

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

DECEMBER 1994

PRICE: Rs. 8.00

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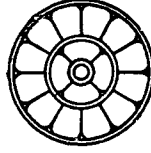
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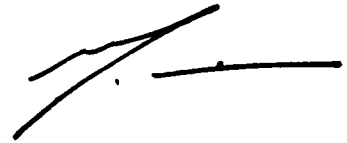
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India
Editor's Phone 34782
Publishers Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

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Published by HARIKANT C PATEL
SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST
PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT, PONDICHERRY 605 002
Printed by AMIYO RANJAN GANGULY
at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry 605 002
PRINTED IN INDIA
Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers under No R N 8667/63

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XLVII

No. 12

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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WORDS OF THE MOTHER

THE manifestation of the love of the Divine in the world was the great holocaust, the supreme self-giving. The Perfect Consciousness accepted to be merged and absorbed into the unconsciousness of matter, so that consciousness might be awakened in the depths of its obscurity and little by little a Divine Power might rise in it and make the whole of this manifested universe a highest expression of the Divine Consciousness and the Divine love. This was the supreme love, to accept the loss of the perfect condition of supreme divinity, its absolute consciousness, its infinite knowledge, to unite with unconsciousness, to dwell in the world with ignorance and darkness. And yet none perhaps would call it love; for it does not clothe itself in a superficial sentiment, it makes no demand in exchange for what it has done, no show of its sacrifice. The force of love in the world is trying to find consciousnesses that are capable of receiving this divine movement in its purity and expressing it. This race of all beings towards love, this irresistible push and seeking out in the world's heart and in all hearts, is the impulse given by a Divine love behind the human longing and seeking. It touches millions of instruments, trying always, always failing; but this constant touch prepares these instruments and suddenly one day there will awake in them the capacity of self-giving, the capacity of loving.

The movement of love is not limited to human beings and it is perhaps less distorted in other worlds than in the human. Look at the flowers and trees. When the sun sets and all becomes silent, sit down for a moment and put yourself into communion with Nature: you will feel rising from the earth, from below the roots of the trees and mounting upward and coursing through their fibres up to the highest outstretching branches, the aspiration of an intense love and longing,—a longing for something that brings light and gives happiness, for the light that is gone and they wish to have back again. There is a yearning so pure and intense that if you can feel the movement in the trees, your own being too will go up in an ardent prayer for the peace and light and love that are unmanifested here....

(CWM, Vol 3, pp 71-2)

THE SECRET OF LIFE—ANANDA

THE world lives in and by Ananda. From Ananda, says the Veda, we were born, by Ananda we live, to Ananda we return, and it adds that no man could even have the strength to draw in his breath and throw it out again if there were not this heaven of Bliss embracing our existence as ether embraces our bodies, nourishing us with its eternal substance and strength and supporting the life and the activity. A world which is essentially a world of bliss—this was the ancient Vedantic vision, the *drsti* of the Vedic *drastā*, which differentiates Hinduism in its early virility from the cosmic sorrow of Buddhism and the cosmic disillusionment of Mayavada. But it is possible to fall from this Bliss, not to realise it with the lower nature in the *Apara Prakṛiti*, not to be able to grasp and possess it. Two things are necessary for the fullness of man's bliss,—the fullness of his being and the fullness of his knowledge creating by their union the fullness of the strength in all its manifestations, *vīryam*, *balam*, *rajas*, *tejas*, *ojas*. For Ananda, Sat and Chit make one reality, and Chit is in its outward working pure force to which our Rishis gave the name of Tapas. To attain even here upon earth this fullness of bliss dependent upon fullness of existence, illumination and force, must always be humanity's drift, man's collective endeavour. To attain it within himself here and beyond, *tha ca amutra ca*, must always be the drift of the human unit, the individual's endeavour. Wherever the knowledge in him thinks it can grasp this bliss, it will fix its heaven. This is Swarga, Vaikuntha, Goloka; this is Nirvana.

*

LIFE

THE object and condition of Life is Ananda; the means of Ananda is Tapas; the nature of Tapas is Chit; the continent and basis of Chit is Sat. It is therefore by a process of Sat developing its own Ananda through Tapas which is Chit that the Absolute appears as the extended, the eternal as the evolutionary, Brahman as the world. He who would live perfectly must know Life, he who would know Life must know Sachchidananda.

Pleasure is not Ananda; it is a half-successful attempt to grasp at Ananda by means which ensure a relapse into pain. Therefore it is that pleasure can never be an enduring possession. It is in its nature transient and fugitive. Pain itself is obviously not Ananda; neither is it in itself anything positive, real and necessary. It has only a negative reality. It is a recoil caused by the inability to command pleasure from certain contacts which becomes habitual in our consciousness and, long ingrained in it, deludes us with the appearance of a law. We can rise above transitory pleasure; we can get rid of the possibility of pain

Pleasure, therefore, cannot be the end and aim of life; for the true object and condition of Life is Ananda and Ananda is something in its nature one, unconditioned and infinite. If we make pleasure the object of life, then we also make pain the condition of life. The two go together and are inseparable companions. You cannot have one for your bedfellow without making a life-companion of the other. They are husband and wife and, though perpetually quarrelling, will not hear of divorce....

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Hour of God, SABCL Vol 17, pp 172-3)

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

A PERSONAL LETTER

BEFORE I launch on the main issues raised in your letter, I should like to say a word on what you have advised about guarding “against interference with the inspirational substance” of people’s writings. I hold that we cannot have a proper sense of inspiration unless we are ready again and again to accept interference either by others or by oneself with what seems to be inspired. The common criterion of inspiration is: “It all came just like that in a rush!” There are numerous levels of being from which things can rush forth in one shape or another and there are also numerous connecting passages where various kinds of intrusions and interventions in what is rushing out can happen. It is only when the free flow is from a deep or high centre of being that we get what can be legitimately considered as inspired. The true spontaneity which should never be tampered with comes from there. But, just because something may arrive with a rush, it does not follow that whatever so arrives is truly spontaneous. Nor, I may add, does true spontaneity arrive always in a rush. “Poetic pains” are proverbial. The vagaries of the Muse are also well-known. A poem may be written all at once or it may come through by dribbles. But, just because it is not born fully formed and perfectly panoplied like Pallas Athena from the head of Zeus, we cannot say that the ultimate structure of it has nothing of Athena-shape or Zeus-substance. The process of a poem’s birth may be slow, gradual, piecemeal. What we have to see at the end is whether the final product, which has come laboriously and over a period of time, looks as if it were born instantaneously with absolute ease. The real aim is to get by any means the authentic article from the depths or the heights. If a poet takes a long time and spends much sweat to write his piece he can still get the authentic article by taking care that whatever comes through has the touch of an eternal freshness on it. The labour he undergoes is really in connection not with what flows out but with the digging of a clear passage through his brain-mind so that the obstructions of the common prose-consciousness may be removed. It is because he has to dig this channel that he writes as if unspontaneously. However, the trouble he takes makes no odds to the nature and quality of the Helicon-spring that leaps sparkling across the channel. Conversely, no amount of apparent spontaneity, no easy gushing forth as of a perennial stream, are a guarantee that true inspiration is present. The phantasmal subconscious, the frenzied vital, the amorphous emotional, the quick-witted but surfacy mental—all these can mimic inspiration, and woe betide the writer who is satisfied just because a power seemingly other than himself pours through him.

There is also the fact that quite often one is in contact with Castaly but between the *point de départ* and the *point d’arrivée* unexpected intrusions and

unsuspected interventions take place. A spurious or at least not equally genuine impulsion may mix with the nectar-flow. One may not feel any change in the compulsiveness of the movement, and yet the poem will not be a pure product of Parnassus. There will be, superimposed on what we may call the archetype, a phenomenal form which, while seeming to reflect it, really refracts it in its agitated flux.

A sensitive self-criticism is always needed, unless you happen to be Shakespearean in your rapport with the sources of song, whether Apollonian or Dionysian. Often a very sharp slashing into shape is called for. By and large, one may maintain as a fecund truth the depiction of the creative process in the lines from one of my old poems:

Implacable, unmeltable,
On the sun-daze of the heart
Falls the chill mind like a crescent's edge—
And the smitten splendour is art

Along with self-criticism, one needs, in order to progress on the artistic path, an alert openness to what honest qualified critics may have to say. Then alone, in the majority of cases, one can be a true mouthpiece of the Gods. You are certainly not shut to inspired founts, but I am afraid you have a too facile notion of mantric utterance and are over-touchy to corrective suggestions though your touchiness is not violent and egoistic but sweet and suffering and therefore with a promising turn towards a fairer future. It is because I know of this fine turn that I am bothering to write to you on the subject of inspiration at all this length.

Now to come to the theme proper of your letter. According to you, you feel at home in India because India is one palpitating mass of emotionalism and sentimentalism. India to me is various things, including emotionalism and sentimentalism, but at its most exquisite and at its truest it is psychic and intuitive on the one hand and *dhira* on the other, calmly contemplative, seeing life with a steady eye and seeing it from all sides. This does not mean that all thought is abandoned: thought continues, yet not in its own right, it is charged with influences that deepen and heighten it. And if ever thought as such is not prominent and even seems absent, it is not sunk into the emotions and the sentiments but refined and rarefied into truth-feeling or truth-seeing, and the mind's brilliant convolutions are replaced by the state Sri Aurobindo describes of the liberated self:

He who from Time's dull motion escapes and thrills
Rapt thoughtless, wordless into the Eternal's breast,
Unrolls the form and sign of being,
Seated above in the omniscient silence

Here you have both ecstasy and peace, thought-transcendence and knowledge-attainment. Here the emotional and the sentimental are not annulled but lifted out of their usual rhythm, in which they tend to be uncontrolled, into the spiritual truth of themselves, at once intense enough to fulfil their own distinctive nature and widened enough to be free from being narrowed by that nature, widened enough to harmonise and even fuse with other movements of the consciousness at their true pitch. Finally, the intense and the immense of all movements are caught up into a kind of supracosmic ineffable which is yet not a denial of them but a poise where one is their masterful source and not their helplessly drifting captive.

You have spoken of the bhakta and his mad illogical rapture of love for the Divine, amounting almost to mindlessness. And you have asked: "Shall we then disregard all the bhajans of India, the uttering of the Sufis of Persia, the rapturous love songs of Mira and countless others and cast them all aside into the wastepaper basket...?" Of course my answer is "No". But it is "No" because these creations are not exactly what you believe they are. Bhakti has two aspects—the psychic (or soul-charged) and the emotional-sentimental. Often the two sides interplay and then all is well. On occasion they fall apart. Then, if the sheer psychic is in action without any "truck" with the emotional-sentimental there is great beauty but a lack of life-power and life-sympathy—and, if the sheer emotional-sentimental is let loose, a colourful degradation takes place, either an excessive weeping and wailing in loneliness or else an all-too-human indulgence in a Radha-Krishna erotic gambit which has cast a blot on the history of Vaishnavism. The wonderful expressions of bhakti to which you refer embody a balance of the two aspects—and the embodiment is done in terms of perfect art. There is nothing of pure madness or illogic or mindlessness in the love-transport finding voice in them. We can feel and even discern a subtle method, a sensitive development, an exquisite rounding-off. There is what I may call a passionate control, a rich restraint: an essence of psychicised mentality suffuses the emotional-sentimental drive, and an instinctive-intuitive perception of the demand of art for "significant form" leads, in however delicate a functioning, to what John Chadwick (our Ashram's "Arjava") has powerfully dubbed "the chaos-ending chisel-smite". Endless effusiveness is the last thing we can find in these bhakti-impelled voices. If the sense of a shapely limit is not in operation along with the tender tumult of the soul, then, no matter how sincere the bhakta in his vision of the Beloved, there is bound to be an over-all impression of emotion and sentiment running riot to submerge thought in a negative "expanse of spirit" rather than "God's plenty"

Your two "Open Letters" have nothing unreservedly wrong with them except that they prolong inordinately the matter and manner suitable for a short prose-poem. The impression of the first one, which I conveyed to you, was not, as you say, just a verdict: it was also a suggestion. For, I distinctly said that if

condensed and concentrated the piece could be an acceptable poetic expression. Here I may add that the thought-element, which now is dispersed and thinned on account of the length of the emotional-sentimental outburst, would automatically surface into a recognisable component within a shortened span. I have to make the same remark in general about your other composition. Parts of it move me—even the final appeal “O Sri Aurobindo, come!”, which has no particular art-impact, pierces to my heart’s core because of my relationship with Sri Aurobindo and my perception of what he is. But, unless this appeal is woven into an art-structure and unless these other parts which have already a diffuse art-form are close-knit and some of the passages dropped or more crystallised, the piece cannot stand in a periodical like *Mother India*. Not that *Mother India* is always chockful of excellent things. It has several “planes”—high brow, middle brow, even low brow; but a certain minimum thought-building has to be there and the thrust of everything has to be towards something fine or cultured in the being, even if not something overtly spiritual at all times. Further, *Mother India* has a “heart” added to its “head”, and I accept many articles or poems which do not stir me to sheer admiration but which are good attempts by beginners or contain glimmers of greater inspiration to come. I like to encourage people and I am very strict only with those from whom I expect really striking stuff. I count you among these fortunate or unfortunate few—“unfortunate” if the hyper-critical attitude is resented. You have talents and gifts beyond the ordinary, but they have not found their full flowering for want of someone to take you in hand right seriously. I wish Sri Aurobindo were there to pass you through the wonderful creative discipline he so considerately yet so consistently imposed on his literary disciples. When he is not there, I try my best to go by his light—in regard both to myself and to my friends. Do you know how finicky he made us by his own high demands, so that Nirod could become depressed if a poem of his was adjudged “Very good” or “Very fine” but missed being labelled as “Exceedingly good” or “Extremely fine”? Do you know that scores of things written by me have either gone into the wastepaper basket or lie still hidden in my files in spite of Sri Aurobindo finding them acceptable? They have suffered this fate because they fell short of the best he considered me capable of.

I may add that Sri Aurobindo too had a large range of standards. He once wrote to me in answer to some questions of mine: “My judgment does differ with different writers and also with different kinds of writing. If I put ‘very good’ on a poem of Shailen’s, it does *not* mean that it is on a par with Harin’s or Arjava’s or yours. It means that it is very good Shailen, but not that it is very good Harin or very good Arjava. I may write ‘good’ or ‘very good’ on the work of a novice if I see that it has succeeded in being poetry and not mere verse however correct or well rhymed—but if Harin or Arjava or you were to produce work like that, I would not say ‘very good’ at all. There are poems of yours which I have slashed and pronounced unsatisfactory, but if certain others were to send me that, I

would say, 'Well, you have been remarkably successful this time.' I am not giving comparative marks according to a fixed rule. I am using words flexibly according to the occasion and the individual. It would be the same with different kinds of writings. If I write 'very good' or 'excellent' on some verses of Dara about his chair, I am not giving it a certificate of equality with some poems of yours similarly appreciated—I am only saying that as humorous easy verse in the lightest vein it is very successful, an outstanding piece of work. Applied to your poems it would mean something different altogether." (14.11.1934)

With various people and with various types of composition Sri Aurobindo aimed at bringing out the best possible to those people and for those types. He did not aim at turning everything Aurobindonian—as if he had written it. I have learned this lesson from him too. And that is why *Mother India* has many levels of writing as well as many modes of expression. If I were doing what you paint me as doing—namely, wanting all poems and articles to be "Amalian"—there would hardly be such a diversity. Merely to want certain turns of speech to be corrected or just to deem certain sorts of writing to be defective or unsuitable for *Mother India* is not to insist on everybody being "Amalian". This is a *non-sequitur* whose equally mistaken converse would be that whatever finds room in *Mother India* is published because it seems as if it has come from Amal's pen!

The issue you raise about the Western psyche and the Eastern psyche and about their different ways of beautifully saying things appears also rather irrelevant. I am a very Westernised Eastern psyche and I should be the last person to have any prejudices against either the full Western psyche or the Western psyche Easternised. I suppose you are referring to yourself when you speak of the Western psyche, but this does not quite tally with what you say at the beginning of your letter: "...of course I am emotional, sentimental—how else would I feel so at home, so perfectly fitted amongst those others who, very much like myself, are made of a similar stuff? In fact, how else could I have come to live in India?" According to these words, you consider yourself a very Easternised Western psyche, perhaps even a typical Eastern psyche that has accidentally got born in the West.

Please, my dear young friend, don't think that in penning this letter I have given vent to any irritation with you or any dislike of you. I like you very much—indeed I have done so from the very first moment you presented yourself and there was an immediate recognition between us of the poetic soul in each. I have written for the sake of clarifying a number of points that have directly or indirectly risen in the course of my reading your letter—points of some moment for the writer as well as the sadhak. If you feel that in certain places I have misseen problems or misunderstood you, you are free to criticise me and set me right.

I am sorry I have delayed for nearly a week before replying to you. I needed time to do justice to the themes I wished to touch. Even when I got some time,

there had to be interruptions. But now at last the letter has got written. In view of all that is said in it and in accord with my sending back to you your first piece and in consonance with your own sense of its inseparableness from the second, I am returning the latter. Before doing so, I have read it again. And I have marked the three opening paragraphs. I think they have genuine inspiration and, if continued a little further in the same strain, they can make a fine prose-poem. The rest, despite some telling phrases, is, in my opinion, romanticised fancy emotionally spun out and the true feeling with which you started fails to break through—except for a scatter of authentic vision-stirred heartbeats. This is harsh judgment, but I could deliver it only to a brave girl capable of profiting by it.

(4.10.1974)

AMAL KIRAN
(K.D. SETHNA)

THE MASTER-MAKER

THE Master-Maker of unusual twilights
 Has also bloomed unnumbered prayerful dawns
 That the face of the omnipresent Delight
 May be revealed to the seeking eyes
 In a brief moment of inward sojourn.
 The admiration-filled heart's gleams
 Saturating the air, the sky, the earth
 Must have incessant fuelling
 From the inexhaustible source of Gratitude
 Which the Master-Maker must have shaped with deep thoughts
 Out of His unknown soul-stuff, the Delight-Self.
 In whatever He makes or re-makes
 A vivid truth always lurks,
 A nascent wonder plays joyfully,
 Unmarred by Time, a saga of love
 Is brightly written for everyone to read.

SEIKH ABDUL KASAM

SOME EPISODES FROM THE LIFE OF “AN EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION TO NIRODBARAN

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1994)

The Court Case: Conclusion

My astrologer had made a prophecy that one of the Fathers of the St. Xavier's College would stand as a witness in my case and his evidence would help me win it—as actually did happen. But the strange thing was also his other prediction that this Father was in love with me! A few years had passed; my son had become a “major”, and had finished his studies in the College. One day the Father appeared in my house. I was very much surprised at his unexpected visit. I introduced him to my mother. He said something in English which my mother could not catch. He was a Belgian by birth

However, he opened his heart to me and said that he wanted to marry me since he loved me. I felt as if I had fallen from the sky! I could not believe my ears. When he asked for my consent, I had to say, “I'm sorry I don't love you. I am a Hindu woman; to me my *dharma* is higher than everything else Besides, you are a priest and have remained a bachelor for so many years. If you marry me, you will lose everything, your *dharma*, your *karma*, etc.”

He replied, “That matters little. I have enough property in my country. I don't need to depend on any job.”

“But,” I added, “Property, happiness are not everything. There are things of higher value in life. You will have to lose your priesthood for my sake. That will be a great sin and I shall be the cause We shall never enjoy a happy life. Forgive me, please, for my ...”

“Oh, that's all right.” He accepted my refusal so calmly that I myself was surprised. While leaving he told my mother, “Your daughter ...” I could not catch the rest.

A few years later, my elder uncle asked me if I could help the son of a friend of his to get admission in the St. Xavier's School. I agreed and took the boy to the School. That Father had then become the Principal. As soon as he saw me he extended eagerly his two hands towards me and, on hearing the reason of my visit, he was at once ready to admit the boy. “But,” I said, “he is a very ordinary boy ” “That does not matter,” he replied.

A Back-look from Pondicherry

Now settled in Pondicherry, looked after by the Lord, I am free from all

worries and am trying to lead a spiritual life for which He has brought me here. But now and then I'm given to the mood of retrospection and I begin to ask myself why my life has been so strange, why I could not be happy with all the advantages given to me: born in a high and wealthy family, the only child of my parents, brought up with so much care and with a rare passionate love for Krishna at an early age. Only as I grew up, there was a strange marriage which proved a dismal failure. The astrologer's warning was that I was fated to marry whether I liked it or not, for I had to have a child! How strange are all these happenings in the life of a young girl! Then the most exceptional phenomenon—why Sri Aurobindo after leaving his body came to me and made the mysterious utterance? And why is he so close to me and why does he help and protect me from all calamities? No answer from him! I am not a great *ādhāra* by any means, I am full of human frailties. If he was so close to me, so solicitous for my good, why was I given to so much pain and suffering? Even my child for whom I had fought in the court, I had to forget him!

I do not find any solution that is satisfactory. People refer it to my past birth's *karma*—a facile solution to our life's problems when no other solution can be found!

I'm waiting patiently to know the solution of the mystery. The Lord hides it.

ALCHEMY

WHEN the heart vibrates,
Lame words leap
And hesitant hands
Compose a poem,
Written already
In the womb of Time.

When poetry hums,
Flowers bloom
In hot deserts,
Music flows profuse
And sprinkles joy
In hewn hearts

ASHALATA DASH

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1994)

SRI AUROBINDO has said that the result of his solitary confinement in Alipore Jail was that he found God there. The British Government appointed Mr. Eardley Norton, the most eminent criminal lawyer at the time in India, as his prosecutor. They thought that they had got their man in their legal net. So it was absolutely necessary to organise the defence of Sri Aurobindo on an efficient basis.

On 17 May the case was brought up before Mr. Birley and on 18 May the case was officially begun.

Sri Aurobindo's sister Sarojini Devi issued the following fervent appeal for funds for the defence:

“My countrymen are aware that my brother Srijut Aravinda Ghose stands accused of a grave offence. But I believe, and I have reason to think that the vast majority of my countrymen believe, that he is quite innocent. I think if he has to be defended by an able Counsel he is sure to be acquitted. But as he has taken a vow of poverty in the service of the Motherland, he has no means to engage the services of a Barrister-at-law. I am, therefore, under the painful necessity of appealing to the public spirit and generosity of my countrymen on his behalf. I know all my countrymen do not hold the same political opinions as he. But I feel some delicacy in saying that probably there are few Indians who do not appreciate his great attainments, his self-sacrifice, his single-minded devotion to the country's cause and the high spirituality of his character. These embolden me, a woman, to stand before every son and daughter of India for help to defend a brother,—my brother and theirs too”¹

“Contributions should be sent either to me at 6, College Square, Calcutta or to my Solicitors Messrs. Mamal and Agarwala. No. 3, Hastings Street, Calcutta.”²

“This moving appeal, wrung from a sister's heart, was eloquently supported by the *Bengalee*, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and other leading papers. Response to the appeal was not very slow in coming; and in cases—as it often does—from the most unexpected places. A blind beggar—all deathless honour to him!—gave Sarojini one rupee out of the alms he had assiduously collected over a period of months! An impecunious student, by denying himself his daily tiffin, gave a modest contribution; the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha bestirred itself to make collections for Sri Aurobindo's Defence Fund.”³

Numerous other institutions, individuals and agencies started to spread all over the country and interested themselves in the matter and a steady stream of support psychological as well as financial started pouring in. In spite of all this trend of general goodwill in the country, the actual amount collected was by no means very impressive at first. In those early weeks, the significant achievement

rebuffed the administration of the Government. The contributions and messages of sympathy came from Europe, from Australia, from America—and the bureaucracy felt isolated from civilised opinion and was left to fend for itself.

Sri Aurobindo has reminisced: “Ferrar who had been my classmate could not come to see me in Court when the trial was going on and we were put in a cage lest we should jump out and murder the judge. He was a barrister practising at Sumatra or Singapore. He saw me in the cage and was much concerned and did not know how to get me out. It was he who had given me the clue to the hexameter in English. He read out a line from Clough which he thought was the best line and that gave me the swing of the metre.”⁴

Of the prosecuting counsel, Mr Norton, Sri Aurobindo has left a vivid sketch. He considered Mr Norton as a roaming hero of a hundred judicial theatres. Sri Aurobindo writes: “The star performer of the show was the government counsel, Mr. Norton. Not only the star performer, but he was also its composer, stage manager and prompter—a versatile genius like him must be rare in the world. Counsel Mr Norton hailed from Madras, hence it appeared he was unaccustomed and inexperienced in the common code and courtesy as it obtained among the barristers of Bengal. He had been at one time a leader of the National Organisation, and for that reason might have been incapable of tolerating opposition and contradiction, and was in the habit of punishing opponents. Such natures are known to be ferocious. I cannot say whether Mr. Norton had been the lion of Madras Corporation, but he certainly was the king among beasts at the Alipore court. . .”⁵

“And Mr Norton happened to be the Shakespeare of this play. I, however, noticed a difference between Shakespeare and Mr Norton: Shakespeare would now and then leave out some of the available material, but Mr Norton never allowed any material, true or false, cogent or irrelevant, from the smallest to the largest, to go unused, on top of it he could weave such a wonderful plot by his self-created and abundant suggestion, inference and hypothesis that the great poets and writers of fiction like Shakespeare and Defoe would have to acknowledge defeat before this grand master of the art. The critic might say that just as Falstaff’s hotel bill showed a pennyworth of bread and countless gallons of wine, similarly in Norton’s plot an ounce of proof was mixed with tons of inference and suggestion”.⁶

If Mr Norton was a creative genius of presenting an epic, he needed a hero or villain and Sri Aurobindo was cast for that role.

“Like Satan in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, in Mr. Norton’s plot at the centre of the mighty rebellion stood I, an extraordinarily sharp, intelligent and powerful, bold, bad man! Of the national movement I was the alpha and the omega, its creator and saviour, engaged in undermining the British empire. As soon as he came across any piece of excellent or vigorous writing in English he would jump and loudly proclaim, Aurobindo Ghose! All the legal and illegal, the organised

activities or unexpected consequences of the movement were the doings of Aurobindo Ghose: then, even when lawfully admissible, they must contain hidden illegal intentions and potentialities. He probably thought that if I were not caught within two years, it would be all up with the British empire. It is a pity I was not born as an Avatar; otherwise, thanks to his intense devotion and ceaseless contemplation of me for the nonce, he would surely have earned his release, *mukti*, then and there and both the period of our detention and the government's expenses would have been curtailed."⁷

... "Like the legitimate and irrepressible anger of a poet when his words are altered, or of a stage manager when the actor's declamation, tone or postures go against his directions, Norton felt a comparable loss of temper. His quarrel with barrister Bhuban Chatterji had this holy or sattvic anger as its root. Such an inordinately sensitive person as Mr. Chatterji I have not come across. He had no sense of time or propriety. For instance, whenever Mr. Norton sacrificed the distinction between the relevant and the irrelevant, or tried to force odd arguments purely for the sake of poetic effect, Mr. Chatterji would invariably get up and raise objections and declare these as inadmissible. He did not appreciate that these were being furnished not because they were relevant or legal, but because they might serve the purpose of Norton's stage-craft. At such impropriety not Norton alone but Mr. Birley could hardly contain himself. Once Mr. Birley addressed Chatterji in a pathetic tone: 'Mr. Chatterji, we were getting on very nicely before you came.' Indeed so, if one raises objections at every word the drama does not proceed, nor has the audience the joy of it."⁸

"If Mr. Norton was the author of the play, its protagonist and stage manager, Mr. Birley may well be described as its patron. He seemed to be a credit to his Scotch origin. His figure was a symbol or reminder of Scotland. Very fair, quite tall, extremely spare, the little head on the long body seemed like little Auchterlonie sitting on top of the sky-kissing Auchterlonie monument, or as if a ripe coconut had been put on the crest of Cleopatra's obelisk! Sandy-haired, all the cold and ice of Scotland seemed to lie frozen on his face. So tall a person needed an intelligence to match, else one had to be sceptical about the economy of nature."⁹

"Even now among the most complex problems of the case the question remains as to when Mr. Birley had taken over his case. The pathetic appeal to Mr. Chatterji, which I have quoted earlier, will help one to infer Mr. Birley's manner of judgment. From the start, charmed by Mr. Norton's learning and rhetoric, he had been completely under his spell. He would follow, ever so humbly, the road pointed out by Norton. Agreeing with his views, he laughed when Norton laughed, grew angry as Norton would be angry. Looking at this daft, childlike conduct one sometimes felt tenderly and paternally towards him. Birley was exceedingly childlike. I could never think of him as a magistrate, it seemed as if a school student suddenly turned teacher, was sitting at the teacher's

high desk. That was the manner in which he conducted the affairs of the court. In case someone did not behave pleasantly towards him, he would scold him like a schoolmaster.”¹⁰

Before the hearing of the case started, all the prisoners including Sri Aurobindo had to undergo acute psychological suffering and found solitary confinement difficult to bear. The very walls they stared at, Upen wrote, seemed to tell them, “you are prisoners, prisoners.”¹¹

“Once the hearing began and the men could see one another again they recovered their customary spirits. Each morning they were driven to the court in a pair of horse-drawn carriages. All the way they talked and joked and sang. At the courthouse they were awaited by policemen and lawyers and onlookers and reporters and even the occasional photographer. ‘All the precaution, pomp and pageantry that are necessary for a State trial... were gone into without a single omission.’ Inside, they were made to stand in the dock when the magistrate was present. But it soon proved impossible to continue this day in and day out, and the magistrate eventually allowed them to sit on the floor. Spectators and reporters were astounded by the prisoners’ cheerful demeanour and their ‘apparent disregard for the proceedings against them’. Regarding the trial as a farce, they paid scant attention to the testimony. Instead they chatted and laughed, making jokes about the magistrate’s bad Bengali or the witnesses’ bad English. But they had to be careful: if the din became too loud the magistrate ordered them to stand. At the end of the day they were driven back to jail, as happy as students released from school.”¹²

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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SRI AUROBINDO AND THE TOMORROW OF THE EARTH

Talk at the Savitri Solar Dome, Crestone, Colorado on August 15, 1994

by C.V. Devan Nair

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1994)

No complaints, but for me, it has been a year of tribulations—physical, mental and emotional. As I said, my wife and I had a rough passage to India last November, and a rougher four-month stay, which included a fortnight's hospitalization in Madras for both of us. It has been a year of terrifying perceptions, dangerous misperceptions, wonderful personal encounters, and some illuminations as startling as lightning flashes in a cloudless sky.

One realization was not so startling, for one had too easily assumed that the sense of a common global family had already become axiomatic, given the glib language of world political leaders who today swear by what is called "the global orientation of market economies." Alas, not so. Only at the level of multinational corporations—out to exploit global market opportunities. However, mention the genocide in Rwanda or Bosnia, for instance, and the sense of globalism vanishes in a trail of verbal gas. There's no oil in Rwanda or Bosnia, you see, so no real western interests are involved. And there's not even a gridlock on the question in the usually gridlocked US Congress.

The so-called civilized world is shocked by what they see on TV or read in news reports, but they turn to more entertaining stuff in the media. Yet an estimated half million men, women and children of the Tutsi tribe in Rwanda have already perished under slashing machete attacks, cloaking the countryside with the stench of death. Tens of thousands of bodies were washed down the Kagera River in May this year into Lake Victoria in Uganda. Aquatic life in the Lake followed suit. Said a member of the Ugandan Parliament, head of the clean-up operation: "I've never seen hatred like this. There are so many of them. Children are skewered on sticks. I saw a woman cut open from the tail bone. They have removed breasts and male genital organs." If this is not a holocaust, what is? Add 1.2 million people who fled from the country as refugees—many crushed to death in panic-stricken stampedes, and tens of thousands dead or dying of cholera.

Do people still believe that the tribe of Asuras disappeared with Hitler and Stalin? Not so. "They know well how to transmigrate," said Sri Aurobindo. And transmigrate, to more places than Rwanda and Bosnia. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have long lists of countries where secret police still knock on the door after midnight, and take away men and women to solitary confinement and physical and psychological torture, simply because they have opinions not congenial to the powers-that-be. Limbs are amputated for offences

like stealing, adultery and so on. There are also whip lashings and canings galore. I myself am an exile from a spanking clean city state known as Singapore. The death penalty still operates in several countries. Get that list from Amnesty, and you will realize that the Asuric operation is world-wide.

The relentless unfolding of ever-more gruesome events in the world are insistent reminders to nations, governments, peoples and individual human beings of an inexorable truth—"Nothing occurs *in vacuo*, independent of its complex global, physico-psychological and socio-economic—political contexts."

Like it or not, we live (and die, for that matter) at all levels—inner and outer—in one intensely, continuously inter-active world. Every single factor in our global village impacts on and alters every other factor. A virus mutates in inner Mongolia, and an influenza epidemic sweeps the continents. Vast subterranean movements of continental plates result, sooner or later, in an earthquake here, a tidal wave there, erupting volcanoes elsewhere, regardless of political borders. The list is endless.

Sri Aurobindo put it so compactly: "The stone lying inert upon the sands which is kicked away in an idle moment, has been producing its effect upon the hemispheres." So where exactly on our blessed earth can anybody seek escape from the life around us? With that imperturbable majesty so characteristic of his utterances, Sri Aurobindo reminded us that "we are in our life and being not only ourselves but all others, for there is a secret solidarity which our egoism may kick at and strive against, but from which we cannot escape.. and only by admitting and realizing our unity with others can we entirely fulfil our true self-being." And the very basis of his integral yoga is: "Nobody is saved unless all are saved."

In short, when we aspire, we need to aspire for everybody, for earth itself. We have Sri Aurobindo's assurance: "If earth calls and the Supreme answers, the hour can be even now for that immense and glorious transformation." We must all call, a little, for we are children of Earth, and it is Mother Earth who calls through us. Nothing is more ludicrous than to find men and women who have forgotten to aspire. I've met a few, in India and elsewhere, who seem to have been seized by amnesia. Rather than continuing to aspire, they give the impression that they need do nothing themselves, but just wait for the Supramental to stroll in one day for a chat over afternoon tea and cakes. They have forgotten what Sri Aurobindo wrote about The Hour of God. "In the hour of God cleanse thy soul of all self-deceit and hypocrisy and vain self-flattering that thou mayst look straight into thy spirit and hear that which summons it.... But being pure cast aside all fear; for the hour is often terrible, a fire and a whirlwind and a tempest, a treading of the winepress of the wrath of God.... Nor let worldly prudence whisper too closely in thy ear, for it is the hour of the unexpected."

Similarly, in an episode of the Mahabharata, Sri Krishna uttered these

ominous words: "Those fascinated by lightning forget how it strikes."

It's as clear as daylight The hour of God is no time for tea-parties.

Let us never forget that we are, in ourselves, all men and women I learned it the hard way Allow me to elaborate a little. As non-executive President of Singapore, several pleas for clemency reached my desk Unable to do anything about them, I would merely minute them to the Prime Minister: "For your attention and advice " A really dreadful moment of my presidency was when an aide laid before me a grim black-bordered document—ordering the death by hanging on the following morning of someone sentenced to death—for my signature. I trembled signing it, and felt weak in the knees afterwards, for it felt as if I had ordered my own execution Thereafter, the President of Singapore contrived, whenever possible, to retreat into the presidential cottage by the sea, and the Speaker of Parliament had the job of signing such documents as Acting President. I didn't ask him how he felt, although he did seem to enjoy playing the ceremonial President for a few days.

Something in me revolted at the very notion of ordering some other human being's death A few days after I had signed the first order of execution of a fellow human being, I dreamed probably the most vivid dream in my life I saw very clearly, in my dream, a man in a convict's striped uniform, seated on a bench in his cell He was quite unlike me He seemed to be somebody from the Middle East, a stoutish man with close-cropped gray hair, with quite different features. Yet, I knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that it was I who sat there. And I thought of my wife and children, and they were not the wife and children I know today. Yet I knew they were *my* wife and children. And I thought to myself: 'Why has this happened to me? Why are they doing this to me?' . Followed a moment of triumph, as I heard the heavy approaching footsteps of men in the stone corridor outside my cell—and I knew that the guards were coming to take me away to be executed—and the last thought in that head I remembered was: 'Well, So Be It!'

A few years later, something inside me leaped in recognition when I read this aphorism of Sri Aurobindo's: "When I knew nothing, then I abhorred the criminal, sinful and impure, being myself full of crime, sin and impurity; but when I was cleansed and my eyes unsealed, then I bowed down in my spirit before the thief and the murderer and adored the feet of the harlot; for I saw that these souls had accepted the terrible burden of evil and drained for all of us the greater portion of the churned poison of the world-ocean."

Some years further down the road, I read a note written in French by the Mother, "under the pressure of Sri Aurobindo's consciousness", she said:

"According to the law of men, the guilty must be punished. But there is a more imperative law than the human law: it is the law of the Divine, the law of compassion and mercy. It is thanks to this law that the world can last and progress. . ."

A profound saying of Sri Aurobindo's struck me as uniquely applicable to the modern world in general:

"The end of a stage of evolution is usually marked by a powerful recrudescence of all that has to go out of the evolution "

What 'a powerful recrudescence' indeed! Take one look at the world at large and we see at once that there is an incredible crowding together in a putrid mass of everything that has to go out of the evolution. India is no exception. One recalls the statement of the Mother to the effect that all the world's difficulties are concentrated in India. The nation that had, in the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, given the profoundest insights into the question of human fulfilment on our planet, has now itself sunk into quite incredible depths of 'crime, corruption and connivance' in public life, as an Indian judge put it.

But conditions in the inner cities of the world's richest nation—the United States—are enough to make the angels weep. Small wonder that sermons on human rights from the US Administration have little impact elsewhere.

Next, take an unflinchingly honest look into ourselves. You know, perhaps the best place to look for apes is not the zoo. If our inner senses are not moribund, we can encounter them quite easily within ourselves. Not only apes, but quite a few more distant cousins as well; cousins who roar, growl, grunt, bellow, snarl or snap. Some of us with greater affinity to our feathered cousins can meet parrots parroting away, for instance; or maybe, like Keats and Shelley, hear melodies of nightingales and larks; or perhaps, depending on our own special affinities, hyenas, hawks or vultures. And how often don't our abundant land-sharks remind us of our distant ferocious cousins in the sea?

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother encountered and dealt, deep within themselves, with our remotest past embedded in inconscient mineral, and at rock-bottom came upon a divine prankster behind it all—the Supreme Himself cowed in utter darkness.

What then is the purpose for which the stars were made? And for which the lives and deaths of earth's millions of creatures were decreed? Mercifully, it's not only the past we can encounter within ourselves. Sometimes we have fleeting glimpses of a more than human posterity. The apes were not so lucky. They did not have the faintest notion that they concealed in their make-up a Buddha, a Christ, a Shakespeare or an Einstein.

One could go on and on about the increasingly chaotic life of the modern world. What do we do? Start a new political movement or institution? Rewrite national constitutions and the Geneva conventions? Not according to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I will quote an undated letter of Sri Aurobindo, which explains itself. He starts with a reference to modern humanism and humanitarianism, idealism, etc.:

"It is not by these means that humanity can get that radical change of its ways of life which is yet becoming imperative, but only by reaching the bedrock

of Reality behind,—not through mere ideas and mental formations, but by a change of the consciousness, an inner and spiritual conversion. But that is a truth for which it would be difficult to get a hearing in the present noise of all kinds of many-voiced clamour and confusion and catastrophe

“Science has missed something essential; it has seen and scrutinized what has happened and in a way how it has happened, but it has shut its eyes to something that made this impossible possible, something it is there to express. There is no fundamental significance in things if you miss the Divine Reality, for you remain embedded in a huge surface crust of manageable and utilisable appearance. It is the magic of the Magician you are trying to analyse, but only when you enter into the consciousness of the Magician himself can you begin to experience the true origination, significance and circles of the Lila ”

Next, there is a stunningly illuminating conversation of the Mother’s: “As it is, the physical body is really only a very disfigured shadow of the eternal life of the Self, but this physical body is capable of a progressive development; through each individual formation, the physical substance progresses, and one day it will be capable of making a bridge between physical life as we know it and the supramental life that will manifest.”

I follow with something else from the Mother “Something has begun to descend—not ‘descend,’ but manifest, penetrate—penetrate and fill this terrestrial consciousness. It had such a force, such a power!—an intensity I had never felt before in matter—such a *stability*, such a power! It was all power and pressure to move ahead—towards progress, evolution, transformation. It was the joy of progress.... And this was not something that came and faded and came again. No, it was an immensity, a solid, full, *established* immensity. Not something that comes, presents itself and says: this is how it will be—it was ‘there’. And it was not something being infused into the Mind; it was an infusion into Life, into the terrestrial, material substance which had become alive. Even plants partook of the experience. It was not something restricted to the mental being, the whole vital, material substance of the earth received that joy of the power of progress—it was triumphant, absolutely triumphant ... A diamond-like sparkle. When I got up this morning, I had the feeling that a corner was turned for the earth. That people do not realize it does not matter at all.”

With Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, a corner has indeed been turned for the earth. And when such corners are turned, they do not make headlines. As we have seen, they go entirely unnoticed. The world of laboriously crawling, earth-grounded caterpillars, is totally unaware that a world of butterflies is flitting right above them—in the very same world. But sometimes, some of us do get an inner assurance of a quite different status of conscious being—an assurance simply untranslatable in the terms of our linear language. As untranslatable as the most unforgettable moment during my four-month stay in India—my first experience of the completed inner chamber of the Matrimandir. I had been into the

chamber at a number of stages before its completion, but even then one had felt as though one was present at arrangements being made for the coming birth of a god.

It was a clear bright day in February this year. My wife was with me. Barbara took us there. My wife had to be taken up in a chair, because of her arthritis. Barbara and I walked up the ramp together. In a complete silence we removed our shoes in front of the curtained entrance, put on spotlessly white stockings; the curtains were gently pulled aside to allow us to pass in.

One entered an intense white silence, unlike anything I had encountered elsewhere before, whether in the great temples of India and China, in the pagodas of Burma and Thailand, in St Peter's in Rome, or in other great cathedrals of the West. No paintings, no stained-glass windows, no idols, no priests, no chanting, no sermons, no incense sticks. Only Sri Aurobindo's symbol, Mother's symbol, and that wonder of a crystal ball, as if held aloft by invisible goddess fingers just above Sri Aurobindo's symbol¹ on the white floor, to capture a golden ray from a hidden sun—for multiple radiation over the earth. In its entirety, it was an OVERT, LIVING, THROBBING symbol of an invasion from the Infinite across the borders of terrestrial time and space.

Nothing more. Only this incredible radiance of a powerful white silence—an intense moonlight white silence, an invincibly sovereign silence, which one *heard*, so to speak. I was rendered wordless—an unusual condition for me. So how can one describe what occurred? *Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.* We remained there for more than half an hour. I returned alone to that zone of supra-terrestrial silence in the inner chamber on two other occasions, sitting there wordlessly for forty-five minutes or more.

Let's be wary of the salespersons of experience. Like the beguiling hard sell of trade, commerce and politics, their aim is to persuade you to part with your judgment, your money or your votes. Occult and spiritual experiences happen to be the favourite field of frauds and charlatans who thrive in the widespread markets of gullibility. We need to beware of what Sri Aurobindo called: 'the valley of the false glimmer', where so many bloaten their purses and their egos—and kill their souls.

But now, at this distance of time and space, I might permit myself to say this. One felt a stupendous ASSURANCE, a tremendous CERTITUDE, that *all shall be done for which our pain was borne.* Many have felt similarly in that other place where the overwhelming feeling of awed reverence is the only possible feeling, the samadhi of the Two-in-One—Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. As also in Sri Aurobindo's room and Mother's room one seems to hear that *solitary tread echoing on the margin of immeasurable Oceans.*

Useless to launch into a metaphysical dissertation on the subject. But inner experiences of several kinds are powerfully suggested in *Savitri, The Life Divine* and in other works of Sri Aurobindo. Many of you, like me, have felt a shock of

recognition in numerous passages of *Savitri*. Let Mother explain how this comes about. She said:

“You can understand only what you already know in your own inner self. What strikes you in a book is what you have already experienced deep within you. Men find a book or a teaching very wonderful and often you hear them say, ‘That is exactly what I myself feel and know, but I could not bring it out or express it as well as it is expressed here.’ When men come across a book of true knowledge, each finds himself there, and at every new reading he discovers things that he did not see in it at first; it opens to him each time a new field of knowledge that had till then escaped him in it. But that is because it reaches layers of knowledge that were waiting for expression in the subconscious in him; the expression has now been given by somebody else and much better than he could himself have done it. But, once expressed, he immediately recognizes it and feels that it is the truth. The knowledge that seems to come to you from outside is only an occasion for bringing out the knowledge that is within you.”

Lines from *Savitri* keep occurring to many of us for a very good reason. Let us recall what Mother said about *Savitri*: “This *Savitri* is wonderful, he foresaw everything, saw everything, everything, absolutely everything, there isn’t one point he left unexplained!” Sri Aurobindo saw and foresaw everything because *Savitri* is at once a spiritual autobiography and an inner biography of the Mother herself. Mother certainly recognized that in speaking of Ashwapati and his experiences Sri Aurobindo was, in fact, speaking of himself. She also clearly recognized that *Savitri*’s inner life was a perfect fit of her own.

Let me mention just a few typical lines in which we immediately recognize Sri Aurobindo himself:

Invested with the rhythm of higher spheres
The word was used as a hieratic means
For the release of the imprisoned spirit.

A treasurer of superhuman dreams.

He sat in secret chambers looking out
Into the luminous countries of the unborn.

He gazed across the empty stillnesses
And heard the footsteps of the undreamed Idea.

Inflexible his look towards Truth’s far end.

Discoverer of unthought realities,
Truer to Truth than all we have ever known,
He is the leader on the inner roads.

He is the invisible hunter of the Light,
 The Angel of mysterious ecstasies,
 The conqueror of the kingdoms of the soul.

If you need more examples you can't do better than go through *Savitri* in its entirety yourself. Not go through with one's eyes alone, but also hear with one's ears. Mantras have to be heard, not read.

India reminded me repeatedly of the uncompromising chapter in Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* with the title 'Kurukshetra', that sanguinary field of battle over which Sri Krishna himself—Divine Love incarnate and the Friend of creatures—presided. Let me quote some of Sri Aurobindo's trenchant reminders to the human soul: "We must look existence in the face if our aim is to arrive at a right solution, whatever that solution may be. And to look existence in the face is to look God in the face.... We erect a God of Good, a God just, righteous and virtuous according to our own moral conceptions of justice, virtue and righteousness, and all the rest, we say, is not He or is not His.... As if man had created the law of death and devouring in the animal world or that tremendous process by which Nature creates indeed and preserves but in the same step and by the same inextricable action slays and destroys. It is only a few religions which have had the courage to say without any reserve, like the Indian, that this enigmatic World-Power is one Deity, one Trinity, to lift up the image of the Force that acts in the world in the figure not only of the beneficent Durga, but of the terrible Kali in her blood-stained dance of destruction and to say, 'This too is the Mother, this also know to be God; this too, if thou hast the strength, adore.' And it is significant that the religion which has had this unflinching honesty and tremendous courage, has succeeded in creating a profound and widespread spirituality such as no other can parallel. For truth is the foundation of real spirituality and courage is its soul.

"All this is not to say that strife and destruction are the alpha and omega of existence, that harmony is not greater than war, love more the manifest divine than death or that we must not move towards the replacement of physical force by soul-force, of war by peace, of strife by union, of devouring by love, of egoism by universality, of death by immortal life. God is not only the Destroyer, but the Friend of creatures; not only the cosmic Trinity, but the Transcendent; the terrible Kali is also the loving and beneficent Mother; the lord of Kurukshetra is the divine comrade and charioteer, the attracter of beings, incarnate Krishna. And whithersoever he is driving through all the strife and clash and confusion, to whatever goal or godhead he may be attracting us, it is—no doubt of that—to some transcendence of all these aspects upon which we have been so firmly insisting. But where, how, with what kind of transcendence, under what conditions, this we have to discover, and to discover it, the first necessity is to see the world as it is, to observe and value rightly his action as it reveals itself at the

start and now; afterwards the way and the goal will better reveal themselves. We must acknowledge Kurukshetra, we must submit to the law of Life by Death before we can find our way to the life immortal, we must open our eyes with a less appalled gaze than Arjuna's, to the vision of our Lord of Time and Death and cease to deny, hate or recoil from the universal Destroyer."

One in recent times who neither denied, hated nor recoiled from the Universal Destroyer, was Vivekananda. He showed in a tremendous experience that only heroes and heroines can truly appreciate and adore the Divine Mother. I quote Sister Nivedita who gives an account of a visit to Kashmir with Vivekananda and a number of western lady disciples

"It was that same evening that we came back to our houseboat from some expedition and found waiting for us, where he had called and left them, his manuscript lines of 'Kali the Mother.' Written in a fever of inspiration, he had fallen on the floor, when he had finished—as we learnt afterwards—exhausted with his own intensity.

KALI THE MOTHER

The stars are blotted out,
 The clouds are covering clouds,
 It is darkness, vibrant, sonant
 In the roaring, whirling wind,
 Are the souls of a million lunatics,
 Just loosed from the prison house,
 Wrenching trees by the roots,
 Sweeping all from the path
 The sea has joined the fray
 And swirls up mountain waves,
 To reach the pitchy sky.
 The flash of lurid light
 Reveals on every side
 A thousand, thousand shades
 Of death, begrimed and black.
 Scattering plagues and sorrows,
 Dancing mad with joy,
 Come, Mother, come!
 For Terror is thy name
 Death is in thy breath.
 And every shaking step
 Destroys a world for ever
 Thou 'Time' the All-Destroyer!
 Come, O Mother, come!

Who dares misery love,
Dance in destruction's dance,
And hug the form of death—
To him the Mother comes.

In the afternoon of that day we saw him coming back to us up the river. He stood in front of the *dunga*, grasping with one hand the bamboo roof-pole, and with the other holding yellow flowers. He entered our house-boat, a transfigured presence, and silently passed from one to another blessing us and putting the marigolds on our heads. 'I offered them to Mother,' he said at last, as he ended by handing the garland to one of us. Then he sat down. 'No more *Hari Om*. It is all *Mother* now!' he said with a smile. We all sat silent. Had we tried to speak, we should have failed, so tense was the spot with something that stilled thought. He opened his lips again. 'All my patriotism is gone. Everything is gone. Now it's only *Mother, Mother!*'

'I have been very wrong,' he said simply after another pause. 'Mother said to me, *What, even if unbelievers should enter my temples and defile My images! What is that to you? Do you protect Me? Or do I protect you?* So there is no more patriotism. I am only a little child!'

The point of it all is that there have been great destructions before—the Age of the Dinosaurs came to some catastrophic end—and there will be great destructions in the future. But to fear would be silly. What is catastrophe for the caterpillars is bliss for the butterflies. We are mental caterpillars. Let us look forward to the advent of divine supramental butterflies. We must stop being guided by the past. Let us hearken instead, with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, to the footfalls of approaching Divinity.

I will end with a beautiful description by Sri Aurobindo of the great discovery he invites us to make:

"Lift your eyes towards the sun; He is there in that wonderful heart of life and light and splendour. Watch at night the innumerable constellations glittering like so many solemn watchfires of the Eternal in the limitless silence which is no void but throbs with the presence of a single calm and tremendous existence; see there Orion with his sword and belt shining as he shone to the Aryan fathers ten thousand years ago at the beginning of the Aryan era, Sirius in his splendour, Lyra sailing billions of miles away in the ocean of space. Remember that these innumerable worlds, most of them mightier than our own, are whirling with indescribable speed at the beck of that Ancient of Days whither none but he knoweth, and yet that they are a million times more ancient than your Himalaya, more steady than the roots of your hills and shall so remain until He at his will shakes them off like withered leaves from the eternal tree of the Universe. Imagine the endlessness of Time, realize the boundlessness of Space; and then remember that when these worlds were not, He was, the Same as now, and when

these are not, He shall be, still the Same, perceive that beyond Lyra He is and far away in Space where the stars of the Southern Cross cannot be seen, still He is there. And then come back to the earth and realize who this He is. He is quite near to you. See yonder old man who passes near you crouching and bent, with his stick. Do you realize that it is God who is passing? There a child runs laughing in the sunlight. Can you hear Him in that laughter? Nay, he is nearer still to you. He is in you, He is you. It is yourself that burns yonder millions of miles away in the infinite reaches of Space, that walks with confident steps on the tumbling billows of the ethereal sea; it is you who have set the stars in their places and woven the necklace of the suns not with hands but by that Yoga, that silent actionless impersonal Will which has set you here today listening to yourself in me. Look up, O child of the ancient Yoga, and be no longer a trembler and a doubter; fear not, doubt not, grieve not; for in your apparent body is One who can create and destroy worlds with a breath.”

(Concluded)

ABOUT WOMAN

2. THE WOMAN-PROBLEM

(Translated by Satadal from the Bengali of Nolini Kanta Gupta)

1

RIVER-WATER, of whatever taste it may be, becomes all the same salty water after running and merging into the sea. Woman, whatever she may be, grows all the same reflecting man's nature after coming in contact with him.

I have within me a thing called shakti—force. My action, my inspiration my emotion, my desire, my idea, my thought—all are being controlled by that force. The movement of my soul is the pull of that force. This force of mine within is woman named without.

Shakti inherently pulls—it may pull me up high, it may also pull me down below. Which way does my soul face? Is it looking towards the high above? Then all my force will be utilised to lift my soul there. Under certain conditions I may even come down for a while, but the momentary downward movement of the force is due to the need of the soul. Rise and fall—both are for the sake of rising; night and day are for the sake of light. The two have two different appearances but have the same resolve and goal—*naktośāsā samanāsā virūpe*' (Night and Dawn are different in form but of one mind).

Then again, is the movement of my soul leading down below? Has my soul leaned towards the earth with eyes full of desires? Then be sure, shakti will carry him to the extreme end of utter hell—no high idea, no high thought will ever be able to stop him. Nullifying agelong severe austerity, it will turn the ascetic or the seer into an animal-like ordinary human. Even in my powerlessness is revealed the power of shakti. That's why the Chandi says—

*Bhavakāle nnnām saiva lakṣmīrvṛddhīpradā grhe,
Saivābhāve tathā alakṣmīrvināśāyate.*²

(During favourable times She as Lakshmi brings prosperity to a house.
And when the time is unfavourable She again as Alakshmi brings destruction.)

The utter materialist alone says that matter only has attraction. But has light no attraction? Earth has a pull, likewise heaven also has a pull. Ask your soul about which direction to follow. What is awake in your soul—matter or light, earth or heaven? Shakti will act accordingly and the work will be accomplished with redoubled vigour by the power of shakti. Don't put the blame on shakti.

I have within me the force to fall as well as the force to rise. Since the force

to fall is there, the force to rise is also there. Since woman has the force to bring about the fall, for the very same reason nothing else has that much force to lift also. Whatever my godhead within demands, woman accordingly arranges the ingredients of enjoyment before him. Circe used to convert men into animals, the thought of Beatrice had Dante transformed into a seer. The angry look of a woman burns a banyan tree to ashes, turns this life into a desert, with a touch of the feet of the very same woman a flamboyant smiles with flowers, the poetic genius of Kalidas finds expression, sadhak Chandidas attains siddhi.

Woman simply arranges support to feed the demands of the soul of man. You may cast away the support but that will not help to turn the face of your soul. The first and foremost thing is to turn the face of your soul. If you just go on removing only the supports, your soul will not turn its face; rather it will make a sad face and sit idle. You will fritter away your life in removing the supports—you will only go on doing your sadhana but siddhi will never be within your reach.

Prakriti conforms herself according to the moods of Purusha, her actions simply follow his moods.

In India, in our personal, social or national life we find ample proof of this truth. The very day the soul of India became small and vigourless, the women of India were the first to be disgraced. From that very day women became weak and closeted themselves within the four walls to hide their faces out of shame. The more the menfolk ran towards sannyasa, took women to be the gateway to hell, kept them at a distance hurling insults, womenfolk too really moved more and more away and clutched the earth.. and became only the things of pleasure and enjoyment. Her power found an expression in this direction of powerlessness only. During the rise of the Raghu-dynasty, Dilip the man among men had as his consort the gem of a woman like Sudarshana; during its decline, as he was red-hot as fire, he saw in women only youthful breasts.

If man and woman are cut into two separate halves, the result will be such only. A few men here or a few women there may somehow turn into ascetics with a single-minded effort, but the bulk of women and therefore the bulk of men too will be netted in the illusion of ordinary pleasures and enjoyments. What man takes woman for, so she becomes to start with, then man himself gets entangled in that self-made mesh.

None can be victorious with a revolt declared against Prakriti. The force of revolt is the force of Prakriti itself—therefore, by revolting, you are simply dividing your own force into two, pitting one part against the other—thus reducing your strength into half. In order to utilise with sanctity the whole force of Prakriti, man first of all must acquire within himself a purity and a calm equanimity. The power of Kali gives a concrete expression to whatever is seen in Shiva's vision. Bring forth this unblemished white purity of Shiva in your soul, O man; then you will never feel the need to be in opposition to woman.

When I pit myself against woman with a terrible force, that means a terrible hunger within me is running unnoticed towards woman. It is just the existence of this subterranean formidable attraction that manifests in the formidable repulsion outside. It is no use putting the blame on woman alone. Woman allures you, but why is she able to do that? Because there is greed in you. First get rid of this greed in yourself, then you will see everything set right, woman tempts you no more; she simply supplies the *rasa* of your soul.

But to get rid of greed does not mean to get rid of the object of greed. It is precisely here that we commit the blunder. There is no surety that the avidity of the senses will fall off by just keeping aloof from the object—

*Karmendriyāṇi samyamya ya āste manasā smaran,
Indriyārthān vimūḍhātmā mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate.*³

(The stupid one who after restraining the organs of action dwells in his mind on the sense-objects is called a hypocrite.)

Even for those who do not indulge mentally like this, their avidity remains simply dampened or dormant. At least such a possibility is more likely. That secret nearly-extinct avidity may cause havoc with a sudden upsurge, if some favourable condition somehow comes to inflame it again. Instances of such lapses are not rare.

By seeing woman with a simple and normal look, the illusion of the eyes gradually gets dispelled. Man considers himself to be simple and normal, but makes of woman a queer thing by casting around her the shadow of a mystery—at times he bows in obeisance from a distance as if to a goddess out of heaven, at others drives her away as an infernal creature. But in reality there is no need of such abnormal excesses. Woman is as simple and normal as I am—the same divine entity is there within woman as within me. The relation of the eater and the eaten, fire and fuel or Buddha and Mara, Christ and Satan is not the natural relation of man and woman. Man and woman both are *sadhaks*; side by side they move hand in hand towards the same goal along the same path—such only is the normal relation between them. When we leave the normal and land into the abnormal, then and there is the beginning of all these conflicts, strifes and miseries.

2

Woman is the portrait of the soul and life of man. So long as man does not find within himself his true soul, his true life, he won't be able to find his other half—the true woman without. Woman will be the portrait of the falsehood that has become a reality in his soul and life, and the force of the woman will only make that reality more horrid.

But the question is: so long as man does not attain to the nature of his own soul, what will he do? Till then what will be his relation with woman? So long as we don't find the inner nature, what can we do with our outer nature of practical life? We can sever all relations and immerge within our own self, then we can return only after getting that philosopher's stone. Or else, we can set ourselves adrift in the flow of the external nature till that flow carries of itself the tired and exhausted mariner into the sea of nectar, either to be a sannyasi or to give oneself to worldly pleasures and enjoyment.

But the risk in the path of sannyasa is liberation—nirvana, that is to say, no return to earth and life. Even if you can, you may draw a few towards sannyasa, but how can you draw the whole society to that path? An order of sannyasis may well be formed for men leaving aside women, but with what result? How far has the Christian Church been able to transform the European society into that divine kingdom of Christ's dream? How far have all these ascetics of our country—however pure and realised they themselves may be—been able to build the whole life of the country, of the society, giving it a spiritual shape with spiritual force? Everyone sees that bare reality with their own eyes.

And the danger of giving oneself to pleasures and enjoyment is annihilation. Where is the certainty that I shall not be drowned in some hideous gigantic whirlpool if I follow that course? Blind men and women going hand in hand may save themselves with mutual help, but the chances are more that they will collide and struggle with each other and fall down the precipice and perish. Europe has followed this path and the result is clearly visible at every step.

The fear of nirvana is there in the path of renunciation, the fear of annihilation in the path of desire. Is there no other way? Yes, there is. Here also as everywhere else—*murārestrīyapanthāh* (Murari takes the third path)

That way or remedy is desire outside, renunciation inside. There is no need to isolate man from woman completely, nor is it necessary to bind them together too strongly with the string of illusion. Everything depends on the change of a mood within, on a new angle of vision. Man must never consider woman as a hindrance. He must welcome woman with a warm and cordial invitation, but from a higher level than the old vital instincts. Man should look upon woman as the idol of strength and beauty of his soul. If one is firm on this will from the very beginning, then the relation between man and woman will gradually become natural, pure and elevating. When we instruct man to lower his eyes at the sight of woman to worship her as a mother, then and there we cast a seed of dormant words behind the veil of those uttered and the result is highly poisonous, so to say—in the secret consciousness of man that poison-tree grows unnoticed, in the end it becomes the cause of his destruction. One should start with this simple fact that woman is woman. "Thou art not a mother, nor a daughter nor even a spouse"—woman thou art, come and appear before man with thy bare womanhood. When we menfolk engage woman within a special definition,

immediately we allow a magical charm to grow around her

Man mixes with man standing on a natural relation, as human beings. So there is hardly any question of acceptance or rejection, renunciation or enjoyment. We must first learn to look upon woman as a human being with a human outlook. With this simple way of looking at things, just as on one side a natural relation of personality finds expression between human beings, in the same way the normal true relation of man-woman-hood will be expressed between man and woman.

That this natural true relation between man and woman has become so rare, has become so difficult for human beings even to conceive is the result of our past education and culture, instincts and social systems. There is no everlasting eternal truth in it. It does not seem that there is any need of a tremendous austerity in order just to change the trend—on the part either of man or of woman. That sort of austerity becomes inevitable when man tries to move all by himself, separated from woman, when woman goes in search of her own path separated from man. If the two become partners of a higher and nobler life, if the two, becoming equally conscious, serve the same mission, then we see no possibility of slip for anyone. By nourishing mutually the idea of each other, both unite in a great realisation.

We don't consider it worthwhile to exaggerate the fear of a slip. In reality this fear becomes the cause of a slip. But when and under what condition in this world is there no possibility of a slip? Does that possibility disappear if man remains in seclusion all alone, or in company with man only? Then why blame woman alone? Or it may be said, why unnecessarily increase the cause of allurements? Even if we accept woman to be the cause of great allurements, there is also the treasure of a great gain—an ambrosia so to say—mixed with it. How will you get that? The greater the allurements, the greater also is the invaluable thing hidden in it. If you don't increase the cause of allurements, the cause of gain also will not increase. From another point of view, the whole world is full of allurements—you cannot save yourself even by becoming a sannyasi; even for a sannyasi, there may not be any allurements outside but there is ample inside, within his own self.

In all the paths of sadhana, there are enormous hindrances, dangers, allurements and responsibilities. For that matter some sort of courage and faith is essential at the very beginning. If one does not have that minimum of courage and faith, it is useless to try to proceed on the path. You will surely get a better result if you make a move after accepting man as a god rather than as a mere animal. The more we encircle ourselves with barriers and continue to move in narrower fields, the Brahmapurusha within too continues to work with constricted power. We do not disagree that in a given time and condition this encircling and narrowing may be necessary for a particular man. But to make of it an irrefutable law for all, under all or nearly all circumstances—is it not blind fanaticism?

3

So far we have dealt with woman as seen from the point of view of man. But how woman comes or will come to man from his way of looking at it, what need and fulfilment of man she supplies or will supply, that is not the whole problem. Consequently if viewed only like this, a lot of errors may creep in. When man speaks of woman, does one know how much colour of his own ideas is unknowingly infused and painted over it? There is no harm in man's reflecting about woman, but then again woman should be allowed to reflect on woman. What woman has to say from woman's point of view, how she looks upon herself, and for that matter how she looks upon man—all these also one should listen to.

Up till now woman has been looked after by man, whatever she is supposed to do has been decided by man. One cannot say that man always had bad intention, but how to deny the fact that after all it was man's intention? Woman is the better half of man, a shadow or a mirror of his soul—this may be true but it does not exhaust woman's own account of herself. We admit the truth of the two but for that matter can we deny the truth of one? We accept that at a certain stage man and woman become harmonious but as we don't want to curb man's manhood in that harmony, why should woman be forced to curb her womanhood? Consequently the union will be effective only when man will not try to swallow woman with his manliness, woman too won't submit to it out of instinct. Man will rise to his own manhood, woman too will rise to her own womanhood. To fulfil this objective, man has to do a little bit of penance so to say. So long the sovereignty lay with man—now for some time if he comes to be dominated by woman, one need not wonder. Such a trend is already visible in Europe. There is nothing to disdain in this instance of Europe. In the present age, the main stream of Nature's activity is flowing mostly over Europe, it is Europe that has occupied the frontal awakened part of world-consciousness. That is why every new thing blossoms first in Europe and then spreads over other places. Whatever it may be, a thing called woman-independence is growing in Europe, and it is not easy to say that India will escape from it, if our aim is to unite man and woman in a more perfect harmony and union.

So long the union of man and woman has taken place in ignorance, under the ordinary impulsion of need. However great the ideal of that union in a given place may be, yet it has been exaggerated by the self-seeking of man and the ignorance of woman, the mastery of man and the slavery of woman. Man is purusha and woman is prakriti, the function of prakriti is to reflect and magnify purusha—if this is true, let it be so. But for that matter when we make man all in all, show woman the path of self-sacrifice, that is to say, self-destruction in the name of womanhood, beauty and modesty, then it cannot be called the path of truth and good. Prakriti may be prakriti but it is not inanimate—how can you

forget this to your advantage? After all prakṛiti is consciousness personified.

Woman must be shown this path of self-awakening. It is probably an error to say “must be shown”—this is an irrational belief of man. Let woman find out her own path herself. Why should man come to formulate what is woman’s aim, her duty, her fulfilment? Even if man has got that capacity, why should he do it at all? If the soul of woman does not welcome it voluntarily in the light of its own inner realisation, then will it be of any use if man forcibly imposes that from outside? Rather let woman tread her own path. Then possibly many unexpected aspects of truth and beauty will find expression in it which man’s thought and prejudice cannot even conceive of.

Whatever we may speculate, nobody knows better than woman’s indwelling god about what is and who is woman. That is to say, woman knows about it herself, so let her know herself on her own. Let man also awaken his indwelling divinity, get established in his own truth. Individual freedom is the first thing needed irrespective of man or woman. To belittle one’s own personality is to belittle the Divine, the indwelling Brahman. At least the awakening of the divine entity is not possible if this personality is forgotten or crushed. We don’t ask man and woman to remain secluded in their own caves and be preoccupied with their sadhana without coming face to face with each other. We say this neither to man nor to woman. Let each one awaken their own divine entity with the help of that relation which develops through a natural outlook. There is no objection also about mutual help and exchange of ideas if needed, that is only natural. But if someone tries to impose anywhere anything forcibly, that will amount to indulging in falsehood. The union in complete independence, in full freedom, is the union that is based on Knowledge and Truth. The union of soul with soul, the fusion of divine with divine is the relation of Ananda. In this divine union in full freedom based on Knowledge and Ananda lies the ultimate fulfilment of the union of man and woman.

Those who consider order and peace in society as the thing supreme and clutch at customs in order to stick to it as the ultimate ideal, probably won’t be able to understand our view, even if they do, they will probably shudder at the prospect. But we are not the makers of that inexorable law that a universal dissolution precedes each new creation, a chaos precedes each new order, one must die before taking a new birth. If God and Nature had given us another law, we could have tried to follow that only—but there is no alternative. Not to speak of greater life, one cannot even get on with life as it is if one remains subdued by fears and apprehensions.

Notes

- 1 Rigveda, 1-113-3
- 2 Markandeyapurana (Gurumandal Granthamala-23), 92-37, 1962, Shrishrichandi, 12-40
- 3 Gita 3-6

A PLUNGE INTO THE UNKNOWN

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE UNEXPECTED

(1)

I WAS groping in the dark seeking my true path, confounded by hostile circumstances, facing an inner situation so disgusting that I was prepared even to jump into the abyss, when all of a sudden I had the good fortune of having three darshans of Sri Aurobindo—and that was the turning point of my life. I took the plunge and since then I have been in the vortex of quite unexpected happenings.

Had the Divine Mother been present today in her physical body, I would have never written these reminiscences. But, as both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have withdrawn from their bodies and a very confusing situation has been created in the world by dark anti-divine forces, our life-experiences in the Ashram may help genuine seekers of Truth. In this apparently Godless sceptic age, even in the name of God hostile beings are occupying the central stage to thwart the Will of God on this hapless planet. Our only hope is that in spite of all difficulties of human nature a saviour Grace is at work, and fortunately at least some of us are in touch with that Grace. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have assured us that perfection of even a few can change the whole world.

Our Ashram is a miniature world, this is a human laboratory in Sri Aurobindo's own language. All types of men are here and the Divine Force is working on them for the creation of perfect men in a perfect society. This perfection is destined to spread in an ever-widening circle throughout the world. Only then can the world hope to experience lasting peace and harmony.

Sri Aurobindo has predicted in his epic, *Savitri*

A few shall see what none yet understands;
God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;
For man shall not know the coming till its hour
And belief shall be not till the work is done

So, let us, ashramites, do our mite and leave the results thereof in the hands of the Lord without seeking any personal benefits. There are different categories of people in our Ashram. The Mother herself has spoken about it in many places. Let me quote *in extenso* from Volume 11 of *Collected Works of the Mother* (Centenary edition, pp 24-25). On 27 November, 1965 the Mother asks a disciple.

The Mother: You felt nothing special on the Darshan day?

Disciple. No

The Mother. Sri Aurobindo was there from the morning till the evening

For, yes, for more than an hour he made me live, as in a concrete and living vision of the condition of humanity.. in relation to the new or supramental creation And it was wonderfully clear and concrete and living.. . There was all the humanity which is no longer altogether animal, which has benefited by mental development and created a kind of harmony in its life—a harmony vital and artistic, literary—in which the large majority are content to live. They have caught a kind of harmony, and within it they live life as it exists in a civilised surrounding, that is to say, somewhat cultured, with refined tastes and refined habits And all this life has a certain beauty where they are at ease, and unless something catastrophic happens to them, they live happy and contented, satisfied with life. These people can be drawn.. they can be attracted by the new forces, the new things, the future life, for example, they can become disciples of Sri Aurobindo mentally, intellectually. But they do not feel at all the need to change materially, and if they are compelled to do so, it would be first of all premature, unjust, and would simply create a great disorder and disturb their life altogether uselessly.

This was very clear

Then there were some—rare individuals—who were ready to make the necessary effort to prepare for the transformation and to draw the new forces, to try to adapt Matter, to seek means of expression, etc These are ready for the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. They are very few in number There are even those who have the sense of sacrifice and are ready for a hard, painful life, if that would lead or help towards this future transformation .

Thus we have seen that the Mother has spoken of three categories of people who are turned towards Sri Aurobindo's Yoga I know perfectly well that I am in the last category. The Mother has also spoken about "the sense of sacrifice" It corroborates my own feeling and experience too.

In 1949, even before I had Sri Aurobindo's darshan, I wrote a letter to the Mother from Calcutta about my inner feeling of my life's mission being "Yoga and Tyaga" In Sanskrit 'Tyaga' means sacrifice But at that time my idea about the supreme sacrifice was death, which is a Tagorean idea. I believe my letter was read by Sri Aurobindo too although I received no reply

In 1950, when I was staying at Golconde for a few months, I wrote another letter to the Mother. Sri Aurobindo was still in his body and I believe that this letter too was read out to him. In that letter I wrote that although I felt that my true path was Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and my true place was the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, my only hurdle was my father who in spite of having a big family depended solely upon me I too loved him and wanted to make him happy with a missionary zeal and could make any sacrifice for his happiness Still I was prepared to take to the Ashram life if I got a nod from the Mother

This letter too went unanswered That is why I decided to leave the Ashram

on 4th December 1950. In the meanwhile, one day, as I was enjoying my siesta in Golconde on the raised platform beside the long shutters on the southern side through which the cool summer breeze was blowing, I had a beautiful dream-experience. I saw that my soul and that of my father, the twin-souls, met in some high heaven and this meeting generated such a thrilling delight that even when I woke up my body was still vibrating with the thrill

Such encounters with the Unexpected happened quite a few times even before I finally settled in this Ashram. Let me narrate one of them.

Once in my early youth when I was in my teens, one night, as I was sleeping in our Calcutta house, I woke up suddenly at the dead of night. A marriage ceremony was on in our neighbourhood. A girl was singing a song which in the silence of the night could be clearly heard. It brought forth the picture of a boat still anchored on the shore. There is the disappointment of failure to launch it. The sun is setting on the western horizon... suddenly my whole body thrilled with an inexplicable delight! Much later I came to know that when our psychic being comes forward, due to some reason or other, such a delight takes place.

Throughout 1951 I could not pay a visit to the Ashram although I kept in touch with it through my elder brother who was in the Ashram till the February Darshan and through other Ashram friends. After that Darshan my brother came back to Calcutta. He gave me some calendars with Sri Aurobindo's photographs on them. One of them I got fixed in a golden frame and hung it on a wall in my father's room at Calcutta. He was at that time at Santiniketan. He was an ardent admirer of Sri Aurobindo and felt a great void within him on Sri Aurobindo's passing. After some time he came to Calcutta.

He did not have Sri Aurobindo's Darshan and did not know how he looked in his old age. One night he called me to his side when none else was there and told me:

"On seeing this photograph of Sri Aurobindo I remember one of my dreams which I saw in Santiniketan. I was dreaming that I had been climbing with much effort a staircase, which was very dark. It seemed to me that I would fall down... yes, I was on the point of falling down when suddenly I heard a cry—as if a mother had cried out on seeing her child falling down. Immediately I clearly heard the sound of footfalls—as if somebody was coming down very rapidly from the upper side of the staircase. He came down and stood before me. Instantly all darkness disappeared ending all my sufferings. I saw a grand old man with a halo of power and wisdom around him standing before me!

"Then I woke up. I asked myself—who was that extraordinary personality whom I had not seen before? Not Rabindranath Tagore, then who is he? Now on seeing this photograph I am convinced that it was Sri Aurobindo who gave me his Darshan in a dream."

Since then my father was more and more engrossed with thoughts of Sri Aurobindo. One day he told me that he would like to establish a Sri Aurobindo

Centre in the very room where he had received his Darshan in a dream. I requested him to offer the whole house with the garden around it at the feet of the Divine Mother. He was hesitant. His real objective was to tie me up with him at Santiniketan by running a Sri Aurobindo Centre there. On the other hand, I had a clear vision that my true path was Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and my true place, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. I felt that some unseen power, some irresistible urge within was pushing me towards that path. It was not my outer being. My outer being would be quite satisfied to stay back at Santiniketan to which so many are attracted. It was something inner which gave the push.

In 1952 I revisited the Ashram for the February Darshan of the Mother. I was charmed with Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi. Where is death here? Everything is bubbling with eternal life! It is the graveyard for Death itself! Heaven's beauty is imprisoned here in a myriad flowers—one must have eyes to see! One must have ears to hear the flowers chanting hymns of joy to the All-Beauty and All-Bliss! One must have lungs to breathe the heavenly fragrance spread out by the incense-smoke curling up with a sublime aspiration towards the unattainable One! One must have a heart to feel the eloquent Silence, in the midst of the town's hubbub, manifesting the Eternal Truth!

Once a warrior uttered these historic boastful words—"I came, I saw, I conquered!" In a reverse gear I was prone to mutter—"I was called, I was seen, I was conquered!"

Sri Aurobindo's presence was unmistakable. His divine touch was too tangible to be disbelieved.

In 1951, when I was in Calcutta, I came to know that the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education was founded by the Mother in the presence of many Indian dignitaries including Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukherji. In 1952 I saw that the Physical Education Department of the Centre was progressing rapidly under the dynamic leadership of the Mother. The Sports Ground Complex was already started and now there was the opening of the Boxing Ring and the Wrestling Arena within the precincts of the Tennis Ground complex. The Volley Ball Ground near Golconde was already in existence. I still vividly remember two of the interesting incidents of the period.

The Boxing Ring was opened with two bouts—Pranab vs. Bishwajit; Mona vs. Sumantra. During the bout of Pranab and Bishwajit, the Mother was very serious-looking. Her lips were quivering, as if she had been repeating some mantra. Later, I came to know from Pranab's book that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were always anxious about their chosen instrument for physical transformation. I suppose, it was because of the instrument's human imperfections.

The second incident is very interesting. There was a Volley Ball match between the Madras University and the Ashram. Technically, the Madras University was a far superior side. They were the All India Champion that year.

They had won the first game when the Mother was playing tennis at the Tennis Ground. Then the Mother arrived. The next two games were played in front of the Mother. Now the Ashram looked a different side altogether. It gave out its best while the Madras side started making mistakes. The next two games were won by the Ashram! Is it not a miracle? I have witnessed many such miracles by the Mother. Gradually I shall come to them.

This time also I wrote a letter to the Mother asking her opinion about my staying in the Ashram. Now too there was no reply. The Darshan of 24th April, 1952 came and went. The message given by the Mother on the occasion was a passage from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* beginning with the line—"At the head she stands of birth and toil and fate," and ending with—"All here shall be one day her sweetness' home." With this assurance of the future I decided once again to leave for Calcutta on the 1st of May 1952. I told the Mother about my decision on 30th April in the Playground. She gravely nodded and gave me a toffee. I bowed down and touched her feet.

The 1st of May was the "Prosperity" day. In the afternoon, in the "Prosperity" room, the Mother gave us "New-birth" leaves. In those days people leaving Pondicherry in the evening would go to the Mother for Pranam when she was about to leave for the Tennis Ground. The Mother asked me—"Going?" And when she asked she did not look at my eyes but at something above my head. I replied, "Yes, Mother, this evening." When I offered my pranam at her feet I prayed that the Mother be with me always and guide me from within. When I got up she gave me a fresh, big and bright red *Malvaviscus* flower which has been named "Divine Solitude." Then she looked at my eyes for a long time. I felt as if she were telling me through that look—"This is your last chance. Don't miss it."

I realised my mistake. It was I who had to take the decision and not the Mother. She hit the ball back into my court which I could not return at the moment.

I left Madras by train for Puri at the request of my elder brother who also was to come there.

There was a wrench within my heart as with the sound of the wheels of the running train. I seemed to hear the Mother's voice—"Going? going? going? going? going?" And something replied from within—"No, Mother, I am not going, I shall come back again—this time for good!"

(To be continued)

ABANI SINHA

A TRIBUTE TO GANGADHARAN

GANGADHARAN of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, who is well known for his soft and gentle speech, pleasing and courteous manners, calm, yet sympathetic face with compassion towards the servant class and with endearing brotherly love for the fellow-inmates of the Ashram—whom he used to call his brothers or sisters—passed away in his 80th year on 16th August 1992, *i.e.*, three days before the passing away of Shri Dyuman, Managing Trustee of the Ashram.

He joined the Ashram in 1933, as a youth of twenty, hailing from a poor fisherman family of Pondicherry. It was after he had been blessed and attracted by the graceful glances of the Mother, when She had visited his village Veerampattinam in 1926.

With sincerity and devotion, humility and surrender, he served the Mother in the Sanitary Service Department of the Ashram. He turned his allotted work into a field of Karma Yoga for his spiritual progress. He always remembered the Mother during work and at all other times. The Mother once spoke of him to Debou, the young homeopath, as an example who remembered her always and who was always in Her Consciousness too. With this background Gangadharan had an early realisation of his psychic being, his true soul, and later in 1976 he was also blessed with the spiritual realisation of the Self by the Grace of the Mother. He has written a Tamil book *Idayaththin Kural* which was published by the Ashram with the support of his old and best friend Amrita, the first Managing Trustee of the Ashram.

I and my aged father Shri T.K. Rama (who is now in Madurai in his 95th year) came in close touch with Gangadharan and had happy relations with him during 1976-1986, when he used to visit us at our Ashram residence on holidays and other important days and occasions of feasts. It was in this period Gangadharan first saw and met the holy Presence of Vallalar alias Swamy Ramalingam too in our house. It was in the bathroom where a sweet and beautiful fragrance prevailed for a month or so until Gangadharan came one day and met the Swamy's Presence there crossing him at its entrance. Thus he enjoyed the Grace of Vallalar too. So much so that he had in 1978 the rare vision in his house of the unique kind of dematerialisation of the spiritualised body of Vallalar which occurred in 1874. This vision came to him, after he had had the vision and experience in 1976 of the "Flood of Grace and Golden Light" by the Grace of the Mother with Her supramental touch.

Both of his great visions have found a place in my book *Arut Perum Jothi and Deathless Body* published by the Madras University in 1981. Further, in the early part of 1981, I requested him to do some Nama Japas and Mantras in their integrating forms or modes of intonation and with remembrance of the One Supreme Divine. Gangadharan readily obliged and did the Mantras over a period, treating the work as the Mother's work itself. His spiritual experiences

got by his chanting of the respective Nama Mantras of Siva, Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ma and finally the Arut Perum Jothi (Grace-Light) Mantra of Swami Ramalingam, have also been published in the same book. I am very grateful to him for the catholicity of his spiritual attitude and for his contributions of the said articles on visions and experiences to my book. In fact, he has established by his visions and experiences some sort of a connecting link in the divine mission of Swami Ramalingam (1823-1874), and that of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) and the Mother (1878-1973).

In the later part of the same eventful year 1981, and by the Grace of the Mother, I too had the occasion to see Vallalar's Presence in my bedroom where He stood manifesting His new body with dazzling and transparent white Grace-Light radiating out and all around his body, from head to foot, above and below. It may be spoken of as a newly reconstituted or re-formed spiritual-physical body after his dematerialisation of the old, because he has also left or fixed the imprint of a very great spiritual-physical power on the floor-space where He stood in my bedroom and likewise in the adjoining bedroom of my father as well as in our cots and beds but with a lesser power. What is of much interest and importance is the fact that on the day after his visit and the vision he gave me of his divine body the Mother came in Her luminous body and gave me the Mantra of Arut Perum Jothi, the Grace-Light. The above-said visions have their sequences and values, and make me remember Gangadharan with love, along with a spiritual gratitude to the Great Masters he adored.

According to the expressed will of Gangadharan his body which had so faithfully served in the services of the Ashram and which till the last moment of his breath—when he wished with the force of his departing soul for the Mother's blessings of Grace to Srikant and Manoj Dasgupta of the Ashram who had come to attend on him—was given away to the people of his village for their evolution and spiritual upliftment through the maintenance of his samadhi-shrine built over his ashes.

T. B. THULASIRAM

AN EXCELLENCE UNKNOWN

BIRTH CENTENARY 1894-1994

SOME souls are like those forest flowers whose excellence remains unknown Surely Narendra Nath Dasgupta (born July 11, 1894) was one such

During his college days he joined the revolutionary movement Jatindranath Mukherjee, popularly known as Bagha (Tiger) Jatin, was his political mentor. He was involved in a car-dacoity by Bagha Jatin's group. After the dacoity the police chased the escaping young revolutionaries to their homes—in Noren's case, a students' boarding house, the Oxford Mission Hostel in Calcutta. Following instructions to never return directly to his own room after any revolutionary activity, Noren first went to another student's room after evading his pursuers. Later he went to his own room and hid the stolen money under his mattress. The policeman noted the room in which the escaped revolutionary had vanished.

The adventure was not yet over. Police surrounded the hostel and, the next morning, demanded to search the building. The Irish superintendent refused to allow them to search the hostel. He said, "You cannot enter. These are my boys." After much argument the superintendent finally allowed the police to search just one room. The police pointed to the room which Noren had first entered. The superintendent, aware of Noren's revolutionary activities, knew it was not his room and readily agreed to the search. Naturally the police found nothing there.

Later that day, after the police departed, the superintendent told Noren, "We will now go for a ride." He drove Noren, in his car, to the banks of the Ganges. There he said, "Noren, I am an Irishman. I understand how you feel towards the British. But what can you do? A few young people like you with your pistols, how can you fight the mighty British empire? Let me go to the Governor [of Bengal] and tell him about you. Surely he will recommend you for the post of a deputy magistrate.¹ Don't waste your time in terrorist activities." But young Noren was beyond such earthly temptations. He was firmly committed to his ideals and declined the offer. He continued his revolutionary activities and studies simultaneously.

Noren, who was a brilliant student, earned the master's degree in two subjects, stood first in both and was awarded two gold medals. After completing his education, he was twice offered the post of a deputy magistrate. But he was not born to serve an oppressive alien government and spurned the offer. Later he was invited to become a professor at Rangoon University at a salary of Rs. 1700 per month which, in purchasing power, would be more than Rs. 17,000 today. Noren declined this offer as well.

¹ At that time the job of a magistrate was offered without any competition to meritorious students

Still, it was necessary to earn a living. Therefore he, along with some other disciples of Sri Aurobindo, started the Arya Publishing House. When *The Life Divine* was first published by the Arya Publishing House in Calcutta, Noren was entrusted with the task of writing a review. Before its publication, when this review was sent to Sri Aurobindo for his approval, he asked, "Who has written it?" "Noren." At first Sri Aurobindo could not recall who Noren was. When details were given to him he exclaimed, "Oh! Noren! He is as firm as a rock."

Noren and his co-workers sold ghee as a side-business. Out of the earnings, this selfless group kept only enough money for their maintenance, sending the balance to Sri Aurobindo. One day they found a large snake-skin in one of the ghee containers. Obviously unscrupulous suppliers were mixing snake fat in the ghee. Immediately they wrote a letter to Sri Aurobindo, informing him about the snake-skin. Sri Aurobindo replied by telegram about the ghee business, "Stop it. I will have nothing to do with it any more."

Noren first visited Pondicherry in 1925. By this time he had married and was already the father of three children. When he made the trip to the Ashram, members of his father's and father-in-law's families feared that he had renounced family life and had gone to live in the Ashram.

However, the auspicious moment for joining the Ashram had not yet dawned for him. One day Sri Aurobindo asked him to return to his family. He then asked Sri Aurobindo, "What am I to do there for a living?" Sri Aurobindo kept silent for some moments and then said, "Why not take some job in a *muffasil* college?" Before leaving the Ashram Noren asked Sri Aurobindo, "Can I do Pranam to the Mother?" Sri Aurobindo was surprised and exclaimed, "Oh! you mean Mirra? Wait, I'll go inside and inform her." After a little while the Mother came out of her room. She was dressed in an ordinary cotton sari. Noren did Pranam and she blessed him. He left the Ashram for an exile that was to last for a long time.

When he reached home he read a notice in a newspaper advertising a job for a professor in philosophy in Feni College at a paltry salary of Rs 150 per month. He applied and got the job. The college could never have hoped to get such a gifted teacher for such a low salary. But Noren was satisfied. After all, he had before him the example of his Guru who had once rejected the chance of winning the prosperity and prestige of an I C S. job! Out of this salary he regularly offered something to Sri Aurobindo. Apart from this he paid for the education of his younger brothers. Therefore very little money was left for his own family. His wife who had been accustomed to a comfortable and gracious life was indeed a great lady. She accepted all the hardships without any complaint and always supported her husband on the upward path.

During his revolutionary days Noren had a pistol. Whenever he went out of his house, he gave it to his wife for safe-keeping. She would slip it in her blouse. At night Noren taught her to shoot.

His father was a pleader and was truly a godly man. He did not trouble his son about his following Sri Aurobindo. As for Noren's mother, that was a different tale altogether. She was furious with Noren for refusing lucrative jobs and bright prospects and she held Sri Aurobindo responsible for her son's actions.

Life in Feni was peaceful. Noren and his colleagues lived in bungalows with thatched roofs held on bamboo poles, surrounded by large playgrounds for the students. The atmosphere was idyllic. But this peaceful existence came to an end with the outbreak of the Second World War. Sri Aurobindo declared his unequivocal support for the Allies and asked his disciples to follow suit.

A storm of protest broke out amongst the intelligentsia. Circumscribed by their aversion for the oppressive British rule, Indians could not comprehend how Sri Aurobindo, the prophet of Nationalism, could side with the British. The horrible Asuric nature of the Axis powers had yet to unfold before the world. Noren's colleagues attacked Sri Aurobindo vehemently, but Noren staunchly defended him. He told them that before going to Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo had been in the forefront of the battle for India's liberation and that he himself had been a revolutionary. If with his prophetic vision Sri Aurobindo chose to support the Allies he must have reasons for it. The other young professors pitied him for defending what they considered indefensible, and considered Noren a "gone" case.

Then came the Japanese advance in South East Asia. Their forces began to march onwards relentlessly. They bombed Chittagong. Suddenly Feni seemed so vulnerable. There was no British Army to defend this small place. One bomb and all those bamboo poles and thatched roofs would have gone up in smoke. When Cox Bazar was bombed the panic-stricken ordinary citizens and professors of Feni College began to leave for safer places. They pleaded with Noren that he too should leave for the sake of his family and children. Before leaving Feni, the wives of other professors came and wept in front of Noren's wife. She remained perfectly calm and reassured the agitated ladies that there was nothing to worry about. Noren was perplexed. He could not decide whether he should leave or at least send his family away to safety. At last he wrote to Sri Aurobindo and asked, "What to do?" Sri Aurobindo replied, "Stay there with the family. Don't run away." Nolini added, "Fear will follow you wherever you go." Now Noren's problem was resolved. He naturally decided to stay. The exodus of other families continued. Soon his was the only family left in the sprawling town. When the family sat for their evening meditation, an eerie silence would surround them. It was as if they were in a desert.

But Noren had iron nerves. He remained unshaken. By way of precaution he dug a trench by himself and taught his children to run and take shelter in the trench whenever he blew his conch. This practice continued for quite some time. Then the British Army came. The soldiers were billeted in the empty College

buildings Noren's was the only civilian family living near the College. Now they were surrounded by soldiers but the latter were very disciplined. They were never disrespectful to Noren's family and his teenage daughters were never disturbed by them. The British Army was so woefully short of arms that the soldiers cut the palm trees of Feni, painted them black and mounted them on carts so that if Japanese aircraft came they would take the mounted trees for canons. But the Japanese aircraft never invaded Feni and Noren's faith was justified.

For many years he bore the agony of separation from his Guru. Every night he used to worship the photographs of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. He would loudly call out Sri Aurobindo's name again and again. This sounded like a wail to his young daughter Priti and she used to weep thinking her father was in great pain or trouble. One day she asked her mother the reason for her father's sorrow. Her mother consoled her by explaining that her father only called out loudly to his Guru and she should not worry.

Priti felt a great attraction towards Pondicherry, the sacred place where the Guru of her father lived. In 1941 Noren brought Priti and her younger sister Tapati to Pondicherry. Priti was enchanted by the Mother and did not want to return to her parental home. But another part of her being cautioned her to study and get a degree, so that in case she could not adjust to the Ashram life she might have the capacity to earn a living. Thus she returned home with her father.

But she was not happy and felt as if her soul had been left with the Mother. Her friends asked her the cause of her sadness. When she replied that she was pining for the Divine Mother they made fun of her. To love a human being was understandable but to pine for the Mother or the Divine seemed ridiculous to them.

She visited the Ashram again with the whole family in 1942 and 1943. In her final year in college she began to wonder what she should do, and what was the aim of her life. In 1944 before she finished her B.A. course she wrote a letter to Nolini Kanta Gupta stating that she wanted to follow the path shown by the Mother and live in the Ashram. He answered, "First finish your education and then we will see."

The same year the whole family came on a visit to the Ashram. The aspiring daughter had hoped that Nolini would say something about her prayer but, alas, he did not. One day she went to the Mother for Pranam. The Mother was standing while one by one the sadhaks went to her. Soon it was Priti's turn. The Mother patted her and said, "*Bonjour.*" The girl was taken aback. She held the Mother in such high reverence that momentarily the Mother's affectionate greeting and patting made her nervous. Then spontaneously she said, "Mother, I want to remain here. I do not want to go back." Her heart began to pound. She wondered if she had spoken correctly.

With a sweet look the Mother caught hold of her and pulled her behind

herself and encircled her with her arms stretched behind. Priti's whole being filled with joy. Then, still holding her behind, the Mother called the next person, "Come in." The daughter did not know that her own father was the next person. Upon seeing him she trembled from fear because she had acted on her own without asking her parents' permission. What would he say she wondered. The Mother then told her father, "Priti will remain here with me." At first Noren was a little stunned. Then the Mother took his hand into hers and told him, "Next year the whole family will come and settle here." Noren was filled with intense gratitude. This is what he had been aspiring and waiting for. Humbly he kissed the Mother's hand. Tears of joy and gratitude filled his eyes.

Thus the following year, 1945, Noren finally came back to the Ashram, his true home. The Mother first made him the head of the publishing department and later the manager of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press. Then she appointed him professor of philosophy at the Centre of Education. Since then he continued both to teach and to manage the Press. Years passed in silent dedicated service. His being grew closer and closer to the Mother.

Noren's wife was only twelve when they were married. They were truly an ideal couple. In October 1953 the wife died. But he remained absolutely calm and undisturbed. Such was his dedication to the Mother's service that even on the day of his wife's death he went to attend to his work at the Press.

Noren's eldest son Swaraj lived in Calcutta. In 1954 he became very ill. He wrote letters to his father begging him to come to Calcutta. Noren did not go. Slowly his son became so weak that his handwriting became faint and gradually illegible. The family's close relatives were sending telegram after telegram. But since the Mother did not ask him to go, Noren remained here and ignored the pleadings of his son and family. Finally some relatives brought the sick young man here. Strangely, he never asked to see the Mother. Every day from the Playground the Mother sent to him some jasmine flowers. Even though he could not sit, he would pull himself up against the wall and weave a garland of those tiny jasmine flowers and send it to the Mother. This continued till the last day of his life. When the moment for departure came he sat up, folded his hands and legs and left the body seated in that yogic pose.

Later the Mother revealed to Priti, "I will tell you why I did not ask your father to go to Calcutta. Did you notice that on the last evening of his last visit to Pondicherry, as soon as I came out of my room in the Playground and was going to the interview room, I saw Swaraj waiting for me and I came straight to him. His soul came out and told me, 'Mother, this is the last meeting. I shall never see you any more in this body.' So I gave him blessings." Then Priti remembered how that day the Mother had patted Swaraj and had asked him, "When will you come again?" He had replied, "Mother, I will come in November." (He did come in November.)

The Mother confided to his family. "He was a very very developed soul but

the body was so frail. He was so mature inwardly that he took this world lightly. A few years' experience was needed. His soul came for that experience and then left. Now Priti understood why her brother refused to see Mother and why he did not ask to be taken to her. His soul had made his farewell earlier.

In his last years Noren suffered from heart-trouble but he never told anyone. For a few days before his death his suffering increased. On the evening of 21 May 1961 he had a heart-attack and was in great pain. He placed a photograph of the Mother on a chair and sat on the floor holding the photograph with both hands for support and solace. Later his condition worsened and, upon noticing this, Tapati called Priti who saw that he looked blue and his body had become cold. She ran to the Mother and informed her about his condition. The Mother at once sent her own physician Dr. Sanyal to treat Noren. But by the time Dr. Sanyal arrived he had recovered somewhat and joked with Dr. Sanyal. He remembered that next day was his dear youngest daughter Arati's birthday and declared, "I will not leave on her birthday." And by an iron will he kept death at bay till after the birthday was over. Then during the night blood began to come out of his mouth. He tried to hide this serious symptom from his children but they found out. On 23 May, early in the morning his son Manoj went to inform the Mother. He came back and told his father that the Mother had given blessings and had said, "Tell him, if he wants to continue in this life then he will have to bear the pain." Manoj put the blessing packet first on his father's forehead and then over his heart. A mysterious smile suffused Noren's face. Then suddenly his pain increased and he passed away in the arms of his son, holding the Mother's photograph and blessings on his chest.

As soon as the Mother came to know of Noren's passing she asked Nolini to call his four children at once. Somebody was sent to fetch them. They went to the Meditation Hall door where Nolini was waiting for them. The Mother advised each of them to sit at one of the four corners of their father's bed and said, "Meditate for one hour." Especially to Priti she said, "Don't weep. You must meditate for one hour. Don't worry about the flowers. I will send flowers with Amrita, Nolini and Pavitra. They will also meditate. And all those who are present there should also meditate." Soon Nolini, Amrita and Pavitra reached Noren's house with flowers and meditated for one hour with the family.¹

Next day Noren's children went to the Mother. She touched her own body and said, "This body is nothing, nothing. As you change an old sari and put on a new one, in the same way when the body gets old you change into a new one. It is like going from one room to another. Don't grieve over his passing away. There! (*gesturing towards the Darshan Room*) he stands smiling at all of you. Don't grieve. He is saying 'I am so happy, so happy. It is so easy to cross over.' He is full of joy and ananda."

Priti had some apprehension. She thought something might have happened

¹ The Mother used to send a dish of flowers to be kept on the bodies of the departed Ashramites

to her father after death, otherwise why should the Mother ask them to meditate for one hour? Therefore she asked the Mother, “Sweet Mother, why did you summon us at once, even before father’s cremation and why did you ask us to meditate for one hour?” The Mother replied, “I asked you to sit at the four corners of the bed and meditate for one hour because during that one hour I did the *shraddha* for him.¹ Priti was still not satisfied and looked at the Mother questioningly. Then the Mother asked her, “Didn’t you see anything?” The girl said, “I saw my father’s body lying down while he was sitting on the air in a golden dress of the same type he used to wear for ceremonial occasions. He rose higher and higher and called us by our names.” She then asked, “Mother, what was the necessity of doing *shraddha* for our father?”

Then the Mother revealed, “After his death the whole of Noren’s being rose but a thread of attachment to his children still remained: the worry as to what would happen to his children. Who would look after them? By doing *shraddha* I liberated him from his fatherly attachment. Now he will never be born as a human being. He will come straight as a Supramental Being. All his Karma is over.” When they heard this, Noren’s children became filled with joy and awe and wonder and Priti was freed from her anxiety.

The same day, Minou, who was a close family-friend, told her that at the time her father left his body she had gone to the Samadhi to offer Pranam. While kneeling there, she saw a vision—the Samadhi was covered with golden flowers of the nearby ‘service’ tree [Copper Pod]. Suddenly all these flowers joined together and took the form of Noren. This form began to rise straight up and up. As soon as the vision stopped, she had hurried to their house and had discovered that Noren had already left his body.

The next day when Priti narrated this vision to the Mother she said,

“Yes, it is true. He was a consecrated man and lived the whole of his life with the idea of serving Sri Aurobindo. He was a very conscious being. He had organised all the parts of his being around his psychic centre. I saw that all the parts of his being united and without dispersing or deviating he rose straight up into the higher hemisphere where Sri Aurobindo is doing his work and there melted in..” [the Mother gestured with her arms to indicate the Infinite]

SHYAM KUMARI

(From the 4th volume of *How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, coming out soon.)

¹ *shraddha* certain ceremonies held in honour of and for the benefit of dead relatives

CHRISTALIS

by

GEORGETTE COTY

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1994)

Ashes and Phoenix

THE dreadful years laid upon the world filled their guts at last. The booty they demanded was paid in kind: the life of the living. Nature's things, animals and men fell as spoils to blind savagery.

If the Gods ever had in their minds to punish men, they must have loosened upon them the hounds of war. Savage, mindless packs of wrath came rushing in for the kill, their baying froze the blood. And the Lords of harm gave weapons of destruction to their instruments and barbarity took its toll.

The flames of battle and plunder burnt bright now in one land, the next day in another, as if the world were a pyre lit for a feast of destruction. Then Nature swept the debris away.

Giant tidal waves or floods came to carry off the weak and injured to their rests, and the dead lay unburied. Where no water was there to do its damage, earthquakes did the same, taking into their deep embrace towns and countryside... There was no more cries or moans to be heard.

And the run-away industries, and those that fed the war-monstrosities had left their legacy of poison in the air, the water and the soil—and hunger stalked among the living, and the plagues.

Now that it was over, life rose out of the ashes of the great sacrifice. The bird of life took to its wings, singing as it flew circling over the world, heralding a new dawn.

All who heard its glad cantata came out from the ruins where they had lain hidden.. looking about them, looking for others of their own kind. They looked and they wept.... They wept for all that was gone, and for those who answered not to their calls.. and now again in disbelief, as they listened to the songster bringing hope and joy to their hearts.

I too came out from my broken dwelling, clutching my child to my breast, blinking to see so much sky and light. I held him high to show God that he was alive and well, and called into the void.

“We shall start anew! Anew, do you hear?” and I laughed.

That night I had a dream.. a very strange dream.

No images of any sort were in it.. there was only pulsating light, a glowing radiance which spoke

What did it say, this light?

It called to me as if it knew me... I heard its voice inside me.

It said,

“Close the door upon the past. Do not linger there.

You will know the way of tomorrow,

I shall lead you there.”

What a curious dream it was . and so very real.

I felt a velvety touch brushing against my heart and heard the voice say

“Clear the labyrinth of your mind of negative reflections. They obstruct your path in the renewed existence of the future life ”

Blinking hard, I struggled to keep my sleep, but the light drew me to attend it.

“I am dreaming this,”—I said to myself—“this cannot be real”.

“I am real.”—came the voice—“Everything is, or else you could not experience anything at all. Have no fear of me ”

“I am a little puzzled,”—I heard myself say—“because I cannot see anything but light, yet I hear your voice. Have I died? Please don’t take me from my child, now that we both have survived ”

The touch of these reassuring hands reached for mine, and the voice that spoke was as tender as the touch. “You are alive.”

“I would rather sleep a little more, if you don’t mind. Maybe you’ll come another time?”

“All that fear clings to you still Be freed from thought-shadows. . Now we move towards the future, the bright horizon of truth, and love and joy. Listen to the bird of light singing in its flight. Listen to its song.”

The light faded out and the voice was gone .. I opened my eyes cautiously—it was still dark, but I called out loud: “Wake up, everyone! There is a new life ahead! New life everywhere!... The Light said so... It is the message of the Light.”

*

Toward Re-creation

The odyssey of man’s follies and grand passion had already found its place in the Archives of Heaven where the records are kept.

The war and its horrid offshoots had done their deeds some time ago and the heavy burdens of the past finally emptied their contents. The prevailing visitations came to a halt.

Having spent its anger, Nature and her elements settled down to rest content.. He, who had sent his message across the lands, sent now his healing smile—the smile of the All-Loving Mother of Heaven. She lifted her veil for a spell and revealed her beauteous face of radiance.

A great sigh from the earth was released She heaved and she thrilled with

renewed energy and gave birth to gems of joyful thoughts. Hope had returned and filled the hearts. All who lived, smiled again and gave thanks for the mercy of this new dawn. Morning shone over the lands with diamond dew everywhere, happy, like a woman loved.

Over the hills, over the fields, new notes hummed their tunes of love and peace. Harmonies of life reborn reverberated, wafting from hill to hill, causing the breeze to dance amidst the lands a dance of joy.

Earth was singing a song to her child, and as she sang darkness grew dim, despair wore itself out, ill-will died and vanished. All that was false rushed to its doom. The light grew brighter in the east as she sang .. as she sang melodies wonderful.

Growths of new life sprang into bloom, they flowered in men's hearts. I lay down to dream of tomorrow and called down the sun's radiance to light up my soul.

*

The city sweltered under the blaze of the sun for weeks, or was it months?—one had lost the sense of time. The horizon looked reddish and glary, burning to the eyes and to the skin. It made the sky look like some distant furnace, menacing to gut everything with an insatiable appetite.

All day I longed to give in, to sink into the sweet arms of nature and let her lull me to sleep. Oh, to sleep, to rest with nothing to do. It seemed a thousand years ago when I was able to do such a leisurely thing. Now that at last the blessed cool change had come with the evening breeze, I held out my face to it, to caress me with its soothing touch.

I looked over the garden, onto the parched ground. The plants were lifeless, and the leaves on the trees had lost their green lustre. They looked like tired women with hair hanging over their faces.

'How strong they must be'—I thought—'patient, enduring. They don't lose hope when things are difficult. They don't think themselves lost as readily as we do. Watch the trees—fall in with the trees, they know everything about life, about survival. Ask them, yes, ask them and they will tell you that the thirsty seasons pass and after the lean years come the good ones when things grow anew. Listen to the trees. Listen to them. They know that no matter how much sun, how little rain, whether there be fire or storm—flood or earthquake, or men's abuse—they will not die out. They will always be there, for without them there will be no life on earth for men.'

'I am so glad, so glad...' I allowed the thought to flood over me like a wave of cool water after a long drought. Laughing aloud with joy, I wanted to cry out for everyone to hear. "The trees are safe, nature is safe, we will live, yes live again!"

I went to the water container, our fountain of existence now, filled a bucket

and walked towards the garden, as though set on an important mission. The weight of the battered pot pleased me. I carried the precious offering and proceeded to distribute it amongst the trees, the shrubs; drop by drop, calculatingly, knowingly, carrying out my rite of significance. The cool, velvety texture flowed from my hands, through my fingers, sparingly onto the dying leaves, onto the parched ground, near where the roots lay waiting in expectation and hope.

The cool water dripping off my fingers had brought me back with a jerk. I should not waste water like this, we can hardly afford that. But am I wasting it? I am giving it back to life! There will be enough water for us, new things will grow in place of what is gone. All will be well again.. I know it—now that it is over.

“Ask the trees, ask the ” I leaned against the wrinkled old trunk and began to laugh, “you and I survived, because we love and are patient, and our Christopher is alive and there are many others. There are enough of us to start anew.”

I laughed out with such joy, that tears filled my eyes and I no longer knew whether I was crying or laughing, or maybe both. All I knew was that I was happy, as I had long forgotten how to be.

Slowly I walked back into the house. ‘I mustn’t wake up Christopher, the child needs his rest, he is shouldering more than his share in his tender years.’ He slept peacefully, his curls stuck to his forehead with the dew of a child’s sleep. Thin and pale, but he is alive and we have survived the past years quite well, what more was there to ask for? Thank you, Lord, that you spared me too, to take care of him, and those little ones who are left alone. May you give me strength to be a mother to them all.

My eyes rested on his face in the dim light. It is quite a walk for him to the Children’s Hall and back, but at least I can work in peace, knowing him to be there with the other children. They are our very future—besides our faith to help us, all we have left now. Our best are gone, and gone are the ones who caused it all. My beloved Julian, our son will never know your loving care, your deep throaty laugh .. our happy times.

A fragment of memory came stealing its way towards me .. Friends sitting round the table talking, laughing... our little boy sitting on his high chair and piles of cushion, banging away with his spoon. And I, carrying in my Sunday special, hot and good-smelling; a woman’s love-offering received amidst joyful remarks, and Julian pouring the wine. .

‘Don’t,’ I said to myself, ‘Don’t! Stop it at once, you must be strong! There is work to be done and remember it! Don’t get sentimental now. You are not alone in this. Do not look back for heaven’s sake, look only to the future.’

Trying to work, I sat down at the table made of pieces of timber I had collected from the ruins, and proceeded to make some copies of the children’s names, who were brought to us today. Some knew their first names only, others knew the whole and some were too young to say anything at all. They only

looked at you with their lovely eyes that say, "Please take care of me, please love me—I am all alone!" It's like looking into the sun for a second, when you look at them. Then there are those others, who just stare with a blank unsmiling face—their sun is overcast by the shock they suffered. 'I must make them laugh again, heaven help me, I must!'

The nearness of Julian came back again... "Darling, darling, how will I live? I am so lonely without you."

'Don't! Be strong'—I commanded myself again—but a cry broke loose from the place where I had it locked away for too long. I fell upon the table weeping uncontrollably—'God, oh God!'

It must have been the heat of the day..

*

The hour was late, the crimson colours had already left the sky and changed into deep blue. Soon the night would spread its blanket over the horizon telling all it's time to rest. I watched the fading lights and lay down, reflecting upon the events of the day just gone, when memories of yesterday with you in them, beloved, came looking for you in the hiding places of my mind. They entered slowly, cautiously, hoping to revisit the delight and the joy that was once ours in the unaware state of its oncoming end.

They lingered awhile, unwilling to leave—those memories of gossamer stuff... I could trace them still, but your face eluded my eyes. Memory gets dim with the passing of time and distance creates another sight.

I look for you nowadays with another eye. Much more loving, less demanding, far less critical. In today's terrain, empty of you, your presence not possessing, I hold you warm, alive, love-supplied. Your memory lives within me, where we can do it no harm. Oh, that love should be so large a thing to hold for us mortals! How can we keep what the Gods themselves jealously guard? There was some innocence in our not knowing, a childhood's purity of no experience. Maybe in losing our treasures lies hidden a greater store of learning, as we peer into all the unknown tomorrows and confront the future that lies ahead with undying hope.

Nostalgic thoughts came to visit me today, memories of what is gone and comes back no more.

Fond memories, don't hurt my heart, why have you come? Go from me, sweet phantoms, disperse in the air! Let me be, you there in the air, me here on the ground. I have work to do here in the dust, leave me! Be gone!

*

(To be continued)

THE BOOK OF JOB

A NEW COMMENTARY

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1994)

Verse 17.

Job told God that he was renewing his witnesses against him. God was getting more and more indignant. Changes and war were against him.

The first sentence only continues the image of litigation. The second poses no problem. It is the third that is not really intelligible in AV. RSV refers to fresh hosts being brought against him. According to Job God was mustering all his forces against him to destroy him completely.

Verses 18 to 22.

A TLS reviewer of a translation of the Book of Job¹²⁹ sums up the five verses by pointing out that Job saw

annihilation as the only deliverance.

Most commentators note how the verses recall the first lamentation of Job (Chapter 3). Some of them (Habel,¹³⁰ for example) note the marked differences. We are concerned with the slow evolution of Job which ultimately led him to the one and only true goal of the human soul,—to have the *pratyaksha*, to have the Lord before one's eye: does not Job say at the end?—

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye seeth thee (42:5).

Habel says,

Two significant modifications of the lead cries of 3:11,16 deserve attention. First, instead of lamenting his origins as though they were determined by some mysterious force of destiny, he puts the onus for his tragic birth squarely on God. The hands which fashioned so miraculously in the womb are those which brought him forth to see the light. Second, it is not the tragedy of Job "seeing the light of day" (as in 3:16) which he now decries, but that he was born for an "eye" to "see" him (v. 18b, i.e., the second part of the verse).

The first progress of Job was to turn his attention to God totally from his vague notions of the initial lament when he first sank into *tamas* from his erstwhile

sattwik state. The second was to develop a little will to live from a mere death-wish,

let me alone that I may take comfort a little (20b)

Habel, with his obsession with the idea of God's "surveillance", misreads verse 18b:

Verse 18.

Wherefore then hast thou brought me forth out of the womb? *Oh that I had given up the ghost and no eye had seen me!* (AV)

The resemblance of the opening sentence to his utterance in Chapter 3 is obvious

Verse 19.

His wish that he should have been as though he had not been and that he should have been carried from the womb to the grave recalls the earlier utterance.

Verse 20.

As noted this verse marks a definite progress from what he spoke in Chapter 3. Asking God if his days were not few to cease or stop his torture and permit him to live comfortably at least for some time.

Verses 21 and 22.

The verses describe the world of death before going where he asked for respite in the previous verse. Strange as it may seem he has now a better understanding of that country from whose bourne no traveller returns than earlier. Earlier he (3:17 to 19) dreamt of a realm where the wicked ceased from troubling and the weary were at rest, where the prisoners rested together and heard not the voice of the oppressor and where the small were like the great and the servant was free from the master. Now he saw it as a place of darkness and shadow and gloom, where light itself was dark. Such a realistic perception shows that he was not sunk in complete *tamas* and that he had developed a greater clarity of seeing.

We have noted above how in some verses he could feel, however momentarily, sometimes unconsciously, the true nature of God. There had also been, though unconsciously, moments of aspiration.

We may also note how the description of the other world is *pre-Christian*.

Chapter 11.

ZOPHAR'S FIRST DISCOURSE

Of the three “friends” who came to “comfort” Job in his distress, Zophar was now to have his turn. If Eliphaz made a cautious beginning and Bildad was rancorous at the start, Zophar was most immoderate and least sympathetic in the first part of his speech. It was not for nothing his name meant “a sharp nail” (vide comment on 2:11). Of course, in the later part of his speech, he, like his friends, held a promise of a bright future for Job if only he felt repentant.

Like the two others too, he presented the idea of retributive justice. But he did not, like Bildad, depend on traditional wisdom nor like Eliphaz speak of a personal vision (whatever the nature of the “vision” was) but seemed to claim a deeper cause for his wisdom. When Hartley¹³¹ tells us that his basis was “reasoned theology” he is wrong, with the earlier commentators who called him “a rationalist dogmatist”. Habel¹³² hits the nail on the head (sharp nail!) when he says,

Zophar, it seems, implies that he was initiated in the esoteric mysteries of wisdom which are normally beyond human reach.

Terrien sees the fact from another point of view when he speaks of Zophar’s “reverential agnosticism” as distinct from the attitude that nothing is known or likely to be known of the existence of a God or anything beyond the material phenomena. When T.H. Huxley¹³³ coined the word from the inscription on the Athenian altar which St. Paul commented on (Acts, 17:23), *AGNOSTO THEO, To the Unknown God*, the eminent scientist either did not know or care to know that the Greeks meant God who could not be known by the mind. Did not the ancient Indian seers say:

aprāpya manasā saha: He cannot be reached by the mind.

According to the approach to the Book of Job presented in these pages the vision of the work could be called, in Terrien’s phrase, reverential agnosticism: God is beyond the grasp of the mind and its ideas.

Zophar pretended that he had gone beyond the limits of the normal human mind and got at “the secrets of wisdom”. That his supposed “initiation” was no more valuable than the “vision” of Eliphaz is obvious in his utter lack of sympathy for Job. God’s words at the end prove to us if we need a proof that Eliphaz’s “supernatural” experience, Bildad’s trust in the wisdom of the past and Zophar’s “spiritual” experience were less true than Job’s consciousness which was struggling, without his being aware of it, to rise above the three “guna”s.

Verse 1.

Then like Eliphaz and Bildad, Zophar was in a hurry to “correct” the “erring” Job. He was waiting for Job to cease talking in order to seize the moment to begin his admonition. His haste and lack of calmness reveal that he had not risen above the limits of human mind. One who has a true spiritual experience is characterised by an absolute peace and calmness.

Zophar, the Naamathite: Vide, 2 11.

Verses 2 and 3.

Zophar asked Job if his “multitude of words” should not be answered, if a man like him full of talk should be justified. Should his “lies” make men hold their peace? When he mocked, should no man feel ashamed?

Zophar’s violent language contradicted his claim of being an “initiate” into the mysteries of God. Neither of the earlier speakers had openly accused him of telling lies.

Verse 4.

Zophar told Job that he had said his doctrine was pure and that he was clean in the eyes of God.

But Job had said no such thing. He had never mentioned any doctrine or spoken of its being pure. To assert his innocence was not to say that he was clean in the eyes of God.¹⁴ Job was convinced of his not deserving his suffering. In fact he wanted God to show him why he suffered at his hands.

Remembering Job’s asking God to show why he suffered, Zophar wished that God really opened his lips and spoke against Job. He wished that God showed him the secrets of wisdom and revealed that which was double to what was (actually known in normal life)

AV reads,

(Oh that ..) he would show thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is.

RSV separating the two parts of the sentence makes Zophar wish God reveal to him the secrets of wisdom and state that God was manifold in his understanding.

Marvin Pope¹⁵ rejects the rendering and points out that the original Hebrew word means not manifold but double, duplex; he says,

We take the sense to be that God knows both sides of every matter, the manifest as well as the hidden and it is the hidden side that God would reveal if he were to speak to Job’s challenge.

Ironically what we see at the end is God's opening his lips but not speaking against Job but against Zophar and his friends.

Zophar also wanted Job to realise that God was exacting less from Job than he actually deserved

(To be continued)

K.B. SITARAMAYYA

Notes

129 Anita Brookner, the reviewer of *The Book of Job*, a new translation according to the traditional Hebrew text by Moshe, Greenberg (and others), The Jewish Publication Society of America *The Times Literary Supplement*, Dec 26, 1980

(A clipping of the above review was sent with an affectionate personal note by the Editor of *Mother India* to the author who knows no words to express all he owes to him The review is particularly valuable for its fresh look at the Book without the stock-responses we find in the commentaries)

130 Habel, p 200

131 Hartley, p 103

132 Habel, p 204

133 T H Huxley, p 994

134 Anderson comments,

So as not to quibble about words, in fairness to Zophar we could concede that Job's insistence, that he is in the right (or at least does not know where he is in the wrong) is tantamount to such a claim The word *doctrine* used in Deuteronomy 32 2, Isaiah, 29 24 and in Proverbs for the instructive discourse of sages (Job, p 157)

135 Marvin Pope

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

46. HONOUR IS NO MERE WORD

POIKAIYAR had just finished reciting his poem *Kalavazhi Narpathu* in the court of the Chozha king Chenganan. The poem, a gruesome description of the Kazhumalam battlefield where king Chenganan had defeated his enemies, became the talk of the court.

“Lovely! Appropriate similes,” said a courtier

“The bloody battlefield, the beasts, the drum, the soldiers—they all come alive in this poem,” applauded another.

“Humour and pathos are well balanced,” praised yet another.

Pleased with the comments, Poikaiyar smiled. But his face betrayed the craving of his heart. He longingly looked at the king and eagerly awaited his mouth to open.

“Incomparable is your poem. It’s worth more than my kingdom. And so ask a boon and it shall be given,” said the king.

Poikaiyar hesitated. The king with a wave of his hand encouraged him to speak out.

When the poet continued to hesitate, the king said: “Ask anything that you want. And I will grant your wish unhesitatingly and ungrudgingly. You know that kings don’t go back on their words. Go ahead ”

“Your Majesty! All that I can ask of you is the release of my bosom friend king Kanaikal Erumporai whom you have defeated in the battle of Kazhumalam and incarcerated.”

King Chenganan gritted his teeth and fumed at the very mention of his enemy’s name. He took time to cool down. And before he said, “Granted”, he applauded the poet’s love for the imprisoned king.

Back home, the Chera king Kanaikal Erumporai was restless. His heart weighed heavy in his chest for several reasons. The losing battle he had fought, his stay behind bars, the enemy king’s contemptuous look during his release—all began to gnaw at his heart.

Sleep, beloved from pole to pole, simply rejected all his invitations. He felt that his honour was at stake. To valiant kings, honour is not a mere word. “Do or die,” said his conscience and within a short period Kanaikal Erumporai gathered his battalions and marched against his arch-enemy Chenganan

Since every citizen in the Chozha empire was a well-trained soldier, king Chenganan defeated the angry Chera king in a trice.

Kanaikal Erumporai found himself inside the prison once again. He ruminated over his defeat in both the battles against the Chozha king

Hours passed.

Thirsting for water, he clapped his hands as he used to do in his palace to

attract the attention of his attendants. But when no one responded he yelled, "Hey! Who is there?"

One among the two guards who stood sentinel to the king's cell turned his head towards the king.

"Fetch me a jug of water. . Do it immediately. I am so thirsty," commanded the king

"Water! You want water?" heckled the guard

"Water from the well? . Or from the gutter?" asked the other guard.

They both giggled.

Shocked beyond words, king Kanaikal Erumporai sprang to his feet. His right hand moved towards his belt searching for the hilt of the sword.

"Ha... ha. . ha. . Searching for the sword! We are not your servants to take orders from you. Instead you have to obey us. We command you to go thirsty," said a guard, laughing all the while.

The king slumped over his bed of straw. The guard's words filled him with shame.

Several minutes later, a guard opened the cell and kept a jug of water on the floor with a heavy clang. He then frowned at the king and said: "Quench your thirst, you prison rat!"

The king saw the guard move out of the cell and lock it.

Tantalizing stood the jug of water. The king felt terribly thirsty.

On the morning of the next day a guard as usual opened the cell to let the king out to finish his ablutions. He moved towards the king to shake him awake. He was shocked to feel the lifeless body of king Kanaikal Erumporai.

The jug of water remained untouched.

47. DESTINY IS MAN-MADE

A herald announced the arrival of an astrologer.

Everyone in the court of king Nedun Cheralathan directed their eyes towards the entrance.

A grey-haired man with a flowing beard entered "Long live the king," he wished. The quiver in his voice spoke volumes about his age.

King Nedun Cheralathan respectfully bowed, welcomed him and offered him a seat.

"Where are your charts and cowrie shells?" asked the king.

The astrologer smiled, nodding his head.

"Your Majesty! This astrologer is in a class of his own," said a minister. "The experience he gained in all these years has made him an expert *par excellence* in his field. By merely looking at one's physical features this age-old astrologer can predict one's future."

The astrologer looked at the king and then moved his eyes onto the two princes who sat on either side of their father.

“Prince Chenguttuvan, the elder. Prince Elango, the younger,” the astrologer said, showing his toothless mouth

Seconds later, he looked at them with a puzzled face “Do not be disturbed, O King! if I predict the future of these two princes,” he said.

The king nodded his head and motioned him to go ahead with his predictions.

“Custom demands that the eldest of the princes should be made king But the stars are not favourable to Prince Chenguttuvan, they favour Prince Elango. And he is destined to rule your Chera empire.”

Prince Chenguttuvan was visibly upset. The king’s face turned pale. But Elango’s betrayed neither anxiety nor joy And a spine-chilling silence held the court.

Prince Elango broke the silence by clearing his throat. “Are you sure that I am destined to succeed my father?” he asked the astrologer.

“There is no iota of doubt about it,” came the reply from the astrologer.

“Are you sure that your words will come true, old man?”

“I am gifted with the power to see anyone’s past, present and future. I have predicted the fate of several kings and statesmen My words have not failed in anyone’s case,” said the astrologer with a sense of pride

Prince Elango guffawed and said. “Why should we blame the poor stars when we are responsible for our own destiny?”

Everyone in the court including the astrologer looked askance at the prince.

“Your predictions will definitely fail in my case,” continued Prince Elango, “for I have decided once for all to take to sainthood ”

The astrologer was flabbergasted

“It is said in the dharma-shastras that the eldest son of a king shall succeed his father. But God knows who poisoned your mind, old man, to twist such rules just to favour me My brother Chenguttuvan is groomed to become king. And it is his right to succeed my father. I’ll not in any way stand in his way to the throne,” so saying Prince Elango removed all his princely attire and garbed himself in a saffron robe.

To everyone’s surprise and shock, he moved out of the court towards his chosen spot to practise austerities.

The prince turned saint later wrote *Silapathikaram* (The Anklet Story), one among the five great epics in Tamil, and earned fame and glory.

(More legends on the way)

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Poems, by *Thémis*, Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, 1994.

THIS wonderful new book of spiritual poetry is entitled simply "Poems, Thémis". The delicate charm of the dust-cover (based, I believe, on an embroidery design prepared by the poet for the Mother) prefigures the subtlety and skill of the poems inside, but gives little hint of the strength and originality that is their most striking characteristic. Thémis' poems evoke the realms of higher light; but their author has also looked steadily at the darker shadows of existence, and transmuted that vision and knowledge to a source of poetic power.

The collection is divided into two parts. Part One consists of poems first published in 1952, when the Mother gave Tehmi, a teacher at the Centre of Education, the name 'Thémis' to use for her writing. Most of the pieces in this section were read out to Sri Aurobindo, and his comment on them appears in the Publisher's Note prefacing the collection. Part Two comprises almost a hundred previously uncollected poems. No composition-dates are given, but it appears that some are earlier and most later than those in Part One, while a few are evidently relatively recent. Regular readers of the Sri Aurobindo Circle will recognise some pieces which have appeared there in the last few years over the *nom-de-plume* "Gléaner".

There is little that the reviewer can add to the high praise given by Sri Aurobindo in 1948, and by Amal Kiran in his Introduction. But I can attempt to give prospective readers some idea of the range of these poems, and indicate some personal preferences.

At one end of the scale, there are some light-hearted pieces, such as "Chinese song (God to the soul)":

My friend of joy,
Why do you never let me row?
Or, you await, perhaps, the breaking of the oar?
When it will break, I'll part the waters
With skill of mine own arm;
For we two must decoy
The deep old river-god.

Where is the shore?
The autumn moon comes arm in arm
With his fair daughters.
You want the moon to think
You're rowing, but I think

The little ones yet know
That it is I.

Thémis has a confident command of many metres, and most of the poems in both sections are in melodious lyric form, rhythmically modulated with great subtlety and skill. Yet these poems often transcend the merely 'lyrical' with thrilling intensities of thought, vision and expression. One of my favourites in this category is "Within the Darkness":

Everywhere in the depths of things
A sacred river runs,
A welling music ever sings
Of strange and buried suns...

Farther and deeper down Time's dance
The ancient waters flow,
Cold stony law-towers swoon in trance,
Dead orders whirl in woe.

Life's lavas burst, fierce fire-flakes fly.
The fettered Dragon, free,
In one leap swallows up the sky
And sinks back in the sea.

The age-old world-stairs rock and crash,
Far-flung in baleful blight;
The rising dragon-waters smash
Mind's pillared halls of light

Primeval darkness holds all things,
Numb lie all memories,
But deep within, the Spirit sings
The myriad suns' release

A few examples of free verse which appear in both parts also demonstrate rhythmical skill. The form of "Harvest" in Part One is interesting for its combination of a regular rhyme scheme with free rhythm varying from line to line. Another poem in Part One, "Unfulfilled Fulfilment", makes use of the device of repeated words, 'glory', 'unfulfilled', 'dreams', 'fulfilment', often as line-endings, to give a complex incantatory effect. In the second part, the free-verse piece which appeals to me most is "New Radiance" on p. 111—too long, perhaps, to quote in full here.

But Thémis achieves her greatest intensities in the sonnet-form. If “Chinese Song...” recalls the charm of oriental wind-chimes, and the lyrics display the varied melodiousness of Schubert, most of the sonnets have the quality of Brahms’ string quartets: a vigorous harmonisation of surprising juxtapositions and startling contrasts. Take “This Hidden World”, for example, the first poem in Part Two:

Mysterious, magical, what is there,
 That secret sweetness in the core of things?
 And this strange melody that flows and sings
 In every atom of the earth and air?
 Rock-crystals hold the light’s delight, a rare
 Close diamond-glow; pools ripple fairy-rings,
 Within dark burgeon-knots what live joy springs,
 And what ecstatic flights the great palms dare!

This hidden world is vibrant with a Name,
 A rapture pulsing in the heart’s abyss,
 Leaping in flame on flame of inward bliss;
 Granite and flower and tree are fire and flame,
 And eye of beast, and man’s thought, word, desire,
 And most the Word, the Name, is fire, is Fire.

Or “Child of our Heart”:

Child of our heart, so beautiful, so bright,
 With angel radiances bedecked so fair,
 Flowers on your brow and stars within your hair,
 What do you do in these black streets of night?
 —These sunless cities reeking bale and blight,
 Where houses breathe a foul and fetid air,
 And bodies flaccid, cold, exhale despair,
 Fester with putrid thought and crooked spite.

O lovely child, most beautiful, you roam
 Joyous among these slums, these flabby hags,
 Untouched—pure sun-drop, snow-drop, honey-sweet,
 Nor fear, nor weep, though strayed so far from home,
 For you are Love, and in their midnight rags
 All dark things know you, bend, and kiss your feet

The collection moves towards its close with a powerful sequence of five

sonnets which deal with the feelings of disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother after November 17, 1973. I will end this brief survey with one of them, "There is no question":

There is no question; one stark fact remains:
 What she had promised to do she has done.
 If men grope blindly, does it mean the sun
 Illumines not their pathways and their plains?
 Why! her love's Sun has kissed even the drains
 Of our desires, has drunk the vapours dun
 Of guttered falsehood where night's waters run:
 What hasn't she done? If in our brains and veins
 The Fire still burns low, it is best we seal
 Our stupid lips and roll ourselves to sleep...
 She called the brave with all their faith to leap
 Into those dangerous depths her heart explored,
 Daring the unknown darkness to reveal
 The flame-gold body that must house the Lord.

The Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, as publisher, and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, are to be congratulated for having made this collection available in a suitably handsome format. This is a valuable contribution to the published work of the constellation of remarkable spiritual poets gathered around Sri Aurobindo. When we think of Nirodbaran and Amal Kiran, Arjava and others, it will no longer be possible to overlook the poems of Thémis.

SHRADDHAVAN

TO PĀṆINI'S TIME FROM PĀṆINI'S PLACE

HIS GEOGRAPHICAL POINTER AT HIS HISTORICAL PERIOD

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1994)

5

WE have gone by the accepted system of chronology. Within its terms we may opine that if *Yavanānī* denoted a script or alphabet the most probable candidate for this "writing" is Aramaic, which was fast spreading from Syria. Pāṇini is shown by Agrawala to have used some Semitic words but not a single word from Greek. We may cite Agrawala¹ on the former:

"*Jābāla* denoted a goatherd, and *Mahājabāla* (VI.2.38) one who was the owner of a big sheep-run. *Jābāla* does not seem to be a word of Sanskrit origin. It may be traced to a Hebrew word *yobel* or *jobel*, signifying ram's horn, whence 'jubilee'... *Hailihula* and *Mahā-hailihula* are words of unknown meaning and origin, mentioned by Pāṇini as special names of some article (VI.3.38) The word is not explained in any Sanskrit dictionary, nor is there any instance of its being used in literature. It appears that *hailihula* was a Semitic word appearing in a sanskritised form, as the name of a poison which was imported from the West. In Arabic *halāhula* means deadly poison (cf. Hebrew *halul*, deadly poison). Steingass derives without reason the Arabic word from Skt. *halāhala* (F. Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, p. 1506). The Skt. word itself is exotic as shown by its variant spelling, e.g. *hālāhala*, *halāhala*, *hālahala*, *hālahāla*, *hāhala*, *hāhāla* (Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1899, revised edition, p. 1293). Pāṇini's *hailihula* seems to come nearest to the original Semitic form of the word, which may have been Aramaic...

"*Gonī* is mentioned as a container or sack (*āvapana*) made from *goṇa* (IV.1.42), obviously a cloth. It is unknown in the Vedic literature, but occurs in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* XV as *goṇaka*, explained as a woollen cloth made from the hair of long-haired goats. It was probably the same as *kaunakēs*, one-piece loin cloth worn by the early Sumerians and the Accadians, and made of suspended loops of wool hanging from a woollen skirt (Marshall, *Indus Valley Civ.*, I.33, 342; pl. 95, fig. 10). The word seems to have travelled to India through commerce in pre-Pāṇinian times."

To supplement Agrawala's information we may turn to Olmstead. In an imaginative reconstruction of the entombment of Cyrus, he lists the garments that must have gone with the king to his final rest. Among them he² mentions "Babylonian tapestries and *kaunakes* clothing". Again, during the reign of Darius II, an Athenian embassy went in c. 423 B.C. to Persia: "Aristophanes thereby learned of the very expensive *kaunakes* garment woven at Ecbatana."³

Evidently, *kaunakes* was in use all over the Middle East from pretty early times. If it can be spoken of in relation to Cyrus, there is no reason why it cannot be connected with Pāṇini some time earlier. We have already seen that Assyria was in direct touch with India certainly in c. 700 under Sennacherib and very probably even in 738 B.C. during the reign of Tiglath Pilaser III. Contrary to Agrawala's idea,⁴ Achaemenid Persia is not in the least necessary as a go-between.

But then the natural question would arise: Why should the Yavanas have the Aramaic script as theirs? We may provide the answer with the help of several considerations. First, there is the Aramaic version of the bilingual inscription recently discovered at Kandahār—a version well sprinkled with words of specifically Avestan (Zoroastrian, Mazdean) nature. Here is the Aramaic script of a community following the Avestan religion. Such a community is known to be the Kambojas. The Buddhist *Jātaka* (VI, 208, 27-30) tells us that many Kambojas kill insects, moths, snakes and worms as a religious practice. This practice, as E. Benveniste⁵ points out, may be recognised as Avestan or Mazdean from passages in Avestan books like the *Videvdāt* (XIV. 5-6) as well as from the remarks of Herodotus (I.140) about the Persian religion. Now, we may remember the pre-Mauryan *Majjhima Nikāya* (II.149) making Buddha tell Assalāyana of the frontier countries *yonakambojesu*—Yavana-Kamboja—and their common customs. The two peoples—the Yavanas and the Kambojas—are frequently joined together in Indian literature. Pāṇini himself in his *Ganapātha* links them. And it is extremely probable that they had religious practices also in common. A religion strongly coloured by the Avestan could easily have been followed by the Yavanas and expressed in Aramaic script like the one at Kandahār and with a similar infusion of Iranian words of an Avestan character. All the more is that script likely when we realise from A. Dupont-Sommer⁶ how archaic are some of the turns of the Aramaic words themselves at Kandahār, as if the language used had come from a fair antiquity and were in accord in that respect with the obvious antiquity of its Iranian-Avestan component which, as Benveniste⁷ remarks, seems older than the Iranian of the Achaemenids. A script like the Kandahār epigraph's could most reasonably be assigned both to the Kambojas and to the people intimately associated with them, the Yavanas. This proposition drives home to us on our harking back to the list of 64 scripts which the Buddha who spoke of *yonakambojesu* is reported to have learnt: the *Lalitavistara* includes *Yavanāni* among them. The *Yavanāni* of Pāṇini, who speaks of *Kāmbaja-muṇḍah Yavana-muṇḍah*, appears also as cogently to be that script.

The possibility that the Yavanas and Kambojas of Pāṇini's day were under Iranian-Avestan influence can be entertained on the strength of Pāṇini's own allusion to Parśu (V 3.117). Agrawala⁸ comments: "The whole tribe was called *Parśavah*, and a single member *Parśava*. The Parśus may be identified with the Persians. The Parśus are also known in Vedic literature (*Rgveda*, VIII.6.46)

where Ludwig and Weber identify them with the Persians Keith discussing Pāṇini's reference to the Parśus proposes the same identification (*Vedic Index*, I, 505) ”

Finally, we may emphasise that the Aramaic script, with Avestan linguistic infusions, which we are attributing to the Yavanas no less than to the Kambojas, was found in the very precincts (Kandahār) of Pāṇini's native *janapada*, Gandhāra. And Gandhāra was closely set with the provinces of those two peoples—so placed and related as to be directly aware of their life-details, including whatever script they might have. Does not the *Mahābhārata* (XII 207) give us the combination: *Yauna-Kāmboja-Gāndhārāh*?

This combination is most likely to have applied to Pāṇini's own day just as much as to other periods. Agrawala' writes: "Pāṇini knows of a *Bhārata* and a *Mahābhārata* (VI.2.38), and refers to its three principal characters, Vāsudeva, Arjuna (IV.3.98) and Yudhishtira (VIII.3.95). This admittedly old reference to the Epic throws light on its evolution. ." Thus the Epic's *Yauna-Kāmboja-Gāndhārāh* could be pre-Pāṇinian, unlike the *Yona-Kamboja-Gandharānām* of Aśoka's Rock Edict V (Girnār). And, stretching down to Aśoka's time, it could be apt also to the intermediate age that was Pāṇini's. Then it might constitute, by its Kamboja-link between Yavana and Gandhāra, a key to the right procedure in the interpretation of the Gandhāran grammarian's *Yavanānī*. In him, well might we trace to the Yavanas a script which is surely relevant to the Kambojas. Two or three times we have spoken of the present framework of chronology. What we meant is the time-scheme which puts Aśoka's accession in 269 B.C. and his grandfather Chandragupta Maurya's not long after Alexander's invasion of India. The starting-point is the identification of Chandragupta Maurya with the Sandrocottus whom the historians of Alexander mention as the latter's contemporary who founded a new dynasty at Palibothra (Pātaliputra). The coronation of Sandrocottus would most probably be in some year between 325 and 315 B.C. But there is a school of historical thinking, basing itself on clues in the Indian Purāṇas and equating Sandrocottus with Chandragupta I, founder of the Imperial Guptas who are at present counted from 320 A.D. If, by any chance, this school should be correct, Aśoka would go farther back in the past by several centuries. Between his 269 B.C. and the Gupta Era of 320 A.D. we have 589 years. So in the Purāna-based scheme he would come in the period between (325+589=) 914 and (315+589=) 904 B.C. Then, naturally, the *Ashṭādhyāyī* would have to be dated without bringing Persian and Greek sources into the picture. We should have to go without their bearing on the political condition of Gandhāra, and determine Buddha's date first and then go by the *Jātakas* as we have done

In dating Pāṇini within the terms of the current scheme we have considered 543 B.C. as a suitable year for Buddha's death. But once the Persian and Greek sources are set aside we need not put (543-269=) 274 years between this event

and Aśoka. Most historians today accept 218 years. But it is the considered opinion of E.J. Thomas,¹⁰ agreeing with the two scholars Rhys Davids and G Buhler who have devoted most study to the subject, that the 218 years cannot command implicit credence. Thomas's own view, based on the best testimony available in Indian Buddhism, testimony which finds support even in Ceylonese Buddhism according to him, is that only 100 years elapsed from Buddha's Nirvāna to Aśoka's accession. Takakusu informs us that in the Chinese Tripitaka there are four dates for Aśoka: 116, 118, 130 and 218 years after the Nirvāna.¹¹ "The last date, however, is found apparently only in the Chinese Sudarśana-vibhāsā Vinaya, which is a translation of Buddhaghosa's Samanta-pāsādikā."¹² Thus Chinese as well as Indian Buddhism no less than a school of Ceylonese situates Buddha's death between 130 and 100 years before Aśoka. With the latter in 914-904 B.C. the former would be between 1144 and 1004 B.C. Then, corresponding to our c. 588 B.C. (45 years before Buddha's death) for the *Ashtādhyāyī*, we should have some year between (45+1144=) 1189 and (45+1004=) 1149 B.C.

In the light of such a chronology Aśoka's *yonakambojeṣu* would not differ in its racial implication from the *Majjhima Nikāya*'s And his *yonakambojagam-dharānām* could carry on the significance we might read in the *Mahābhārata*'s compound on the same three tribes

Much would be of a piece, but now problems would face us in dealing, principally, with Aśoka's own Yona rāja Arīṭiyoka, the four rājas beyond him with their almost equally Greek-sounding names, and the Greek version accompanying the Aramaic in the Kandahār inscription of Aśoka.

As for *Yavanānī*, it might still be the Aramaic script. For, the Arameans poured from South Arabia into the Fertile Crescent in c. 1400 B.C. and by the period 1189-1149 B.C. their language might have penetrated into the province of the Mazdean Yonas on India's borders. But, of course, we cannot be so sure as we can when the *Ashtādhyāyī* is dated to c. 588 B.C. It would be quite on the cards that Pānini's *Yavanānī*, unlike the use of the term in later writers, meant no script at all and bore the sense which Kane sees in it.

(Concluded)

K. D. SETHNA

Notes

1 Agrawala, *op cit*, pp 220-1, 124, 146

2 Olmstead, *op cit*, p 66

3 *Ibid*, p 357

4 Agrawala, *op cit*, p 124

5 *Journal Asiatique* CCXLVI, 1958, I "Une bilingue gréco-araméenne d'Aśoka", p 48

6 *Ibid*, pp 25, 27, 30

7 *Ibid* , pp 44-5, 36-7

8 Agrawala, *op cit* , p 445

9 *Ibid* , p 340

10 "Theravādīn and Sarvāstivādīn Dates of the Nirvāna", *B C Law Volume*, Part II (Poona, 1946), pp 18-22

11 W Geiger, *Mahāvamsā* (Colombo, 1950), Introduction, p lxi

12 *Ibid*.

WINGS OF JOY

HUSH, do not rush.
 Halt, run no more.
 Do not vain-struggle.
 Be still. If you stir
 You will churn mud.

Unknot yourself.
 Plug your emotions.
 Blank out your thoughts.
 Make way for the Light.

Reach inside you
 In devotion and trust.
 You will find Him there
 Waiting for you

He will embrace you,
 Take you in His fold,
 Break your mortal bonds,
 And put you on wings of Joy.

You can then come down to earth,
 A mortal blessed by His loving God-touch.

VIRENDRA B. SHAH

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Seventy-sixth Seminar

20 February 1994

WHAT ARE THE INSPIRATIONS FOR PROGRESS THAT I HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF THE MOTHER?

Speech by Sucharu Rai

I WAS a student of this Centre of Education and completed my education from this very institution three years ago. Today I will tell you what I have been able to grasp from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and will share with you a few of my ideas on studies and education.

To study, in its essential meaning, implies the raising of our mental capacities, enlarging our intellectual horizons and giving coherence to our thinking. But study, used in its most derogative form, is for economic and social gains or mental pride. Even the aim of the philosopher or the scientist to attain knowledge for the sake of knowledge is not the highest because there is possible a still higher type of study. By the higher type of study I do not mean a more advanced form of external study, but study which transcends its formal limits and becomes the vehicle of a greater self-becoming and development. Study usually is either boredom, or the springboard of ambition, or perhaps the filling of some unfilled vacant hours. But it can become also in its own terms a way of our sadhana.

Before I proceed, let me explain that by "sadhana" I mean the sadhana of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. Traditionally it was considered that there were only certain well-defined ways by which one could pursue one's sadhana. But the age-old traditions do not apply in our Yoga in which each mode, each way, each sincere effort can become a path of sadhana. Sadhana means a discipline, a method, a way of working for the realisation of Self and God. Sadhana is the accelerated process of conscious evolution culminating in realisation of the Divine. This being so, our study can also very well become a means of progress for the discovery of our central inner being.

The next inevitable question that rises is: How can this be done?

Study usually is a process of learning some branch of knowledge. This is a process of concentration, memory and a successful expression of the subject studied. The whole thing is a mental process. But it is possible, as a first step, to remember that this mental growth and acquisition need not be for the benefit of

the narrow mental self, but can be essentially a process of self-consecration through the medium of study. By practice this consecration can become a part of the student's consciousness and study can become indeed a sacrifice. Then, he must learn to see that study, though it opens intellectual horizons, has a deeper purpose: to transcend mental limits and to open the heights of intuition.

Study thus changes from an objective course of knowledge to a larger subjective way of perception and knowledge by experience. The student would discover that the intellectual topic of study would have for him a wider grasp, a deeper seizing and he would not need a lesser mental level to understand a fact, a sequence, a pattern, for by now he would have acquired the intuitive perception by which he would automatically look into the core of the matter without any mental effort and the knowledge would be a permanent portion of his consciousness

Also there is a greater joy in studying as a work of dedication. There is no great happiness in working for one's own benefit, or for some ambition which brings only unrest or momentary elation or frustration. But not studying for one's gains brings greater peace, joy and fulfilment

However, this study as a means of sadhana is not for all. It is for those who are called to the path. It is specially for us, who have studied in this Centre of Education. For, it is not our aim to turn out great scholars, philosophers, scientists or masters of other branches of study for their own sake, but students who have made study a way of self-dedication. The world is producing great scholars by thousands every year—surely we do not want to fall in the same blind groove. So also the aim here is not to produce great professionals of any kind but dedicated souls yearning towards a higher truth in every field of pursuit. A dedicated being who has made study a means of reaching his soul and higher realities is surely preferred here. For, he must remember that our institution is a spiritual one; here we cannot allow a lesser goal to spoil our essential aim. That the way may appear very arduous is no cause for giving up the effort. Ours is not an easy path. Study as a sacrifice is the true study. Here all the activities including studies are opportunities to open to and communicate with the Divine.

In fact all things that are done here have a specific goal, the goal of sacrifice. Sacrifice is our existence. So study too falls into the same spiritual pattern. All things have their meaning and fulfilment in sacrifice; sacrifice is the backbone of all that we are and shall be.

Before I conclude let me explain the meaning of the term sacrifice. It is not a physical process but an integral psychological process by which we lift up all actions, thoughts, feelings, moods to the highest godhead in us. It is a concrete process, and if we carry it out selflessly, seeking no rewards, we can attain the greatest possible spiritual realisation. As Sri Aurobindo says. "He is God, the Divine, the Purushottama. To Him we offer everything as a sacrifice; into His hands we give up our actions; in His existence we live and move; unified with

Him in our nature and with all existence in Him, we become one soul and one power of being with Him and with all beings; with His supreme reality we identify and unite our self-being. By works done for sacrifice, eliminating desire, we arrive at knowledge and at the soul's possession of itself; by works done in self-knowledge and God-knowledge we are liberated into the unity, peace and joy of the divine existence."¹

1 *Essays on the Gita* (Cent Ed Vol 13), pp 115-116