, his sleeping glory, the loss of which he so deeply broods over in the chapter entitled *The Jackal*. The inspired prophecy of Carton at the end of Bk. II, Ch. 13, is just an opening of a new track. Then we come to know that he never goes to children when "heated with wine." After that, in Bk. III, Ch. 12, he knows that the time has come to throw his baser elements into fire. "For the first time in many years, he had no strong drink. Since last night he had taken nothing but a little light thin wine, and last night he had dropped the Brandy slowly down on Mr. Lorry's hearth like a man who had done with it." True life can only be achieved through repeated deaths. Symbolically, Carton dies here, the old Carton.

And then comes the last chapter, the subtlety of which has also been confused by the repetition of those hackneyed words like Resurrection and Renunciation. The phrase "Recalled to life" is certainly more expressive. There are greater things happening in the last chapter and although the biblical phrases are quite relevant to these happenings they must be supported by additional details and examination of the exact nature of glory, which the author indicates through his significant schematic devices. Edgar Allan Poe would have called it "elevating excitement of soul." Dickens has not lost his balance in this supreme moment of elevation. His poetry is aiding his sight. Or his sight and poetry are no two things. To imagine a life is to live it out. Maybe for a few moments. Yet it is reality for the artist at work. The rejection of strong drink, the care for children and then the sight of dream-children, the culture of the poetry of Christ—all these are related to the word "sacrifice" and the phrase "Recalled to Life."

Carton goes only to stay back as a better replacement. That is his hope of a better awareness, a better status of life out of the clutch of the animal and a better love lurking behind the face of Death. It is interesting how Dickens blends quotations, allusions, myth and metaphor in re-discovering the Jesus pattern. The fact that Dickens halts the narration before straight-lifting from *John* proves that he wishes to indicate a perfect knowledge by identity, which has taken place before Carton is guillotined. Carton's joy lies in his new-found glory, his total identification with the Supreme Self represented by Christ. Both Eliot and Dickens are aware of the evolution of the superman. Hence Dickens's use of the superlative: "peacefullest" face. The epanthoral "I see" is a successful lingering. It shows Dickens's involvement. There is no greater theme in literature than the

future of man who is a transitional being.

Lucie is a lived-out experience in the last chapter. What remains is the dream of Paradise on earth. At last there is an answer to the dark rhetoric of Chapter I and the evil in the wine-shop. Man can rise. The dreamer believes in his power.

GAUTAM GHOSAL

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

(Continued from the issue of December 1993)

15. THE MOTHER

THE sound of drumming that came from a distance thrilled the ears of an old lady. She moved towards her son and said in a jubilant tone: "The soldiers are coming, my dear! It's time to join them."

"I am ready, mother! How can I ever forget the pains you have taken to instil into me courage and strength from the day you started suckling me?" said the son, adjusting his helmet.

The old lady beamed with joy. As she garlanded her son, and placed a red tilak on his forehead she heard him say: "I am much worried about you, for there is none at home to look after you. I can see your health deteriorating day by day."

"Don't you worry about me, my dear son! To a soldier like you, your motherland is more precious than your mother."

Nodding his head in approval, the son bent down and touched her feet with both his hands. His mother blessed him by saying, "Victory or glorious death."

The soldier moved out of his house and joined the accoutred troops marching towards the battlefield.

A couple of days later, news reached the land that the battle was over and that the soldiers were returning home.

To everyone's surprise the old lady showed no anxiety at all. When her neighbours asked about it, she said. "My son will return if he is alive. If he is not alive, he has died a glorious death. So why should I be fidgetty?"

People stood outside their houses to welcome the soldiers. The elders patted the backs of the soldiers for the remarkable job they had done. Some garlanded them and many shouted, "Long live our brothers who saved us from our enemy "

The old lady too watched the soldiers pass by her house. She greeted them by bringing her palms together in a salute.

A soldier seeing the old lady trickled out of the troops and told her: "Your son is dead "

"Is it so?.. Well! My son sacrificed his life for the welfare of his country. It's a glorious death," said the old lady, her eyes brimming with tears of joy.

"Well said!... He was gored to death with a spear."

"Gored!" yelled the old lady as if she was unable to bear the shock. "Did the spear pass through his chest or through his back?" she asked sternly.

The soldier scratched his head in an attempt to recollect and seconds later said: "If I remember right, the spear did pass through his back."

“Oh, no!...” the old lady shouted. “It’s an insult. Only cowards who take to their heels sustain wounds in the back. But not an undaunted warrior like my son. Yet if he has died like a coward, I will sever my breasts that suckled him and throw them at him and spit on his face,” so saying she drew out the sword from the soldier’s scabbard

With the naked sword in one hand and a supporting stick in the other, she hustled her way towards the battlefield.

Headless bodies, limbless bodies, severed heads, severed limbs lay scattered all over the place and made a gory scene.

The old lady searched for the corpse of her son with anxiety-filled eyes. She did succeed after a long search

Tears of joy streamed down her bony cheeks as she examined her son’s corpse. A spear stood well planted on his chest. She turned him on his back. Not a wound was there.

“I am proud to call myself your mother, warrior dear! Blessed are my breasts that suckled you,” the old lady shouted at the top of her voice so as to make herself audible to her son who had just made his way into the Heavens.

16. BE PROUD TO BE A POET

Thakadur wore a festive look on that day. Streets were strewn with flowers. Coconut fronds tied to planted poles adorned either side of the street. Dressed in their best, the inhabitants of Thakadur thronged near the entrance of the palace.

Adigaman Neduman Anji, the reigning chief of Thakadur too stood at his palace gates, eagerly waiting for someone.

“Ah! There comes the palanquin,” Adigaman said enthusiastically pointing in the Eastern direction. Everyone turned their eyes to see a palanquin coming at a distance. Four sturdy bearers came balancing the palanquin on their shoulders. As they reached the palace, they gently placed the palanquin on the ground. Outstepped an elderly woman.

“Long live.. Avvaiyar Long live... Avvaiyar.” The cry of the commons rent the sky.

Avvaiyar was a Sangam celebrity, a literary luminary, whom everyone in Thakadur had heard of and they had read many of her ethical writings but no one had seen her in person.

Avvai (the name meaning a venerable and aged matron) raised both her hands in the air and blessed the ruler and his subjects.

Adigaman welcomed her with wide-open arms and took her to his court. To sing in praise of the reigning chief and the glory of Thakadur, and then receive a generous reward from Adigaman was the purpose of her visit. Perhaps that was the reason why Adigaman too had sent his palanquin to fetch her the moment he

had heard that she was on her way to Thakadur.

Avvai spent a few days in Thakadur. She wandered in rice fields and on river banks, meeting people and giving them good advice. Everyone loved to hear her sing:

“No castes there are but two.
They are, let me tell you,
the high and the low.
True to the scripture,
those who help others belong to the first,
and those who do not, belong to the last.”

*

“The flowing water
routed through the channel
to feed the paddy plants,
feeds on its way the grass too.
If on this age-old earth
there is one good man
the willing Heavens for his sake
will send down rain
and all may enjoy it.”

*

“Praise your friend sky-high
but do it only in his absence
Praise so your guru,
but open-heartedly and everywhere.
When it comes to your lovely wife,
praise her only in bed.
When your sons deserve praise,
do so, but let them not know.
Praise your servants too
but not before they carry out your orders.”

*

One day in the court of Adigaman she sang a panegyric on him. She did so because she had decided to leave Thakadur and before she would go she wanted to receive the reward for her songs.

Adigaman who had developed a soft corner for the old lady and her songs of wisdom was quite happy with the panegyric. But his face didn't reflect the joyous feeling of his heart. He restrained himself with a purpose.

Avvai was disappointed for the reigning chief went away without giving any reward. The courtiers too wondered at the strange behaviour of their ruler.

Hours later Avvai said to the gatekeeper of the palace: "Tell your king that I leave Thakadur with a broken heart. Never was I so insulted in any court. It's a strange experience. Thakadur is an unforgettable place."

When the gatekeeper conveyed the news to the ruler about Avvai's departure, Adigaman felt sorry for his foolish act. He ran in search of the old lady and found her.

"Believe me, you Goddess Saraswati incarnate! I didn't give you a reward for fear that you would go away. Please understand the love and affection I have for you. I request you to spend the rest of your life in Thakadur. Your needs will be looked after," said Adigaman.

"As you know, I am a minstrel. And minstrels don't belong to a particular place. I can't stay in your place for long. My songs must reach all the ears in the Tamil country," Avvai said and continued to walk.

Adigaman earnestly begged her, "Please . Please stay with me for a few more days. The time is not yet ripe. Let me reward you suitably. Till then please do not leave me."

Avvai hesitated awhile. And before she could reconsider her decision, Adigaman physically lifted the frail old lady up and, placing her on his shoulder, returned to his palace.

Avvai for the first time in her life journeyed on a human vehicle and that too on the shoulder of a renowned ruler. She understood the mind of Adigaman.

A few days later Adigaman presented Avvai with a *nelli* (fruit of emblic myrobalan tree) and requested her to eat it.

Munching the fruit, Avvai asked, "What is special about it?"

"O Goddess Saraswati incarnate! That's the only reward I could think of giving you for the excellent verses you have given us. Now that you have eaten the fruit, you are blessed to lead a very long life," said Adigaman beaming with a sense of satisfaction.

Avvai had already heard of the rare fruit. On an unreachable spot of a mountain stood a *nelli* tree. It bore only one fruit once in several years. Whoever ate it would be blessed with longevity. But since the tree stood on a difficult-to-reach place, to fetch the fruit was a Herculean labour. But someone risking his life brought that fruit of rare virtue and gave it to the king. And he in turn gave it to the old lady.

Avvai remarked, "You deserve the rare fruit more than I. If you are blessed with a long life, you would be of great service to your people. But you have given it to me. Why should I live long?"

“I am after all a ruler. If I die, anyone with strength and valour can ascend the throne. Rulers can be replaced. But a poetess has a merit of her own. Who can replace you? You are a rare being. Only a fool in his folly would think of replacing you. And so I gave you the best of presents—the rare fruit. I am sure you’ll be of immense service to society. A poet can change the destiny of the people rather than a ruler. Hence you deserve the fruit more than I.”

Avvai’s opinion about Adigaman shot up and she burst into a song:

“O Wielder of the sword
that vanquished all foes!
Valour and strength are your wealth,
more than gold and silver.
Laborious indeed was the task
that fetched you the rare *nelli*.
Neither did you speak to me of the pain
nor of its miraculous power,
but gave it to me with all your heart
and made me kill my death.
O! May you be as immortal
as the Divine Lord Siva.”

(*Purananooru*, Song: 91)

Avvai lived in Thakadur in the company of Adigaman for several years. The rare *nelli* worked a miracle in Avvai’s frail body and she lived to be 240 years old.

(*More legends on the way*)

P. RAJA

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Special Seventy-fourth Seminar

25 April 1993

WHAT ARE THE LESSONS OF LIFE THAT I HAVE LEARNT FROM THE MOTHER?

Speech by Sunayana Panda

LIFE teaches its own lessons in its own time. All parents, however, try to give these lessons to their children so that they may not have to learn them the hard way. So, we being the Mother's children learnt them from her. But we were always aware that when she asked us to do something it was something that she had already done herself.

Our generation of Ashram children learnt things by reading what the Mother had written or from what our elders had told us. We were not among those who could run up to her with a question and get her answer. Often our captains and teachers, and more often the people who looked after the boardings, told us what the Mother would have said in the difficult situation which we were then facing. In that context they told us how she had solved the problems of others who had been in a similar situation. This is how we learnt many things indirectly. But what remained most impressed on our minds was what we could see in her own life as an example.

It was reassuring to know that the Mother had lived a very human life before manifesting her divine self. This is why we could take her as a real role-model. If she had overcome difficulties we could do so too. After all, the purpose of avatarhood is the taking on of the human condition and showing by its example to ordinary beings that an extraordinary life is possible.

There are so many things she has done and shown to us that one can say a lot, but I will restrict myself to those things which have been most important to me.

The first, undoubtedly, is the sentence which opens her book *On Education*: "An aimless life is always a miserable life."¹ In one of our class-rooms there used to be a picture of a boat moored along the bank of a river on a moonlit night. Under this was written this small sentence. We saw it every day while coming in and going out. I often asked if it was true. Couldn't one be happy just by eating, drinking and making merry, taking each day as it came? But now, after living so

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 12, p 3

many years, reading so much and observing really happy people, I have understood the truth of this simple statement. Indeed, the happy few who live full lives are those who pursue an aim with great interest and passion.

An aim gives a direction to a life, otherwise one becomes like a boat that floats rudderless on a river, going where the current of the river takes it. The Mother specifies that an aim can be of any quality, but the higher the better, she adds. We see a lot of vigour and joy in the lives of some people who follow an artistic career or who have an intellectual pursuit or even those who have a social cause to fight for. Most often, evidently, people are taken up by the one-pointed aim of making money. But even that gives to them a sense of purpose in life. An aim makes a man feel that he is living life more intensely. As a contrast it can be said that those who are not sure of what they want from life or are doing things that don't interest them, are the ones who are certainly unhappy. Of course, one can have more than one aim in life, one can even change one's aim if one has attained the first aim. It makes all the difference between merely existing and really living.

If we look at the Mother's own life we observe that everything she attempted had a purpose. Right from her early years, everything she did was connected to her ultimate goal. Events, activities, people and places were only supports in her quest, not aims by themselves. She did not stop half way, letting herself be content with small victories.

The second great lesson that I learnt from the Mother is the importance she attached to beauty in daily life. It was not only to beauty in the objects that surround us physically but to beauty of thought and emotion too. Not only the beauty that draws everyone's attention by its dazzling richness but also the beauty in simplicity. Again, here I remember her little sentence: "There is a great beauty in simplicity." How often we heard this sentence! The simple beauty is there in harmony, balance, grace and poise,—qualities that she herself embodied. This is what in traditional vocabulary we would call "Shree". She showed by her own example how a life surrounded by loveliness was a more valuable and pleasant life than one lived in ordinariness and disorder.

When we went to see her in her room, there emanated from her a great love but also a strong presence of beauty. Everything was harmonious out of respect for material things. One could feel that everything was living. Even what she wore was in such good taste, so faultlessly embroidered by people in whom she had encouraged the aesthetic quality.

It was not without reason that she had undergone the training of an artist in her youth. She knew that being sensitive to beauty puts you in contact with the divine element in the physical.

As for the beauty of thought and sentiment we have seen in all that she has said and written how her words were permeated with sweetness and light. In her

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent. Ed.), Vol. 14, p. 159

letters as well as in her books we are struck by the clarity of her thought and expression. When we were students and studying the *Entretiens* we were told that the Mother's French was very elegant. But we never realised how much it was so until we came in contact with the crude language people generally use to express themselves.

Her few years spent in Japan were also spent in making a conscious contact with a culture that gives so much importance to beauty, good taste and a sense of proportion in every aspect of life. In fact, it is the most dominant aspect of Japanese life.

Talking of the aesthetic element in life, I feel like recounting an incident which shows how particular the Mother was about it. We have all seen the picture of a wave which is near the entrance to Sri Aurobindo's room, behind the Mother's own chair, but most of us don't know how it came to be there. In the early years of the Ashram, on darshan days the Mother and Sri Aurobindo sat in the little room which is opposite this picture, and devotees came in a line to do pranam. One year she told Krishnalal, who was a senior artist of the Ashram, to paint something depicting an open space, and to hang it exactly in that place on that wall. This was because she could rest her eyes on something beautiful when she wasn't looking at anyone in particular. She didn't want to look at just an empty wall in front of her. Beauty surrounded her in every little moment of her life.

In fact, when I remember the Ashram of my childhood what comes back most strongly to my mind is that atmosphere of simple beauty. This was the direct result of the Mother's influence because this is how she wanted things to be.

The third thing—and one of the most important—I have learnt from the Mother is never to judge anyone from a conventionally moral point of view. She never judged, never made categories of "good" or "bad" or even "inside the Ashram" or "outside". She always saw things in a larger perspective. Once she had accepted someone into the magic circle of her love it was for ever. She never withdrew her love because she found the person unworthy. Even when people left on their own, her goodwill and grace followed them. This generosity of heart is a great lesson of life. She gave her love and protection even to the most undeserving. Or what seemed to others undeserving.

In her own life she had the courage to break conventions, to do things that were totally outside the norms of conventional morality. It was because she knew that such morality was for ordinary people living ordinary lives. She could see things from a higher point of view. So, in her relationship with people, rather than judging them by external appearances she preferred to understand what was behind the appearance.

How often it happens to us to meet people about whom we may have preconceived ideas, prejudices coming from hearsay, but once we have ourselves

met and spoken to them we find out that they are endowed with some qualities of the heart or the mind that are unusual. On the other hand, we meet people who are so morally righteous that we imagine them to be great souls, but we are so often disillusioned by their lack of openness to new ideas or by their incapacity to influence and change their society towards something new and beneficial.

I would like to share with you an incident which illustrates how the Mother disregarded the conventional moral standpoint, choosing rather the more compassionate one. In the early 'forties when the Ashram was still a small community of people doing their sadhana very intensely, there used to be a young girl of about 17 or 18 who was living here with her old and invalid mother. The young girl spent all her time looking after her mother and she did it with a lot of devotion. Some months later her mother died. This young girl found no interest in the life of the Ashram after this. One day without asking for permission to leave, she packed everything which was in her room and which evidently had been given to her by the Ashram, and went away. She must have reached the station when someone who had found out about her plan rushed to the Playground to inform the Mother about her. After listening to everything the Mother said with great concern, "Send someone to the station to see that she gets on to the train safely. Also see that she has enough money for her journey."

Her heart was much too large for our petty human understanding. This is what we have to learn: before understanding fellow human beings with our mind we must first understand them with our heart.

The fourth great lesson of life that I have learnt from the Mother is in fact a secret which she revealed to us. It is the answer to the old question, "How can one remain young eternally?" Everywhere in the world people are looking for ways by which one can prolong physical youth but the Mother gave us freely the secret formula of psychological youth. The New Year Message of 1968 was: "Remain young, never stop striving towards perfection."¹ In other words the only way to continue to be young is to constantly progress, constantly learn something new, ready to add something more to what we already are.

I remember learning in my English class the famous passage on youth, written by a well-known writer. He says that youth is not in rosy cheeks and supple knees. Youth is a state of mind. So, logically, keeping the mind young is the only way to remain young as long as one wants to.

Once again we turn to the Mother for example. She was constantly striving for something new. She was always ready to change something if she wasn't satisfied with what was already there. Her body had lived for so many years that we could not call her physically young but her mind and consciousness were eternally young. They gave birth to new projects, new experiments and new ideas. What is more, she was aware of all the changes the world was undergoing.

If there was one word we heard most often in her messages in the late

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent. Ed.), Vol. 15, p. 188

'sixties, it was "adventure". She always said that she was inviting us to an adventure. She said that she was doing something that had never been done before, so she could not assure us of what lay ahead, but if we had the spirit of adventure then we could follow her.

It was in this spirit that she started the free-progress system in the school. She took great interest in every detail of this experiment in education. She wanted to know exactly how it was taking shape. When we think that at the same time she was fully taken up by the creation of Auroville it really baffles the mind. And what was her physical age at that time? Ninety!

Indeed this clearly shows that the mythical fountain of youth is within us if only we choose to drink from it. We learn from the Mother's example that life is a process of continuous learning and progressing

Now I shift to a more subtle lesson that I learnt from her. It is so delicate that we could very well have missed it. It comes from the story about the virtues which the Mother wrote as a class-work when she was in school. It was later published as one of the stories in *Words of Long Ago*.¹ It was one of our favourite stories and was enacted on the stage by the Ashram children in those days, year after year. We all knew the story by heart but we loved seeing it again and again done in a different way, in a different language and sometimes in the form of dance-dramas or ballets.

The story is about a feast to which all the virtues are invited. The last to come is gratitude who is almost turned away by the guards of the palace because she is dressed as a beggar. Finally, the other virtues see her standing at the gate and welcome her warmly. The story wants to say that gratitude is a rare virtue, almost unknown to people.

This beautiful story remained only a story in my mind until as an adult I noticed how quickly people forget a good turn done to them. I have found that gratitude too is "twice blessed" like mercy. "It blesses him that gives and him that takes." Often it means only a small gesture on the part of the one who gives but what a difference it makes to the one who receives! Even a hundred years after it was written, the Mother's story still continues to be a valid comment on human nature.

The other place where the Mother uses this word again, and which never fails to move me to the depths is her message on the Samadhi:

"To Thee who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to Thee our infinite gratitude. Before Thee, who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before Thee who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee."

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 3, pp 5-6

No words can ever describe the beauty, the truth and the power of that message.

In the end after everything is said there remains only gratitude. And here we see Mother's gratitude to Sri Aurobindo:

I think with that I can sum up and say that to her also our infinite gratitude who taught us so much, sparing us the knocks of life, taking us through short-cuts on this journey, warning us of dangers that we would never have known existed—and all this by her own living example.