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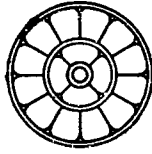
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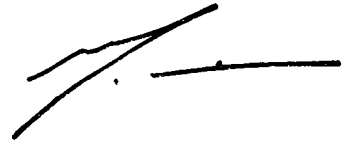


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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A TALK BY THE MOTHER

TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON 10 FEBRUARY 1951

“You must be able, if you are ready to follow the Divine order, to take up whatever work you are given, even a stupendous work, and leave it the next day with the same quietness with which you took it up and not feel that the responsibility is yours. There should be no attachment—to any object or any mode of life. You must be absolutely free.”

Questions and Answers 1929 (14 April)

I WOULD like someone to tell me what he understands by “be absolutely free”, for it is a very important question I shall tell you why.

Most people confuse liberty with licence. For the ordinary mind, to be free is to have the chance of committing every stupidity that one likes, without anybody intervening. I say one must be “absolutely free”, but it is a very dangerous advice unless one understands the meaning of the words Free from what?—free from attachments, evidently. It is exactly that. It is the story of the Buddha¹ who answers the young man expert in all the arts, “I am an expert in the art of self-control. If men congratulate me or praise me, it leaves me tranquil and indifferent. If they blame me, that leaves me equally tranquil and indifferent.”

Try then to question yourself to see to what extent you are above all blame and praise. Not that you must feel so superior to others that what they say seems to you of no importance, it is not that. It is that you have become aware of the general state of ignorance, including yours, and when others believe that something is good, you know “It is not so good as that”, and when they believe it is bad you can say, “It is not so bad as that.” Everything is completely mixed up and finally nobody can judge anybody. Therefore you are completely indifferent to all praise and all blame. And the conclusion would be: so long as the divine consciousness in me or in one whom I have chosen as my Guru does not tell me “this is to be done”, “this is not to be done”, I am indifferent to what others may tell me. For I think that the divine presence in the one in whom I have put my trust is capable of knowing what is good and what is bad, what is to be done and what is not to be done.

And that is the best way of being free. Let your surrender to the Divine be entire and you will become completely free.

The only way of being truly free is to make your surrender to the Divine entire, without reservation, because then all that binds you, ties you down, chains you, falls away naturally from you and has no longer any importance. If someone comes and blames you, you may say, “On what authority does he blame me, does he know the supreme will?” And the same thing when you are congratulated. This is not to advise you not to profit by what comes to you from

¹ “Self-Control”, *Words of Long Ago*

others—I have learnt throughout my life that even a little child can give you a lesson. Not that he is less ignorant than you but he is like a mirror which reflects the image of what you are; he may tell you something which is not true but also may show you something that you did not know. You can hence profit a great deal by it if you receive the lesson without any undesirable reaction.

Every hour of my life I have learnt that one can learn something; but I have never felt bound by the opinion of others, for I consider that there is only one truth in the world which can know something, and this is the Supreme Truth. Then one is quite free. And it is this freedom that I want of you—free from all attachment, all ignorance, all reaction; free from everything except a total surrender to the Divine. This is the way out from all responsibility towards the world. The Divine alone is responsible.

It is not possible, is it, for the surrender to be total from the very beginning?

Generally, no. It needs time. But there are instantaneous conversions; to explain all that to you in detail would take too much time. You know perhaps that in all schools of initiation it used to be said that it needed thirty-five years to change one's character! So you must not expect the thing to be done in a minute.

If one is to be indifferent to everything, why are prizes given to the children?

You do not expect a schoolboy to be a yogi, do you? I have just said that it needs thirty-five years to attain that and to change one's character.

You see, individual, human authority, like the authority of a father of the family, of a teacher, of the head of a state, is a symbolic thing. They have no real authority but authority is given to them to enable them to fulfil a role in social life as it now is, that is to say, a social life founded upon falsehood and not at all on truth, for truth means unity and society is founded on division. There are people who work out their role, their function, their symbol more or less well—nobody is faultless, all is mixed in this world. But he who takes his role seriously, tries to fill it as honestly as possible, may receive inspirations which enable him to play his part a little more truly than an ordinary man. If the teacher who gives marks kept in mind that he was the representative of the divine truth, if he constantly took sufficient trouble to be in tune with the divine Will as much as this is possible for him, well, that could be very useful; for the ordinary teacher acts according to his personal preferences—what he does not like, what he likes, etc.—and he belongs to the general falsehood, but if at the time of giving marks, the teacher tries sincerely to put himself in harmony with a truth deeper than his small narrow consciousness, he may serve as an intermediary of this truth and, as such, help his students to become conscious of this truth within themselves.

This is precisely one of the things that I wanted to tell you. Education is a sacerdotaly,¹ teaching is a sacerdotaly, and to be at the head of a State is a sacerdotaly. Then, if the person who fulfils this role aspires to fulfil it in the highest and the most true way, the general condition of the world can become much better. Unfortunately, most people never think about this at all, they fill their role somehow—not to speak of the innumerable people who work only to earn money, but in this case their activity is altogether rotten, naturally. That was my very first basis in forming the Ashram; that the work done here be an offering to the Divine.

Instead of letting oneself go in the stream of one's nature, of one's mood, one must constantly keep in mind this kind of feeling that one is a representative of the Supreme Knowledge, the Supreme Truth, the Supreme Law, and that one must apply it in the most honest, the most sincere way one can; then one makes great progress oneself and can make others also progress. And besides, one will be respected, there will be no more indiscipline in the class, for there is in every human being something that recognises and bows down before true greatness; even the worst criminals are capable of admiring a noble and disinterested act. Therefore when children feel in a teacher, in a school master, this deep aspiration to act according to the truth, they listen to you with an obedience which you would not get if one day you were in a good mood and the next day you were not, which is disastrous for everybody

If one needs thirty-five years to change one's character, how can one make, from now, a total surrender to the Divine?

It may go quicker, you know! All depends on the way that one follows.

You remember, we spoke once of the attitude of the baby cat and that of the baby monkey.² If you agree to be like a docile baby cat (there are also baby cats which are very undisciplined, I have seen them), like a docile little child, this may go very fast. Note that it is very easy to say, "Choose the attitude of the baby cat", but it is not so easy to do it. You must not believe that adopting the attitude of the baby cat lets you off from all personal effort. Because you are not a baby cat, human beings are not baby cats! There are in you innumerable elements which are accustomed to trusting only themselves, which want to do their own work, and it is much more difficult to control all these elements than to let oneself go in all circumstances. It is very difficult. First of all, there is always that wonderful work of the mind which likes so very much to observe, criticise, analyse, doubt, try to solve the problem, say, "Is it good thus?" "Would it not be

¹ *Editor's Note* "Sacerdotaly" suggests dedicated or consecrated work as of a high priest

² Sri Ramakrishna used to say that a disciple can choose one of two attitudes—the passive trust of the baby cat which lets itself be carried by its mother (this is the way of surrender, the surest) and the active attitude of the baby monkey which clings to its mother (the way of personal effort)

better like that?" and so on. So that goes on and on, and where is the baby cat?... For the baby cat does not think! It is free from all this and hence it is much easier for it!

Whatever be the way you follow, personal effort is always necessary till the moment of identification. At that moment all effort drops from you like a worn-out robe, you are another person: what was impossible for you becomes not only possible but indispensable, you cannot do otherwise.

You must be attentive, silent, must await the inner inspiration, not do anything from external reactions, you must be moved by the light that comes from above, constantly, regularly, must act only under the inspiration of that light and nothing else. Never to think, never to question, never to ask "Should I do this or that?", but to know, to see, to hear. To act with an inner certitude without questioning and without doubting, because the decision does not come from you, it comes from above. Well, this may come very soon or one may have to wait perhaps a long time—that depends upon one's previous preparation, upon many things. Till then you must will and will with persistence, and above all never lose patience or courage. If necessary, repeat the same thing a thousand times, knowing that perhaps the thousandth time you will realise the result.

You are not all of a single piece. Your present body is often an accident. If you have within you a conscious soul which has influenced the formation of your body, you are infinitely better prepared than someone, a soul, which falls head foremost into a body without knowing where it is going; in this latter case much hard work is needed to lift up the consciousness which has thus fallen into obscurity. The inner preparation may come from previous lives or from the present life; or you have reached a turning-point in your integral growth and are in just the right relation with the circumstances necessary for the last step to be taken. But this does not mean that you have not lived a thousand times before reaching this turning-point.

IDEAS AND IDEALS

PASSAGES FROM SRI AUROBINDO

Compiler's Note

(India is at present dangerously deficient in original thinking. We have assimilated countless ideas, rejected many and have also selected some but we have not acquired mastery over them. Our tamasic state of mind and behaviour sets us against newness and originality. Hereunder we reproduce from Sri Aurobindo the measures to regain our lost intellectual freedom and freshness.)

G.P. GUPTA

On Original Thinking

THE attitude of mankind towards originality of opinion is marked by a natural hesitation and inconsistency. Admired for its rarity, brilliancy and potency, yet in practice and for the same qualities it is more generally dreaded, ridiculed and feared. There is no doubt that it tends to disturb what is established. Therefore tamasic men and tamasic states of society take especial pains to discourage independence of opinion. Their watchword is authority. Few societies have been so tamasic, so full of inertia and contentment in increasing narrowness as Indian society in later times; few have been so eager to preserve themselves in inertia. Few therefore have attached so great an importance to authority. Every detail of our life has been fixed for us by Shastra and custom, every detail of our thought by Scripture and its commentators,—but much oftener by the commentators than by Scripture. Only in one field, that of individual spiritual experience, have we cherished the ancient freedom and originality out of which our past greatness sprang; it is from some new movement in this inexhaustible source that every fresh impulse and rejuvenated strength has arisen. Otherwise we should long ago have been in the grave where dead nations lie, with Greece and Rome of the Caesars, with Esarhaddon and the Chosroes. You will often hear it said that it was the forms of Hinduism which have given us so much national vitality. I think rather it was its spirit....

The result of this well-meaning bondage has been an increasing impoverishment of the Indian intellect, once the most gigantic and original in the world. Hence a certain incapacity, atrophy, impotence have marked our later activities even at their best. The most striking instance is our continued helplessness in the face of the new conditions and new knowledge imposed on us by recent European contact. We have tried to assimilate, we have tried to reject, and we have tried to select; but we have not been able to do any of these things

successfully. Successful assimilation depends on mastery; but we have not mastered European conditions and knowledge, rather we have been seized, subjected and enslaved by them. Successful rejection is possible only if we have intelligent possession of that which we wish to keep. Our rejection too must be an intelligent rejection; we must reject because we have understood, not because we have failed to understand. ... throughout the whole range of our life we do things without knowing why we do them, we believe things without knowing why we believe them, we assert things without knowing what right we have to assert them,—or, at most, it is because some book or some Brahmin enjoins it, because Shankara thinks it, or because someone has so interpreted something that he asserts it to be a fundamental Scripture of our religion. Nothing is our own, nothing native to our intelligence, all is derived. As little have we understood the new knowledge; we have only understood what the Europeans want us to think about themselves and their modern civilisation. Our English culture—if culture it can be called—has increased tenfold the evil of our dependence instead of remedying it.

More even than the other two processes successful selection requires the independent play of intellect. If we merely receive new ideas and institutions in the light in which they are presented to us, we shall, instead of selecting, imitate—blindly, foolishly and inappropriately. If we receive them in the light given by our previous knowledge, which was on so many points nil, we shall as blindly and foolishly reject. Selection demands that we should see things not as a foreigner sees them, or as the orthodox Pandit sees them, but as they are in themselves. But we have selected at random, we have rejected at random, we have not known how to assimilate or choose. In the upshot we have merely suffered the European impact, overborne at points, crassly resisting at others, and, altogether, miserable, enslaved by our environments, able neither to perish nor to survive. We preserve indeed a certain ingenuity and subtlety; we can imitate with an appearance of brightness, we can play plausibly, even brilliantly with the minutiae of a subject; but we fail to think usefully, we fail to master the life and heart of things. Yet it is only by mastering the life and heart of things that we can hope, as a nation, to survive.

How shall we recover our lost intellectual freedom and elasticity? By reversing, for a time at least, the process by which we lost it, by liberating our minds in all subjects from the thralldom to authority. That is not what reformers and the Anglicised require of us. They ask us, indeed, to abandon authority, to revolt against custom and superstition, to have free and enlightened minds. But they mean by these high-sounding recommendations that we should renounce the authority of Sayana for the authority of Max Muller, the monism of Shankara for the monism of Haeckel, the written Shashtra for the unwritten law of European social opinion, the dogmatism of Brahmin Pandits for the dogmatism of European scientists, thinkers and scholars. Such a foolish exchange of

servitude can receive the assent of no self-respecting mind. Let us break our chains, venerable as they are, but let it be in order to be free,—in the name of truth, not in the name of Europe. It would be a poor bargain to exchange our old Indian illuminations, however dark they may have grown to us, for a derivative European enlightenment or replace the superstitions of popular Hinduism by the superstitions of materialistic Science.

Our first necessity, if India is to survive and do her appointed work in the world, is that the youth of India should learn to think,—to think on all subjects, to think independently, fruitfully, going to the heart of things, not stopped by their surface, free of prejudgments, shearing sophism and prejudice asunder as with a sharp sword, smiting down obscurantism of all kinds as with the mace of Bhima. Let our brain no longer, like European infants, be swathed with swaddling clothes; let it recover the free and unbound motion of the gods; let it have not only the minuteness but the wide mastery and sovereignty natural to the intellect of Bharata and easily recoverable by it if it once accustoms itself to feel its own power and be convinced of its own worth. If it cannot entirely shake off past shackles, let it at least arise like the infant Krishna bound to the wain, and move forward dragging with it wain and all and shattering in its progress the twin trees, the twin obstacles to self-fulfilment, blind mediæval prejudice and arrogant modern dogmatism. The old fixed foundations have been broken up, we are tossing in the waters of a great upheaval and change. It is no use clinging to the old ice-floes of the past, they will soon melt and leave their refugees struggling in perilous waters. It is no use landing ourselves in the infirm bog, neither sea nor good dry land, of a second-hand Europeanism. We shall only die there a miserable and unclean death. No, we must learn to swim and use that power to reach the good vessel of unchanging truth; we must land again on the eternal rock of ages.

Let us not, either, select at random, make a nameless hotchpotch and then triumphantly call it the assimilation of East and West. We must begin by accepting nothing on trust from any source whatsoever, by questioning everything and forming our own conclusions. We need not fear that we shall by that process cease to be Indians or fall into the danger of abandoning Hinduism. India can never cease to be India or Hinduism to be Hinduism, if we really think for ourselves. It is only if we allow Europe to think for us that India is in danger of becoming an ill-executed and foolish copy of Europe. We must not begin by becoming partisans, our first business as original thinkers will be to accept nothing, to question everything. That means to get rid of all unexamined opinions old or new, all mere habitual Sanskaras in the mind, to have no preconceived judgments.... Nevertheless it is certain that the great mass of our habitual conceptions are not only temporary, but imperfect and misleading. We must escape from these imperfections and take our stand on that which is true and lasting. But in order to find out what in our conceptions is true and lasting,

we must question all alike rigorously and impartially. The necessity of such a process not for India, but for all humanity has been recognised by leading European thinkers. It was what Carlyle meant when he spoke of swallowing all formulas. It was the process by which Goethe helped to reinvigorate European thinking....

Sri Aurobindo: Birth Cent. Ed , 1972, Vol. 3, pp 110-14

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

Two letters of yours have been lying before me, constantly crying to be answered. They carry something of your magical presence and have tried hard to lift the heavy hand of indolence that has recently been weighing down the “man of letters” in me. I say “magical” about your presence because that is what I have always felt in all the years I have known you. One aspect of you seemed always to be looking out of “magic casements”, so that there is an expression in your eyes at once of reverie and wonder as if they reached forth from a strange inwardness to some enchanted secret behind the commonplaces and familiarities of the outward world. And what is that secret? Here I am reminded of seven lines from *Savitri* which have been your favourites:

A magic leverage suddenly is caught
That moves the veiled Ineffable's timeless will:
A prayer, a master act, a king idea
Can link man's strength to a transcendent Force.
Then miracle is made the common rule,
One mighty deed can change the course of things;
A lonely thought becomes omnipotent.

The enchanted secret you are ever looking for is this “magic leverage” and the anticipation of it brings a light into your being and a lightness in your body, making you a magical presence all the more.

Now let me come down to earth. When D'Annunzio was introduced to Eleonora Duse, he stepped back a little and looking at her exclaimed: “Splendid! Magnificent! D'Annunzian!” Then he said: “Madame, how do you do?” Having uttered my little panegyric on you, I'll deal with your request whether you could freely quote me and even reproduce whole articles of mine. Of course! I shall be so happy if you show your liking of my stuff.

Most happy too am I to learn that *The Adventure of the Apocalypse* especially appeals to you from among all my collections of poems. The piece you like very much—“Words”—is also one of my own pets. I still remember the thrill that ran through my whole body when I wrote the end of its concluding paragraph. Here is the paragraph:

Words are the shadows of enhaloed hawks:
The shadows cling to clay and seem clay-born,
But he who marks their moving mystery
Feels how a strange spontaneous quiver wings

Their passage here and how intangible
 They float for all their close and massive shapes.
 Alone the poet looks up to the Inane,
 Sees the gold wanderers of the boundless blue,
 Catches the radiant rhythms each burning heart
 Puts forth in every line of the wide form
 Spanning the silences with pinion-song
 Thus in his scheme of shades from the vast throng
 Haunting the earth-mind he shows across brief thought
 Glimmers immortal, throbbings of the bliss
 That reels through heaven a drunkard of Truth's sun.
 Or, in rare moments quick with dawn and noon
 And eve at once, our little human dreams
 Love with such far-flung eyes the undying birds
 That the large lust comes swooping down for prey
 And, where the shadows mystically shone,
 Falls—crushing, piercing, ravishing every sense—
 The living body and beauty and blaze of God!

Now to your main problem. You write:

“A question has arisen, that I would like your help with. I've been asked to speak—one of five people representing different organisations—on the subject of 'gurus'. Not a subject I would have chosen for myself! However, I do not want to misrepresent Sri Aurobindo's teaching. What did he say about the need for—the desirability of—a guru? I have always had the impression that he himself did not want to be anyone's Guru, in the traditional Indian sense. At the same time I remember reading somewhere that he had said that 'at a certain stage of a Yoga, the presence of a living Guru is indispensable' (not in those exact words, but something along those lines). If this is so, how are we who came to Sri Aurobindo's Yoga after the Mother had left her body to pass that 'certain stage'? Can anyone be sure that he has been accepted? (For myself, the answer to the latter question—the only answer I shall ever have!—came to me in a dream, but I don't feel I can offer dreams to my audience, they will surely look for something more substantial!) Can you help?”

I should say that, according to Sri Aurobindo, in his Yoga as in all Indian spiritual disciplines it is advisable to have a Guru in physical form. Behind this general advice there is the fact that people who claim to be inwardly guided at all times and don't care for a physical Guru are frequently lured by the unacknowledged realisation that such a Guru can be a damned nuisance—ready to contradict the often convenient deliverances of the exclusively inward guide! I know from experience what a wonderful help, both prescriptive and restrictive, the embodied Guru can be. But, of course, Yoga can go on in the absence of a

living Guru, though it is best to put oneself as much as possible in touch inwardly with a Guru who has once lived. Outwardly one would do well to avail oneself of whatever help a sincere disciple of such a Guru can offer when asked. The stage at which, in Sri Aurobindo's view, an embodied Guru is indispensable is when the bodily supramentalisation, which is the ultimate crown of his Yoga, has begun. At that stage there are extremely grave dangers which only the physically present Guru can save one from. Such a stage is indeed a far cry for all of us—and it is my conviction no less than it was Nolini's that bodily supramentalisation has been postponed now. I have written somewhere about man reaching this condition either in a revolutionary or in an evolutionary way. The revolutionary way was envisaged originally for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the first place and for their close disciples in the second. Even I was once told by the Mother orally—and my report of her statement was confirmed by Sri Aurobindo in writing—that I would undergo "the Great Transformation", meaning bodily supramentalisation, in this very life. Knowing my own weaknesses I found this double assurance breathtaking, but there it was. When both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother gave up—for reasons of their own—the grand experiment with their own bodies, the hope of any of their disciples doing it faded. But what is called "the Supramental Manifestation" on February 29, 1956 has made the evolutionary achievement by mankind in some future age certain, for now the Supermind's "light, force and consciousness" which manifested are a part of the earth's future history and from their subtle-physical presence as of today they will become more and more directly physical in the course of time, helped by the action of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who have taken their station as concrete beings on the subtle-physical plane for their divine work to continue on earth. As for acceptance by them of people as disciples now, there can be no doubt if the aspirants are sincere and turned towards them. One's sincerity is the sign that they have put their golden seal upon one. (17 7 1993)

*

Your friend's observation is unusual and worth pondering. It is true that people living in great comfort and with money in full flow tend to be drawn outward. But, with so much natural beauty around, it is hard to think that one would tend to lose touch with one's inner being. What your friend is driving at is something like the following. The utterly beautiful forests and gardens and hills with a clean finely appointed cottage nestling among them make one content and happy to spend one's days in such a setting and keep away from physically poor and noisy Pondicherry. The urge to go back to the Ashram which is located in this town gets extremely weakened and one is apt to lose touch with what is at present the soul's material home. One inclines to lose sight of the intense inwardness one has experienced in the Pondicherry-surrounded Ashram-atmosphere and one is

satisfied with whatever comfortable in-feeling one gets amidst the scenic beauty before one's outer eyes.

I remember the joy I used to experience on the "hill-station" of Matheran where I felt that, instead of my having to move towards Yoga, Yoga was coming on its own towards me in sight of the mountains and the thick woods and with fresh unpolluted air steeped in silence all about me. Pondicherry was almost forgotten.

But when I compare the in-feeling there with that which was mine in the proximity of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother I realise that the master-point of inner intensity was absent. Of course this holds only for those who have deeply breathed the Ashram-atmosphere. For those who live outside, places like Matheran would mean the *ne plus ultra* of spiritual encouragement. A response or reaction has to be considered in this light. (6.8.1993)

*

I haven't written to you for a long while, nor have you been deluging me with letters as before. In one of your wisely spaced-out trickles an apparent contradiction between two statements by the Mother was posed to me for a solution. In one you report the Mother as saying that when difficulties come we may be sure that the Grace is present to act. In the other she is said to declare that the Grace is present and active all the time.

I don't think the first statement negates the ever-active play of Grace. It draws attention to the truth which is liable to get ignored that difficulties are not a sign of the Grace's withdrawal. They may simply have been inevitable, as some things are bound to be in a world which lives in the reign of Ignorance—a cosmic phenomenon. Even so, the Grace is ready to tackle them: it does not give one up. Possibly the difficulties are themselves an act of Grace, a secret spur to the soul in us to emerge and take charge of the outer life which may be threatening to get out of hand. We are asked by the Mother not to fall under the shadow of the suspicion that the Divine has forsaken us.

The other statement serves to assure us that even if we withdraw from the Divine, the Grace will never leave us—only it is often obstructed by our denials from acting. The Mother also forewarns us that adverse circumstances do not mean that the Grace has bidden us adieu. The Divine is always there to pull us out of the deepest hole as well as to lift us up from height to greater height. Especially a Yoga like ours which calls for self-surrender because its sights are trained on super-Himalayan realisations which no human power on its own can attain, the Grace has automatically to be there to clap wings on to our sagging shoulders. (27.9.1993)

*

Here are your questions and my answers.

1. *What is the unifying relation between the Supermind and Divine Grace?*

The Divine Mother who is the Supermind's eternal gesture of Light and Love to our fumbling and stumbling world.

2. *What should be our attitude towards the Supermind?*

Self-offering to Sri Aurobindo who has offered the Supermind to us.

3. *How do I live in the Supreme Consciousness?*

Before you can live in it, you have to love it.

4. *If all is Grace-ordained, where can be any cause for delay in our sadhana?*

Your question seems to be just clever words meant to do away with some inconvenient uneasiness about your own role as a sadhak.

5. *Should I at times invoke Mother Mahakali?*

Better not at present. You are not God's Warrior enough.

6. *Of the two—an ardent desire for one's personal progress and not having any concern for it—which is better?*

The former—with no special sense of self-importance.

7. *Should I adopt a mantra? And which?*

If the heart's cry is for a mantra in the times when a deep silence is not speech enough to join you to the Supreme Beloved, you may adopt what has appealed to me the most: *Ma-Sri Aurobindo sharanam mama* ("Mother-Sri Aurobindo are my refuge").

8. *Can I be of any help to you?*

Join me in a poised intensity of aspiration for the Divine—and let your handwriting be less nervously twisted. In Q.6 I could read "progress" only by intuition (a sign of my own progress?) The same holds for "between" in Q.1. To scribble like this is no help to me—nor, I am afraid, will it be to you in your coming M D. examination. You must prepare yourself all round to consummate your professional career by becoming M(other's) D(ocor). (7.10 1993)

*

Believe it or not, the shock of the recent earthquake in Maharashtra was felt by many people in Pondicherry. My own experience was rather queer. All of a sudden, a big hard pillow which I keep as a support to my right knee near the site of the fracture moved forward on its own! I looked around to see if anybody had shifted it. The young man who was in my room as a possible help at night was fast asleep. The pillow's autonomous movement would have remained a mystery, a miracle, if I had not heard the news of the far-off earthquake in the morning.

During the last two days I have been feeling—more than before—a deep inadequacy in the course of my sadhana, a kind of quaking of my settled earth. So much seems still unrealised! An act of warm self-giving, bringing a sense of

mingling with the hushed heaven, as it were, of the ever-near presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is there hour after hour. It lends a meaning to all activities beyond their immediate and apparent usefulness, a meaning that seems to point both inward and upward to some everlasting Perfection. This Perfection, which is at the same time far away and plays like an aura around the sublime yet intimate closeness that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are through the earthly hours, serves as a reminder that an infinity of more-and-more is beckoning us and that the sweet proximity of grace brought by our two Gurus is a call to experience even in the midst of a profound happiness an immense dissatisfaction. Along with being like a home of fulfilling rest for the soul's long search for the Divine through the True, the Good, the Beautiful, they reveal themselves as doorways for that soul to pass beyond its own ken, so to speak, and reach some endless mystery and magnificence of its own existence in harmony with our Gurus' transcendent counterparts. The difficult task to plunge into those doorways is before me, a challenge that sets an ache of aspiring uncertainty behind all the joy of "the Immortal in the mortal" the long years of the integral Yoga have managed to gather bit by bit (13.10.1993)

*

What pleased me greatly in your letter is your feeling that I am helping to maintain you in your inmost aspiration. Perhaps you are upheld in your own quest of spiritual fulfilment by the thought that the person who is so close to your soul is one who has pledged his whole life to the great Beyond and the deep Within and longed to live in the wide Without with the ego-swamping light from on high and the ego-refining warmth from the secret psyche. I have said "longed to live", for the goal is still far ahead. What has been done is no more than the taking of a few toddling steps towards it—even if those steps never halt, much less turn backward. The progress is rather slow, but I have the conviction that I am in omnipotent hands which at any moment will lift me out of myself and carry me where Time neighbours Eternity. (22.10.1993)

*

How shall I repay your love and generosity? All I can do is to keep you in the very core of my heart.

Perhaps you will want to know what sort of place this core is. Here the feeling of time is charged with a secret transcendence of the hours. Being within the complex of body, life-force and mind, it is necessarily aware of the passage of the moments, and the pains no less than the pleasures, the travails as well as the triumphs of that passage are experienced. They are steadily held in this mysterious domain but along with their earthly character a strange essence of

them is distilled like a divine nectar which invigorates and delights, as if I were a warrior who would exult in all the vicissitudes of a battle under the banner of some great cause. Every movement of this warrior is a strain in both the senses of that term. There is an exertion, an expenditure of arduous energy and simultaneously the to-and-fro, the rise and fall of musical notes, the fluent building of poetic stanzas, the silent singing that is woven by varied dance-rhythms. The meeting and parting of earth's ways are reflected here, but all of them bear like an inner light the trend towards a single goal: either a deathless face of utter peace with infinite pity in its eyes or an immortal face of bliss whose eyes brim with love unending—twin aspects of one divinity with arms offering eternal rest and feet tracing for us an enchanted pilgrimage. The part of me that lives in the depth of this magical world is at once aloof from all my friends and yet intimate with their own depths and through these profundities gives the joys and sorrows of their surface selves an intense warmth of sympathy which still leaves him free from the shallowness of those feelings on the surface and unshadowed by their transiency.

Aside from the small bit of Amal Kiran that, by the compassion of Sri Aurobindo and by the grace of the Mother, is held by them in this ever-sunlit realm which is constituted by their presence and whose similitude is hidden within each human being—barring the tiny portion of Amal Kiran which inhabits this blessedness all of him is one in substance with common humanity though always aspiring that that sparkling Seed within him, that wonderful Much-in-little, may sprout and flower in the outer self with its fragrance of the Infinite and its flame of the Unerring.

I have written in terms of images. The being's core is not known immediately in a burst of imagery. But there is no beatific blankness, either. Everything is concretely experienced just as one grows aware of the outer world by sight and sound and touch. The only difference is that here this sense-knowledge is not always explicit. When one dwells on what is present in this inmost dimension of one's being, a self-created picture forms in consonance with the way one's imagination is usually apt to work. An inspiration seems to guide its activity so that spontaneously the Real gets a revelation in terms of the visible, the audible, the tangible, and "unknown modes of being" take strange yet convincing shapes

(16.11 1993)

AMAL KIRAN
(K.D. SETHNA)

SRI AUROBINDO AS I SAW HIM

A TALK BY NIRODBARAN

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

(Continued from the issue of January 1994)

To return to Sri Aurobindo. The next picture: As I said, he had conquered or outgrown the body's needs. The Mother used to bring His meals. After the accident, the meal used to come quite early; but by and by it began to shift from 10 to 11, 1, 2, 3, 4 o'clock. But he had no complaint, he was waiting very silently, perhaps indrawn or concentrating—no sign of hunger, or of appetite. Appetite there was, perhaps, but it did not trouble him.

And again at night—we have seen it, we were working, we kept waiting—the Mother served his meal at 10, 11 o'clock, and he would go to bed at 1 or 2 o'clock; yet there was no complaint. So we too got a little *punya karma* by our waiting! These are some glimpses from the external side. A colleague used to say that Sri Aurobindo's yoga of surrender had been accomplished by only two people—the Mother and Sri Aurobindo himself: the surrender of the one to the other.

The Personal Aspect

I think this is enough to give you a picture, a rough picture, of his impersonality, which, as I said before, was the hall-mark of his being. So now I come to the personal aspect:

There were also times when he came out of his inner absorption; and these were the most beautiful times for us. He used to talk with us, to exchange views with us; and we could ask any question—he used to answer slowly with a very sweet smile, usually in a few words. But he would never look at us, and hardly ever called us by name. We were four or five people around him, one question coming from the back, another question coming this side—we were trying to target him with all these spears, with all these questions. He was smiling, taking them and answering in one or two sentences. He would look in front or downward, and give a smile—a sense of humour was always playing on his lips—and cut jokes with us, make puns... quite a different person from what we have seen before. But again, impersonality in this: he would not look at us; he would hardly call us by name. I don't know why it was so, but it was so. So this is one instance of how personality and impersonality can be together. But one thing we must remember: he never lost contact with his higher consciousness even when he was most human.

I don't know much about philosophy, but he has said in his philosophy that

the Divine is both personal and impersonal. It fits him very well.

If you don't mind, I can repeat a joke... it is a little coarse, but for Sri Aurobindo, the Divine, there is no such thing as 'coarse' or 'refined'.

The war was going on, and everything had to be rationed; even for Sri Aurobindo, the Mother rationed: she told Champaklal, "He will be given two soaps, two cloths..." and this and that. Food was not rationed, luckily. At that time—now I am speaking medically—we had to watch over the clearance of his bowels. The bowels must be clear, otherwise there might be trouble. So one day we noticed that he had passed very little. "Sir," we said, "What is this? Please try harder—use your Force." "It is war economy" he replied. [*outburst of laughter*] You see.. we all burst out laughing! "It is war economy"—That is Sri Aurobindo. He was not one of those stiff, hard and dry yogis like coconuts. Once I asked him, "Where do you get all this humour from? You are a great scholar, you are an intellectual, you are a great yogi... where does this come from?" His laconic answer was "*raso vai sah*". That means He is all *rasa*, delight.

So this is another picture of him.

The Mother has said he is the supramental avatar—the avatar of the Supermind. But from this account of him that I have given, you will at least admit that he is somebody wonderful, somebody unique.

When we were talking about people, he never criticised anybody. We might discuss somebody, or a person's views, but personal criticism was never in his nature. He was always loving and generous, always vast, always conscious about what he was saying; there was never a moment when he criticised anybody in any way. He was above what we call ordinary human emotion. He was above, as it says in the Gita, all these attachments, absolutely free. He would not be troubled in the least even if the whole world went into *pralaya*. That was the *samatā* he had acquired by his *tapasyā*. Mind you, it was not inborn. He has told us that from his very childhood, for whatever reason, he had a certain amount of equanimity—he never cared for positions, nursed ambitions. So that much equanimity he had. But he said, "I was not born perfect. I had many difficulties in my life, many faults, many failings, many weaknesses... but by sheer *sādhanā*, *tapasyā*, I have transformed my nature"... from what he was, to what he had become. It was all due to hard *tapasyā* and effort, to change the nature. I never saw him lose his temper. He was always affable, always sweet, always very kind in everything. He said, "Anger was foreign to my nature." He was the *mukta puruṣa*, as we would put it.

Whether you accept him as an avatar or not it doesn't matter. But according to my personal view at least... I have not seen him as avatar—with all the glow, all the beauty, all the largeness and splendour as Arjuna saw Krishna in his *viśvarūpa*—but from my observation of his nature, of his daily way of life, of his unfathomable mind of knowledge, I am firmly convinced that he was a perfect man above all frailties and foibles. He himself said, "I have nothing human in

me.” There are many great men, but I think none of them could be called a ‘perfect man’. You cannot become that by your own personal effort, by your moral effort, or any other kind of effort. You can become that only by the practice of yoga: by realisation, becoming identified with the Divine, one with the Divine. Then only can you become a perfect man I suppose you know of many great men in our country; I can mention two: Mahatma Gandhi, and in Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore. Mahatma Gandhi had many qualities, but I wouldn’t say that he was a perfect man; because he was very subject to depression and other feelings... he himself said, “I have committed a Himalayan blunder. .” And one cannot be perfect without being a yogi. So it comes to the same thing as what the Mother said. . The Mother went one step further, saying that He was an avatar, the supramental avatar. I must say that only avatars can be perfect men. Sri Krishna, Rama, Buddha, Christ, they are all perfect men, avatars. I don’t know, some people may differ. It doesn’t matter. But where Sri Aurobindo says “One man’s perfection still can save the world,” he means much more. In this sense I consider him a perfect man

I forgot to mention something of his personal side. Something that happened at the end will remove all doubt about this personal aspect of him

Sri Aurobindo’s Passing

When Sri Aurobindo was passing away, in 1950, before he passed away he embraced and kissed his great bhakta Champaklal three, four, five times.

We saw it, we were struck with wonder—amazement!—When he has been so impersonal even in his personality, what is this we see? How is it possible? But it was possible. When we were waiting for the end, this one thing we have seen... his vast recognition of his bhakta for his devoted service.

By the way, I may also mention—not for any vainglory—that just three minutes before his passing, he called me. “Nirod .”—he called me ‘Nirod’, directly for the first time. He has written many things in the personal style—they are there in the books, but this was face to face... Champaklal got embraces, I got one sweet phrase: “Nirod, give me some water.” That was the final reward for me, and it is equal to millions and millions! Those few words are imprinted on my soul forever.

Perhaps you know what happened after he left his body . this was a touch of avatarhood that we saw with our own eyes.

When he passed away, at 1.20 in the early morning, we saw the whole body become crimson-gold. [*Pause*]

How can it be? Medical science is baffled. Scientists will be baffled... or if they are very clever, they will give some reason.... But this is a fact. The Government doctors were called, they saw it; scores of other people saw it over the next few days: the whole body was crimson-gold.

And to again tell you an experience of my own: you can imagine, when he passed away, what our condition was: dejected, morose, very sad indeed. All my dejection and sorrow was washed away—washed away—by this wonderful vision.

That was my last experience. I don't think I need to say anything about the significance of that. The Mother has said that in the last days, after he had decided to go away, he was bringing down the Supramental Light... He was in contact with it all the time, so when he decided to go away he was bringing it down; and finally, at the price of this holocaust of his own body, he established this Supramental Light in the bodily consciousness.

And this supramental light is vigorously at work in the world. We may ask, "Why then all this trouble and. .?" I don't need to go into it. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo are very near us, I can assure you of that, and they are acting on the whole world.

Sri Aurobindo and India

Again, people say that India was made free by the leaders, but they don't know the truth behind. In 1935, when I was writing to him, I took the liberty of asking him, "Sir, in your scheme of spirituality, is there a place for India's Independence? Are you working for it?" Then he wrote back, "It is all settled. India will be free." Even before that he had made this promise to some of our friends, but this time he put it in writing. Then again, as I was impertinent and a little obstinate, perhaps foolish, I wrote, "Settled or not, please do something positive, because things are very bad." And he wrote back a bit testily, "You are a very queer creature." [*laughter*] "I have told you that it is all settled. Why then should I bother about it? What India will do with her Independence, that is what I am bothering about." That was his botheration! "Will it be bolshevik-raj, corruption, goonda-raj?" That is what was bothering him. These are the three words he used.

India gained her freedom on the 15th of August—tomorrow. [*Pause*]. On his birthday. Is it a coincidence? Is it fortuitous, by chance? He said, "It was not a coincidence, nor a fortuitous accident." It was a seal and sanction on the work he had undertaken for India's liberation since his youth. Sri Aurobindo would never give any compliment to himself—just a broad hint: "I see it as a seal and sanction of the Divine on my work."

In giving the significance of Sri Aurobindo's birthday, the Mother gives us a revelation. First she says in one word, "It is an eternal birth"... eternal birth: it will be going on, it will stay on. Then, interpreting the meaning she says:

"The sentence can be understood in four different ways on four ascending planes of consciousness:

1. Physically, the consequence of the birth will be of eternal importance to the world.

2. Mentally, it is a birth that will be eternally remembered in the universal history.

3. Psychically, a birth that recurs forever from age to age upon earth

4. Spiritually, the birth of the Eternal upon earth.”

This is the meaning of his birth. It is an eternal birth, on the mental plane, on the psychic plane, on the physical plane. . this means that on this birthday every year there will be some influence of the avatar. It depends on your receptivity. I don't need to say anything more

Friends, brothers and sisters, you are indeed very lucky, I must say, to have come here to do his work and the Mother's. Through their force, through their blessing, Matrimandir and Auroville are going to be something very unique. There are many wonders, but I think this wonder will surpass all other vital, physical, mental wonders. it will be spiritual. And you are the instruments. Somehow you have come, it must be the Force that has brought you here, and you are extremely fortunate to be aware that you are doing your work, sacrificing yourselves, giving all your labour, all your goodwill, for the success of the Mother's work.

If you want to know Sri Aurobindo's spiritual content, his avatarhood, read *Savitri*. Read particularly about Aswapathi's yoga Aswapathi is none but Sri Aurobindo... all his experiences he has given there in the name of Aswapathi.

Namaste, brothers and sisters, till we meet again You are making a bridge between the West and the East.

[*Mauna*] And you have made a bridge at this moment between the Ashram and Auroville. [*Applause*]

SOME EPISODES FROM THE LIFE OF “AN EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

(Continued from the issue of January 1994)

Experiences on the Way

Before the Darshan Day of 17th November 1993

I WAS preparing some hot water in a kettle. As I brought down the kettle from the stove, I lost my grip and the boiling water fell on my feet. As a result the right foot got very badly scalded. At once I dipped both my feet in cold water. Though it had an immediate soothing effect, an intensely burning pain followed, so much so that I had to go to the doctor. For two days I remained at home, but when blisters had formed and the right foot had swollen I had to be shifted to the Nursing Home where I stayed till I was much better. The accident prevented me from coming to the Darshan of the 24th November 1993.

I asked Sri Aurobindo why I had to meet with this accident when I was supposed to be under His protection. He replied, “There cannot be an absolute protection under the present conditions. There are small entities around who are always trying to make mischief. One has to be always on one’s guard till the protection becomes absolute.”

One interesting thing I have marked which I should narrate. I cannot be sure if it has any truth. I was living all alone in my room for many years without engaging any servants. I was doing all my chores by myself. But a few weeks before the accident, an old woman came as if from nowhere and was employed as a gatekeeper for our apartment building. For no obvious reason she became fond of me and was helping me by running some of my errands. Had she not been there during my accident, life would have been very difficult indeed, for the burning pain made me unable to move from my bed for the first few days that I remained at home. Was there a Divine Eye that had foreseen the probable mishap befalling me and had made this provision?

I have no doubt in my mind as to the answer to that question because of a similar incident some years ago. I believe I have recounted it already. It was the incident of my having fallen down into the water tank early one morning when I had gone down to fetch some water. I was waiting there helplessly till some one came and rescued me. A few days earlier I had wondered why I had seen Sri Krishna’s right hand stretched out in a gesture of protection. I realised later that the accident could have been serious given the circumstances, and that his protecting hand, though it could not prevent it altogether, had minimised the ill effects.

On one Darshan day I did not feel like attending the meditation at 10 a.m. Sri Aurobindo told me distinctly, "No, you must attend the meditation. It is very important."

On another day I asked him "How can I be sure that it is your voice that is speaking?"

He replied, "Be quiet; make your mind free from all desires. Then you will hear the true voice. It applies to all who can observe this condition. Desire distorts the true answer."

My Elder Uncle and My Son—A Contrast

We have rarely found our uncle losing his temper. His wife also used to tell us about it. He is a very simple frank old man. The first time when he came to see me in Pondicherry I was living in X's house. I had written to him that he could come there with his luggage and that after resting awhile we could go and look for an accommodation in the town. X said to me that he should not land in her house. I was astonished to hear it. For she had agreed to the arrangement and yet she said this to his face in such a rude manner and for no fault of his! I was in a fix I took him with all that luggage to another friend's house. They welcomed him and took good care of him. I was relieved. After a short rest, we took him to a hotel. Uncle was not in the least disturbed by the rude behaviour. He went to visit the lady next day and deliver the presents offered by her friends. Now she repented of her conduct.

On another occasion during the Puja in Calcutta, my son, uncle and myself took a fancy to go about in a car seeing the many idols of the Goddess Durga in the town. Suddenly I received a phone-call from a friend saying that her group was going to see the Puja festival and asking whether I would join them. I replied we were also out with the same purpose but since I had a friend with me I could not join her. She insisted that I could bring him with me. So we got into her car. Suddenly there was a heavy downpour and all of us got drenched. My friend, after leaving us at home, was going away when I told her that uncle had no means of going back; there was no vehicle on the road. Could she not see him home? She left him in the lurch and drove away. I was exasperated but he said, "Why do you lose your temper? I can manage." He did not take even my umbrella and walked all the distance soaked to the skin.

My son on the other hand was a picture of contrast—very bad-tempered and self-willed. Uncle had a son, very rich and unmarried. He was charmed by my son's wife, at which my son was extremely displeased with him "Why should he run after her? I'll tell his father." I tried to mollify his bad mood and said, "Uncle is quite innocent. For heaven's sake, don't speak a word to him. He will be mortally hurt. Furthermore, what will be the use of it all? Say, if you run after a girl, what can I do about it?"

This time when he came to visit us he made a scene. My Bengali neighbour, an educated man, used to move about almost half-naked which was very embarrassing for us, for we could not pass him without witnessing his naked figure. One day my son went straight to him and delivered some home-truths. It had an effect but created difficulty for me; for my neighbour used to help me in my trouble. Now he would not. My son would leave soon for Calcutta and I would be all alone. So I thought I must make up with him. An opportunity presented itself, thank God! That man was in charge of paying all our electric bills to the office. He was a newcomer and did not know the byways, lanes, etc. of the town. Not only so, he was cheated to the extent of Rs. 10 or 15 in the office. This angered all the other tenants who refused to pay the money. His fault was that instead of going to the Head office he had gone to the Branch office and hence had to pay extra money. But the tenants would not excuse him. Then I said, "How can we do that? He hasn't done it to suit his purpose. Neither have we given him the directions. So it was not his wilful commission." My defence on his behalf pleased him very much and he would run to help me in my need.

Once my son and myself were making a train journey. Somebody occupied one of our seats. My son argued with him and requested him to move elsewhere. He was adamant. My son lost his temper. He was a strong young fellow and simply lifting the man or, as Shakespeare would say, "catching him by the hip" threw him down and took his seat quietly.

I had always to keep a watch over his bad temper. He would flush red with rage as he had a very fair complexion.

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

THE BOOK OF JOB

A NEW COMMENTARY

(Continued from the issue of January 1994)

Verses 6 to 12. The Scene in Heaven.

It is with verse 6 that the real Prologue to the drama which God enacts begins. In the Indian tradition God is called the *Jagan-Nātaka-Sūtradhāra*, the holder of the strings of the puppet-show or the Drama of the Turning World. All that takes place in the world is His arrangement. In lives like Job's especially, he takes a personal interest. It is such men who consciously endeavour to live the best life possible for them. If they are made to awake to something deeper in them, they can rise higher in their consciousness and therefore in the life they lead "The way up is the way down." We should never forget the fact that if God had not drawn Satan's attention to Job, Satan would not have thought of him. Terrien¹⁰ says,

No one should at this juncture remark, "Why invite trouble? Let sleeping dogs lie." For the narrator was not a theologian. He was not concerned with a description of divine attributes. He was not even conscious of the theological implications which might follow God's endorsement of Job's virtues. He merely retold a popular tale of early origin.. because he wanted to introduce his poem with the sceptical question of "the Satan".

The learned Exegete escapes the problem instead of facing it or understanding it. If we accept the Scripture as the Word of God (though revealed to *men* and expressed in *human words*) the question of the narrator being this or that does not arise. Theology, let us understand clearly, is the *human mind's* attempt to interpret the Word of God, that accounts for the pronounced differences in the interpretations by the theologians. If two theologians differ, we can only say Roger-like, "Much can be said on both sides" unless we are committed to one interpretation or the other.

Curiously, Paul Scherer,¹¹ the Expositor in the same volume, agreeing with the view of the Exegete that Satan is responsible for Job's suffering and that God only permits Satan to make him suffer, quotes the words of McKechney:

Satan does not accomplish anything for God, though God may accomplish much through Satan.

It is God who does accomplish much through Satan, using him as no more than an instrument for his grand divine purposes.

Verse 6.

The scene in Heaven is introduced to us with a day appointed by God for his “sons” to meet Him. The “sons” were the angels as is evidenced in the *Book of Daniel*. In Chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar orders the three Jews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, to be cast into the burning furnace for not worshipping the image of gold he has made. But down in the furnace are seen four men walking about. In verse number 25, we read,

the form of the fourth is like the son of God.

In verse 28, Nebuchadnezzar says,

Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who has sent his angel and delivered his servants....

Satan is not described as one of His sons:

Satan also came along among them.

The name Satan in Hebrew means “The Adversary”. Without the usual attempts at identifying him let us understand his role in the Book. He is a functional character. God knowing him to be hostile to man uses him to bring suffering to Job. We see that He has a total control over him and can command, “thus far and no further.” We do not see him or hear about him after his function is over. Commentators give him more importance than he deserves.

Verse 7.

In the verse we see God addressing Satan and not His Sons

Who came to present themselves before the Lord.

It is with him he had the chosen business. He asked him wherefrom he came as if the Omniscient Lord did not know. He wanted Satan to say he came from the earth so that he could immediately refer to Job. That is exactly what Satan said, though in a tone typical of him, without any “fear of God”.

Verse 8.

As has been noted while considering Verse 1, the words presenting Job’s character were repeated by God when He drew Satan’s attention to him. Though God’s main purpose in doing so was to provoke the Adversary’s challenge He spoke what was true and just. God was not exaggerating when He said that there was none like Job on the earth. Terrien,¹² taking into account not only God’s

words but what Job himself would say later in his debate with his friends, remarks,

Job is not represented as being endowed with divine perfection. He was neither blameless nor sinless. In the poetic discussion he acknowledged that even angels were not pure in comparison with the purity of God... and he confessed the possibility of having committed sin... but he was not conscious of sinfulness before God. Here is the “something” lacking. He did not ask for the mercy of God; he felt no need of it. He was in some measure the ancestor of the “Pharisee”, with his faults and virtues.

Job cannot be represented as endowed with divine perfection for the very reason Job himself gave, according to the Exegete; even angels could not be considered pure in comparison with the purity of God. As a man, with all the limitations of the finite mind, there was none like him on the earth in living the life of the noblest ideals, constantly remembering God, revering Him and deliberately avoiding evil. How could he be the ancestor of the “Pharisee” when he was aware of the possibility of evil and not only avoiding it in himself but in fearing its presence in his children and “sanctifying” them from time to time?

Verse 9.

Satan’s challenge in this and the following verse was not only what God expected but also what He wanted for executing His purpose. Satan’s question,

Doth Job fear God for naught?

has evoked the following comment from Terrien:¹³

Here is the starting-point of the discussion, the nerve of the drama, the basic verse of the whole book . The disturbing question was not merely that of undeserved suffering, but that of genuine piety and authentic devotion .. The enigma of suffering is not the central concern of the poet; it is merely the instrument of the argument.

It is odd that the statement of the Adversary should be taken as the “Mahāvākya” (the Great Utterance, the Guiding Word) of the Scripture. To call it “the nerve of the whole drama, the basic question of the whole book” is to make Satan greater than God. Satan, as has been pointed out from the start, is no more than a tool in God’s hands.

Verse 10.

The verse only elaborates what was asked in the previous verse, whether

Job revered God for no reason, without receiving anything from Him. God had not only protected Job, his house and all that belonged to him, his property as well as his children, but had blessed him with prosperity by making the work of his hand, his labour, fruitful. Would he have loved God without all this?

Satan uses a powerful image, hedge or fence. God had prevented any force of destruction like his from entering Job, his house or his belongings.

Perhaps the Exegetes and Commentators (as suggested in the comment on the previous verse) give a greater meaning and a higher value to Satan's question than it bears. To say that Satan asked God if Job's religion was disinterested is to make him more philosophical than he could be. It was a downright *practical* question. It is the commentators who give a philosophic import to it.

Verses 11 and 12

As a first step, God permitted Satan to break through "the hedge" about Job's house and belongings including his children. God did not want to bring down all suffering at one stroke. He also wanted to show Satan that things were to happen as He willed and not as the Adversary desired. He also wanted to demonstrate to Satan Job's constancy at different stages of loss. God knew that Job would not waver as long as he was governed by his mind. If Job began to weep and wail in the presence of his friends after a long spell of suffering, he was no longer governed by his idealistic mind by which he had been kept *sāttvic*, and sank into *tamas*; all that had been pushed down to the subconscious rose up. The *sāttvic* man who eschews evil *suppresses* it without *rejecting* it. That is what makes life from a deeper centre in ourselves necessary.

In Verse 11, we see God asking Satan to "put forth thine hand now and touch all that he hath" The reward he will get is, "he will curse thee to thy face". Job will retain his integrity. In Verse 12 we see God's warning to Satan that it was only all the possessions of Job that were in his power and nothing more.

Verses 13 to 22.

With a sudden shift of scene from Heaven to earth and with a rapid presentation of the four messengers and their successive tales of woe, the verses reveal Satan's swiftness in bringing misery to Job. Terrien rightly notes "the symmetrical and stylized" character of the scene:

Each bearer of bad news escaped alone, for the seemingly single purpose of telling the tale, and was still speaking when the next messenger arrived.

Terrien also notes the sense of supernatural awe created in the scene.

Verse 13.

Ironically the day chosen by Satan to bring disaster on Job was the day on

which the eldest son was holding a feast in his house; the brothers and sisters “were eating and drinking wine”. (We have asked the question if it was accidental. Job’s concern for his children on such days has also been noted).

Verses 14 and 15

Job was in his house, perhaps after presenting to God burnt offerings as his eldest son was holding a banquet in *his* house. The first messenger of the evil tidings told him how, when the oxen were ploughing and the asses beside them were feeding, the Sabians fell upon them and took them away slaying all the servants except the speaker.

The Sabians were an Arab tribe, later classed in the *Korān* with Moslems, Jews and Christians as believers in the true God. Satan could use anyone for his purpose!

Verse 16.

Another messenger came in to tell him of a (super)natural agency—the fire of God falling from Heaven—and burning up all his sheep. We know it is not the fire of God nor from Heaven though it was God’s will and permission that made it possible.

Verse 17.

Yet another messenger came in to tell him that three bands of Chaldeans fell upon the camels and carried them away killing all the servants except the speaker.

The Chaldeans were a race of Semitic Babylonians from Arabia who settled in the neighbourhood of Ur and were later merged with Babylonians. They have a legend about a figure like Christ who shed his blood drop by drop to establish love on earth.¹⁴ Satan, as noted above, could use the best for the worst purpose.

Verses 18 and 19.

In these verses we see the last messenger bringing the worst news. When Job’s children were at their banquet in the eldest son’s house a great wind came from the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house and made it fall on the children as well as the servants of the household killing them all except the speaker.

Verses 20 to 22.

The verses present Job’s reaction to the loss of not only the property, but his children too. He does not cease to revere God. Rending the mantle and shaving his head and falling on the ground according to the custom of the race he only worshipped God.

His words are those of a “perfect” Man: He says he came naked from his

mother's womb and he would return there naked. It was the Lord Who gave him what he had and it was He who took it away. Blessed be the Lord! Job did not sin by accusing God foolishly as doing what was wrong.

Job means by "mother's womb" the womb of the mother earth from which he came and to which he returned.

Verse 22.

The Authorised Version (King James Version), used in the present commentary, with the differences from which are not normally referred to, does not seem to render the Hebrew original literally. The Revised Standard Version reads,

In all this Job did not charge God with wrong.

Terrien¹⁵ rendering it,

ascribe to God any folly,

comments,

The word *tphlāh*, "tastelessness" applies to moral capriciousness and ill behaviour. Job did not accuse the Deity of any caprice or misrule .

It must be noted that, though literally imprecise, the rendering is adequate from a literary point of view.

(To be continued)

K.B. SITARAMAYYA

Notes

10 P 913

11 P 920

12 P 911

13 P 913

14 Vide, *The Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol 7, p 308

15 Pp 915-916

A LETTER FROM KATHLEEN RAINE

An article by K.B. Sitaramayya—*William Blake's "The Little Black Boy" An Interpretation*—appeared in *Mother India* of September 1993, pp. 667-670. A copy of it was sent by the author to Miss Kathleen Raine, the well-known English authority on Blake. She replied with a letter full of easy scholarship and genial appreciation not only of the author of the article but also of her old Indian friends as well as of India itself. We are glad to reproduce this valuable letter.

TEMENOS ACADEMY

Oct. 22nd 1993

Dear Professor Sitaramayya,

Thank you for sending me your beautiful paper on Blake's poem *The Little Black Boy*. Of course I cannot but agree with your reading of it, and at best only descant on its substance with a few details which only go to confirm it.

It is I would say a very Swedenborgian poem. The bodies as 'black' or 'white' clouds is entirely a Swedenborgian image, used by Blake also in the introductory poems of *Innocence and Experience*, 'On a cloud I saw a child', and the child in the world of experience, 'Like a fiend hid in a cloud'. I agree with you also that this is not a political poem deeply of course as Blake opposed slavery. You will remember *Vala Night the Ninth*, lines 680 on,

Then all the Slaves from every Earth in the wide Universe
Sing a New Song...
... & the song they sung was this,
Composed by an African Black, from the little earth of Sotha:

'Aha! Aha! how came I here so soon in my sweet native land?
'How came I here? Methinks I am as I was in my youth
'When in my father's house I sat and heard his chearing voice.
'Methinks I see his flocks & herds & feel my limbs renew'd,
'And Lo, my brethren in their tents, & their little ones around them!'

Of course it's nonsense to suppose the Tree to be the accursed Tree of Good and Evil, it is the Tree of Life of the 'sweet native land' of the *Little Black Boy*. Swedenborg too spoke warmly of the Africans, who understood who the Lord is, even if not by the name of Jesus.

The other Swedenborgian element is the heat and light of the sun. Swedenborg speaks of God's love and Wisdom, love being heat, and wisdom light His pages are full of it. But he also is the source of Blake's seeing the

Human Form as the supreme expression of the divine—'Jesus, the Imagination', the universal Divine Humanity; which of course brings that other quatrain,

God Appears and God is Light
 To those who dwell in realms of night,
 But doth a human form display
 To those who live in realms of day.

That is to say, the highest realization is that of the Divine Humanity of God, and the Grand Man made up of all the multitudes of mankind, who when seen at a distance appears as one Man, but at near view made up of multitudes. This very wonderful Swedenborgian image Blake took over, as in *Vala Night the First*, 469 et seq,

Then those in Great Eternity met in the Council of God
 As one Man, for contracting their Exalted Senses
 They behold Multitude, or Expanding, they behold as one,
 As One Man all the Universal Family, & that One Man
 They call Jesus the Christ, & they in him and he in them
 Live in perfect harmony, in Eden the land of life,
 Consulting as One Man above the mountain of Snowdon Sublime.

Your reading is entirely compatible with all these Swedenborgian allusions, which are very clear in the Songs of Innocence and Experience.

I expect you have read Dr. Sethna's very fine book on the Tyger, with all its Miltonic associations. I do indeed know Dr. Sethna though I have never met him, but have long known him as a fellow-disciple of Blake, whom I also regard as my Master (not my 'subject' as they say in academia!) Please remember me to him. I expect you also know Prof Arabinda Basu, who is a very old friend and who will be giving us a series of lectures in the Temenos Academy in the spring of 1994.

Blake certainly managed to make his white figures radiant with beautiful light, but in reality the white races are by no means the most beautiful of mankind—I would say quite the contrary, after India I always find the white skins of my compatriots quite hideous, pallid and unhealthy looking after the golden skins of India, and indeed the black people also can be very beautiful. But of course 'blackness' has been throughout Christendom the colour of the Devil who is described as black, while the angels are spirits of light. That tradition Blake would have inherited and had never the opportunity of making such comparisons! And he may have had in mind the story of the Pope, who, on first seeing English children, said, 'not Angles, Angels!' which is of course a story the English like to remember.

It was Blake who led me finally to India—his total rejection of the premisses of materialism. This he learned mostly from the Neoplatonists, translated by his contemporary Thomas Taylor the Platonist, but he had as you know also illustrated 'Mr Wilkin translating the Bhagavad Geeta' Yeats understood where Blake stood, and where he led

Thank you for the two poems. The language is English but the content is Indian. The trouble with so many Indian poets who write in English is that they take over the culture as well as the language. Whereas the truth is that Western civilization is doomed unless there is a renaissance of spiritual knowledge, and where can the world look unless to India?

I send you a little paper on Blake's City of Golgonooza that I gave to the young architects of our Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture, where our Temenos Academy is also based.

Please remember me to K.D. Sethna.

With warm regards

KATHLEEN RAINE

A FACET

DARK IS my despair with myself, O my Love!
 I envy the stone for its insentience
 And the grass for its unconcern.
 Abysmal is my ignominy
 And grave my many imperfections.
 O! how to look at Thy perfect Face.
 And achieve Thy absolute perfection?
 Burn me, Love! in Thy altar Flames,
 So that my human gaze,
 Redeemed at last, may mirror
 Some facet of Thy diamond Grace.

SHYAM KUMARI

IMAGE OF THE CHILD AND AMERICAN LITERARY SENSIBILITY

I

HENRY Nash Smith has conclusively demonstrated that the imagination of Americans after 1800 was dominated by the belief that the American West represented a redemptive nature which would provide the spiritual salvation for the men who settled upon it. Man corrupted by civilization hopes to be reborn here and made innocent when he abandons the Old World history and settles for the New World. This idea is best expressed by D.H. Lawrence when he speaks about the Leatherstocking novels:

The Leatherstocking novels... go backwards from old age to golden youth. That is the true myth of America. She starts old, old, wrinkled and writhing in an old skin. And there is a gradual sloughing off of the old skin towards a new youth. It is the myth of America.¹

This movement backward in search of innocence is best expressed in the Americans' journey to the West, an effort to escape from history. And as long as there was an unsettled area, Americans would continue to believe in the myth that they might escape history to live with nature. American writers from the time of Cooper to the present adhere to this myth that the Europeans, in stepping out of the Old World culture, are reborn in the New World *as a child of nature: the myth of the Jeffersonian Arcadia*. This craving for a new baptismal innocence is derived from the anti-mythological stream in American culture born of the utopian ideals of certain original colonists and of the revolutionary generation which asserted that this New World had to be liberated from the dead hand of the past and become the scene of a new departure in human affairs.²

Against such a backdrop it is but natural for a generation of Americans nurtured on Freud and Gessell to think of childhood as the most significant period of their lives. Many contemporary periodicals publish short stories in which some precocious child is introduced painfully and perhaps tragically into maturity. Salinger, Saroyan, Faulkner, Welty, Porter and Capote have regarded this theme as natural to the American present. Like other aspects of American culture, the idea of childhood has been a part of the American tradition. Its origins lie somewhere in the early years of the nineteenth century when the Transcendentalist movement began to change the modes of thought in New England. The romantic imagination had indeed reversed the traditional puritan order of things. Men like Emerson and Bronson Alcott asserted that children, far from being limbs of Satan, were in fact innately superior to adults, closer to nature and hence closer to God, more alive to sensuous, emotional and moral

experience. At the same time, the importance of the formative years came to be felt in other areas of American life. Catherine Beecher, Elizabeth Peabody and Horace Mann in education, Horace Bushnell in theology, itinerant portrait painters like Henry Walton—they are but some of those who reflect in the decades before the Civil War the new sympathy and interest.

The uniqueness of American Experience—the myth of the American West, the myth of American innocence and the myth of American Dream—necessitated a new angle of vision to approach and apprehend reality. Persistent interest in scraping old emotions from reality has now become a conspicuous feature of American writing. It displays an effort to cleanse words of those clusters of associations which may produce dullness as often as they contribute to richness. Recurring references to the superior vision of the child in American literature confirms this hunger to discover a new access to reality. The vision of the child is put to much more far-ranging uses in American writing than in any other literature. A major problem facing the American writers was simply the need to recognise and contain a new continent. The variety and wonder of the child's view of the world was adopted to meet this challenge towards inclusion and assimilation.

The problems and solutions present in many American writers may be profitably approached by considering their predilection for a strategy of the naive vision, a vision which attempts to regard reality with minimum reference to previous familiarity. This is best revealed in writers like Emerson who called himself "an endless seeker with no past at my back."

The unusual concern for the present has enabled the American writers to make discoveries denied to those who prefer to see the present through the eyes of the past. So the need to hold on to the present tense is the need to overcome the disabling, crippling quality of thought itself. This crippling influence is minimum in the child, and hence the American writers found it convenient to use the child as a positive image against the claims of tradition.

II

Emerson (1803-1882) played a key role in the shaping of American imagination. He insisted on the need to "set up a strong present tense." He saw no basic hostilities in nature and no radical evil in man. Evil was neither lasting nor real to Emerson. According to him America's deepest need was a "general education of the eye." In one of his poems, Emerson appeals to the Spring:

"Make the aged eye sun-clear"³

He wants the eye to be washed clean of those selective and interpretative schemata which prevent us from an original relation to the universe.

Emerson endorsed this mode of seeing because he thought that if man could retain a primitive simplicity of vision the divinity which pervades the universe would suddenly become clear to him. In this context Emerson's interest in the child's eye becomes very relevant. The child's eye hasn't been overlaid with the dirt or dust of habit. So he sees better than the adult. Commenting on the capability of the child, Emerson observes:

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and heart of the child.⁴

Here Emerson indicates that man's eye has been conquered, but that of the child remains unconquered. In this lies the child's genius: the openness to sensations, the visual abandon he is capable of. Hence we are at our best when we too can "gaze like children". As Tony Tanner remarks, the child seems to live in what it sees with no subject-object dichotomy to haunt it. And so it displays "a generous attentive wonder" in front of nature's multiple particulars.⁵

Now it is possible to examine the promise that Emerson offers through the image of the child. He passionately held the view that man has not fallen into the knowledge of evil but into consciousness. For him there is no vision of evil. What we call evil would disappear if we acquired a new way of looking at things. His rejection of history in favour of the everlasting now reinforces this view. To be conscious is to be alienated from our original home or womb whereby we lose the comfort of our primary ties. Here consciousness is seen not as evil but as an inhibitor. What Emerson really wants is to get back to those primary ties, to regain what he calls "the forfeit paradise." The same idea is expressed by Emerson elsewhere:

Infancy is the perpetual Messiah, which comes into the arms of fallen men and pleads with them to return to paradise.⁶

The child is perhaps Emerson's right image for his own best intentions. Adulthood is no real maturity since the adult no longer is capable of *asking the right questions*, which the child does in his uncrusted innocence. In its ultimate possibility it offers the key to the secret of a total revolution which would transform the very nature of human consciousness.

Emerson's preference for the everlasting Now and his concern for the eye of the child finds its sustained development in the thoughts of Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). Thoreau is insistent in his stress on the importance of "seeing." But, for him the only valuable kind of "seeing" is one divorced from knowledge and understanding. Like Traherne he speaks very confidently about the advantages of ignorance. He even affirms that "a man's ignorance is

sometimes not only useful but beautiful, while his knowledge is often times worse than ugliness, besides being ugly.”⁷

Thoreau’s method essentially focusses on education achieved through the ‘sauntering of the eye.’ It is an effortless process free from any kind of resistance caused by mental domination or intellectual motivation. According to him the sauntering eye alone could discover the inherent excellence of the world which is a constant fact.

The mystical trait in Thoreau’s sensitivity leads him to elevate the innocent eye above the scientific eye. He prefers the keen joy and discrimination of the child who has just seen a flower for the first time to the dry botanical descriptions. Here Thoreau establishes the connection between the correct response to the world and the child. In this connection, he observes:

I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born.⁸

and again,

I think that no experience which I have today comes up to, or is comparable with, the experience of my boyhood.⁹

Like Wordsworth, the rapport which he experienced with his environment in his boyhood, he feels to be lost in some measure. So, he attempts to “recover the lost child that I am.”¹⁰ He records in his Journal:

I think that we should treat our minds as innocent and ingenuous children whose guardians we are—be careful what objects and what subjects we thrust on their attention.¹¹

Thus, if one cannot return to childhood, one can at least preserve a child-like mind, a mind not ruined by thought and knowledge. Knowledge for Thoreau, as much it was for Emerson, is a “state of the sense rather than a cerebral hoard, a capacity for delight, rather than a disposition to dissect.”¹²

Like Emerson and Thoreau, Whitman also seems to have approached that state of perception. He writes in a later poem:

Beginning my studies the first step pleased me so much,
The mere fact consciousness, these forms, the power of motion,
The least insect or animal, the senses, eyesight, love,
The first step I saw awed me and pleased me so much,
I have hardly gone and hardly wished to go any further
But step and loiter all the time and sing it in ecstatic songs.¹³

Here the poet relates the nature of the experience of early childhood. Each item is noted as a small miracle. The diversity of particulars in nature is regarded with awe. The eye travels from the apple blossom to a drunkard with no diminution of wonder, unaccompanied by moral judgement. This is the required facility to live in truth. And Whitman thought the child was gifted with this. His poem, "There was a child went forth" further illustrates his convictions:

There was a child went forth every day,
 And the first object he looked upon and received
 with wonder or pity or love or dread, that
 object he became,
 And that object became part of him for the day or
 a certain part of the day ..¹⁴

The countryside, the home—"all the changes of the city and country wherever he went," they all became part of the child whose naivety acts as a sort of sponge to the teeming fragments of the real world. This uncritical assimilation of the seen world, the eye wondering and delighting in everything, constitutes the first great step of the human being. He wishes it was also the last step, because any further movement would only deviate him from truth.

(To be continued)

P.M. SANKARAN KUTTY

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SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of January 1994)

AT the dawn of 1908, after the breaking up of the Surat Congress, Sri Aurobindo became a prominent leader in Indian politics. He left Surat for Baroda. It was eighteen months since his departure from Calcutta in 1906. Then he went through a stupendous change. During 1906 he was hardly known to anyone except his close associates and followers. But he came back to Baroda as a front-line figure in Indian politics and gave a new vision to his country. The ideal he preached for India's Freedom Movement was oriented by a spiritual insight with a significance which had not been known before.

Throughout 1907, the pursuit of politics in the spirit of religion—service of the Mother, looking upon India as the Mother—dominated Sri Aurobindo's thoughts and actions. He felt that Yoga could help him to acquire power and as the difficulties of political realisation increased he decided that he should harness this power, *brahmatej* and use it in the service of the country.

Many political workers came to see him and he addressed a number of political meetings in Baroda.

We have already noted that he started his Yogic career in 1904 without a formal initiation from any Guru. We have also noted the first results of his Pranayama—the opening of his inner vision and the flood-gates of poetry, increased health energy, etc. Beyond these he made no further progress and in the stress and pursuit of his hectic political activities the practice of Pranayama was discontinued. Sri Aurobindo now wanted to take up the Yoga-discipline with a greater intensity and earnestness, but he felt the need of help from someone who was on the spiritual path. We find from a chapter of his younger brother Barin Ghose's book of reminiscences all about "Aurobindo's Spiritual Initiation." Barin writes: "I was sent along with another friend to Northern India to look for a Guru or spiritual guide who could guide India's destiny and train us the future builders of the nation along spiritual lines."¹

Barin further tells us: "The great yogi Brahmananda of Nurbada had passed away some years before and I found his disciple Keshavananda to be a dry-as-dust pedant and a mechanical Hatha Yogi knowing no higher yoga at all. But quite accidentally I had met for a few minutes a Maharashtra Brahmin, Vishnu Bhaskar Lele by name, in the Chandote Ashram. I did know that this man was a great and real yogi.... I met Lele in a friend's house at Navasari. He made me sit in a dark room with him for a few minutes and as a result three days afterwards I had my first glimpse of spiritual awakening, my first Psychic experience.

"Aurobindo hearing about him from me had expressed a desire to meet this wonderful devotee of love. As soon as the Surat Congress was over I wired to Lele requesting him to come to Baroda to meet Aurobindo. Crowds with flags

and national cries followed us from the station and students unyoked a carriage and putting Aurobindo, myself and a Sannyasi, Sakhariaswami, on it, pulled it for some distance. In the midst of a surging crowd we reached Khasirao's (*sic*) Bungalow at 8 A.M. and immediately after Vishnu Bhaskar Lele arrived. I left Aurobindo alone with him for half an hour. When he had left I asked my brother how he found him so far as Yoga was concerned. Aurobindo said in his characteristic cryptic way, 'Lele is a wonderful yogi'."²

As regards Yoga, Lele told Sri Aurobindo that he should completely suspend all political activity, at least for a few days. Sri Aurobindo agreed. Then in a small upstairs room on the top floor of Sardar Majumdar's Wada, he and Lele sat together. Lele told A.B. Purani in 1916 that "when he received the telegram telling him to go to Baroda he had an intuition that he would have to give initiation to a great soul."³

Barin writes: "Lele suddenly spirited Aurobindo away from the midst of all this commotion to a lonely old place tucked away from the heart of the city. Three days, day in and day out, the two of them sat wrapped in deep meditation facing each other. Their simple needs were looked after by Vishnu Bhaskar's wife, a Matriculate girl of small stature of very subdued nature. I was also there and used to sit in meditation with them morning and evening in my restless and perfunctory way. My mind was divided between my ambitious national work and this inner elite of yoga."⁴

Sri Aurobindo, recollecting what had happened to him at that time, wrote in 1932: " 'Sit down', I was told. 'Look and you will see that your thoughts come into you from outside. Before they enter, fling them back.' I sat down and looked and saw to my astonishment that it was so; I saw and felt concretely the thought approaching as if to enter through or above the head, and was able to push it back concretely before it came inside. In three days—really in one—my mind became full of an eternal silence—it is still there. But that I don't know how many people can do. One (not a disciple—I had no disciples in those days) asked me how to do Yoga. I said: 'make your mind quiet first.' He did and his mind became quite silent and empty. Then he rushed to me saying: 'My brain is empty of thoughts, I cannot think. I am becoming an idiot.' He did not pause to look and see where these thoughts he uttered were coming from! Nor did he realise that one who is already an idiot cannot become one. Anyhow I was not patient in those days and I dropped him and let him lose his miraculously achieved silence.

"The usual way, the easiest if one can manage it at all, is to call down the silence from above you into the brain, mind and body."⁵

Sri Aurobindo narrated that "what Lele asked him was whether he could surrender himself entirely to the inner Guide within him and move as it moved him; if so he needed no instructions from Lele or anybody else. This Sri Aurobindo accepted and made that his rule of Sadhana and of life.... There was

no conflict or wavering between Yoga and politics, when he started Yoga, he carried on both without any idea of opposition between them.”⁶

Thus the political activity on one side and sadhana on the other were both being intensely pursued. Lele advised Sri Aurobindo to make the mind empty as would be a sheet of white paper ready to receive a piece of Divine Calligraphy—and to purify the mind by eliminating all ego-stuff so that the Divine might take possession of it and direct its future operations. It was but a little hint from “a man without fame... a bhakta with a limited mind but with some experience and evocative power.”⁷

“We sat together and I followed with an absolute fidelity what he instructed me to do, not myself in the least understanding where he was leading me or where I was myself going. The first result was a series of tremendously powerful experiences and radical changes of consciousness which he had never intended—for they were Advaitic and Vedantic and he was against Advaita Vedanta—and which were quite contrary to my own ideas, for they made me see with a stupendous intensity the world as a cinematographic play of vacant forms in the impersonal universality of the Absolute Brahman.”⁸

“As for calm and silence, there is no need of the supramental to get that. One can get it even on the level of Higher Mind which is the next above the human intelligence. I got these things in 1908, 27 years ago, and I can assure you they were solid enough and marvellous enough in all conscience without any need of supramentality to make it more so. Again, ‘a calm that looks like action and motion’ is a phenomenon of which I know nothing. A calm or silence that is what I have had—the proof is that out of an absolute silence of the mind I edited the *Bande Mataram* for 4 months and wrote 6 volumes of the *Arya*, not to speak of all letters and messages etc. I have written since.”⁹

“I myself had my experience of Nirvana and silence in the Brahman, etc. long before there was any knowledge of the overhead spiritual planes; it came first simply by an absolute stillness and blotting out as it were of all mental, emotional and other inner activities—the body continued indeed to see, walk, speak and do its other business, but as an empty automatic machine and nothing more. I did not become aware of any pure ‘I’ nor even of any self, impersonal or other,—there was only an awareness of That as the sole Reality, all else being quite unsubstantial, void, non-real. As to what realised that Reality, it was a nameless consciousness which was not other than That; one could perhaps say this, though hardly even so much as this, since there was no mental concept of it, but not more. Neither was I aware of any lower soul or outer self called by such and such a personal name that was performing this feat of arriving at the consciousness of Nirvana...”

“Mark that I did not think these things, there were no thoughts or concepts nor did they present themselves like that to any Me; it simply just was so or was self-apparently so.”¹⁰

During that period Sri Aurobindo when he had achieved a high spiritual state did not forget to give practical instructions and deliver lectures at different places about further political organisation. He met Chhotalal Purani in a private interview and showed to him “a Scheme for the revolutionary work by drawing a pencil sketch on a blank piece of paper.” He then advised him to meet Barin who met C.B. Purani for three consecutive days, explaining to him the details of the revolutionary organisation.”¹¹ Moreover, Sri Aurobindo gave three lectures at Baroda on the political situation.

In the second week of January 1908 he went to Poona from Baroda. Then on the thirteenth of the month he went to Bombay. In Bombay the spiritual experience gained at Baroda became more intense and deep. A.B. Purani records: “The vacant condition of the mind turned into the experience of the Silent Brahman consciousness. The multifarious activities of the city of Bombay, the rows of tall houses, etc.—all became as if things moving on the surface, mere appearances, things unreal against the background of the Silent Infinite which alone seemed real.”¹²

Sri Aurobindo has said: “When I was in Bombay, from the balcony of the friend’s house I saw the whole busy movement of Bombay as a picture in a cinema show, all unreal and shadowy. Ever since I have maintained that poise of mind—never lost it even in the midst of difficulties.” The following sonnet, written in the 1930’s, is a poetic expression of the same experience:

NIRVANA

All is abolished but the mute Alone
 The mind from thought released, the heart from grief
 Grow inexistent now beyond belief,
 There is no I, no Nature known-unknown.
 The city, a shadow picture without tone,
 Floats, quivers unreal, forms without relief
 Flow, a cinema’s vacant shapes; like a reef
 Foundering in shoreless gulfs the world is done.

Only the illimitable Permanent
 Is here. A Peace stupendous, featureless, still,
 Replaces all,—what once was I, in It
 A silent unnamed emptiness content
 Either to fade in the Unknowable
 Or thrill with the luminous seas of the Infinite.¹³

When Sri Aurobindo got an invitation from the Bombay National Union to address a meeting at the Mahajan Wadi on the nineteenth of January, 1908 he

was in a fix. His mind had become calm, blank—how was he to deliver a speech? He could not very well decline the invitation as he was an active political worker and a prominent all-India leader. He asked Lele, who said that it would be all right to accept and that all would be well. Here is a description of what happened in Sri Aurobindo's own words: "In that silent condition—without any thought in the mind—I went to Bombay. There I had to lecture in the National Union and so I asked Lele: 'What should I do?' He asked me to pray. But I was so absorbed in the silent Brahman Consciousness that I could not pray. So I said to him that I was not in a mood to pray. Then he replied that it did not matter. He and some others would pray and I had simply to go to the meeting and make Namaskar to the audience as Narayana and then some voice would speak. I did exactly as he told me. On my way to the meeting somebody gave me a paper to read. When I rose to speak the impression of the headline flashed across my mind and then all of a sudden something spoke out. That was my second experience from Lele..."¹⁴

From Bombay Sri Aurobindo began his journey back to Calcutta. He gave speeches in several cities on the way: 24 January 1908 at Naskik, 26 January at Dhulia, 28 and 29 January at Amravati, 30 and 31 January and 1 February at Nagpur. (Shyam Sunder Chakravarty was present.)

"All the speeches I delivered on my way to Calcutta were of the same nature—with some mixture of mental working in some parts

"Before parting from Lele I asked for his instructions. He was giving me detailed instructions. In the meantime I told him of a Mantra that had arisen in my heart. Suddenly while giving instructions he stopped and asked me if I could rely absolutely on Him who gave me the Mantra. I replied that I could always do that. Then Lele said that there was no need of further instructions."¹⁵

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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FREEDOM IS THE ULTIMATE CHOICE

FOR ages men were under the yoke of good and bad, whimsical and tyrannical rulers, the kings. Small kings were the Feudal Lords and the Barons and Zamindars. Later, the owners of the industries were judged to be oppressors of the working class, their economic rulers. To get freed from the shackles of their rulers men struggled hard from time to time. Some such great struggles in the modern history of mankind were the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution and the Chinese Revolution. The French Revolution gave birth to another autocratic ruler and the other two revolutions gave birth to Socialist States under dictators.

Going through the history of the USSR we come to know about the colossal human losses at the beginning. It all went unnoticed in the fervour of its first emotional outburst. Then Joseph Stalin's forced collectivisation of agriculture took away millions of peasant lives and their livestock. Inhuman repressions, tortures, labour-camps, banishments and killings marked the reign of terror of the staunch Marxist. No one who had independent views, it is said, was given any scope to survive. Nikita Khrushchev came with renewed ferocity and vengeance—ousting Malenkov, killing Beria, defaming Stalin. And at the end, in keeping with the tradition, he himself was lost behind the iron curtain. This was followed by similar revengeful uprisings. In recent years there have been great upheavals, turmoils and sporadic troubles in different parts of the Union. We may mention the revolt in Kazakstan in 1985, unrest among the Tartars in 1987, demand of freedom by Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia in the same year and ethnic trouble among the Armenians and Azerbaijanians in 1988 and so on.

Events were further pushed by the process that had already set in. With the Miners' Strike and great debacles on the economic front, growing discontent and confusion prevailed—chasms everywhere in the great body-politic of the Communist empire became an obvious fact. The USSR in the midst of such troubles could not maintain its position as a Super-power. The country failed to keep pace with the American Star-War programme. Its influence in the Communist bloc declined steadily.

In the meantime the mechanical system was crumbling down in Eastern European countries. In one country after another discontent among the people for various types of misrule was high: it resulted in revolt and finally in the breakdown of the Communist regimes. In this context the Putsch of August 19-21, 1991 in Soviet Russia was a Counter Revolution that was doomed to failure. It all finally led to the bringing down of the Communist Flag from atop the Kremlin Tower, abolition of the USSR, banning of the Communist party and formation of a Commonwealth of twelve independent Republics

At a later stage of these developments, we find Boris Yeltsin appearing to be the man behind the anti-Communist upsurge of the peoples, emerging as the

hero of the game. But he is a leader of Russia, one of the twelve Republics, though the largest one. And he is more a product of the times than a leader initiating the tide. The real man and statesman, a leader not only of the USSR but also of the present world, the man behind all these peaceful transitions and transformations of the Soviet Society is Mikhail S. Gorbachev who led the people through his unique Perestroika and Glasnost, creating democratic conditions and helping people come out of bondage to freedom. The people who lost their freedom at the hands of the Communist oppressors during the last seventy years, had to be led out of the quagmire gradually in a tolerant way. Mr. Gorbachev did it very patiently. He is the true leader of world peace and disarmament. No one really great completes the work, perhaps to his satisfaction, during his lifetime, but a great leader shows the right path and sows the proper seed. Seeds of renewed thirst for freedom have been cast and must burgeon in due course. Though the Republics have to go through many a vicissitude, though many are the pitfalls ahead, it is expected that they would come out successful. Vladimir Radyushin says, "And Gorbachev is the man who drew the line to the past. He has set the standard of democratic leadership against which all politicians in the country will henceforth be judged." (*Mainstream*—4 1.92) Gorbachev has done what best could be done. He was given a farewell on 25th December, 1991. He is the only Soviet President to honourably retire with a pension of 4000 Roubles a month.

We remember another man who was the first voice of freedom from the totalitarian regime of Poland. He finally led his people to democratic freedom in recent years through his Solidarity movement. He was Lech Walesa.

Over the years, the Soviet land scientifically and technically progressed, the country's global influence increased, its domination over other Socialist countries was considerable but the people of the land had no freedom—they could not freely speak, criticise, discuss, do or undo as they liked. They were bound by chains of thousands of restrictions and that resulted in all sorts of trouble and turmoil. This is the basic defect of a totalitarian state-socialism which turns into a mechanical system. Man shall not live without food under the present conditions and he has many other physical and vital needs, but he is not destined to barely live in physical and vital surroundings. He is destined to expand, outgrow his physical needs; he is destined to know himself and reach the spiritual realm, the source of his existence. He will never be satisfied with eating, drinking, sleeping and gratifying each petty physical need only. He will rather sacrifice himself than remain chained forever. No Black Africa can remain dominated forever. This has happened throughout the history of man. Mechanical Collectivisation may be a temporary necessity, never a permanent solution. So Tiananmen Square shows itself again and again till its victory. And the fire of freedom in the hearts of the Tibetans will never be extinguished till they win over their oppressors.

About the fate of the USSR and Communism everywhere, we may recall Sri

Aurobindo's words of wisdom as recorded in the pages of *The Ideal of Human Unity* written between 1915 and 1918:

"... The rational idea ends always as a captive of its machinery, because a slave of its too binding process. A new idea with another turn of the logical machine revolts against it and breaks up the machinery but only to substitute in the end another mechanical system, another credo formula and practice."

He further elaborated: "A Centralised Socialist State may be a necessity of the future, once it is founded, but a reaction from it will be equally an eventual necessity of the future. The greater its pressure, the more certainly will it be met by spread of the spiritual, the intellectual, the vital and practical principle of anarchism in revolt against the mechanical pressure... [It] might well terminate in a crumbling up and disintegration." (*Ibid.*)

Sri Aurobindo was specific about the USSR when he said, "The labourite despotism in Russia, the rule of Soviets fixing its hold and lasting long enough, could effect the transition of society to a second and more advanced basis of the same or even to a still further development... but the resort to a principle of government by force brought in a contradictory element which endangered its sound effectuation even in Russia itself and, therefore, weakened the force." (*Ibid.*)

And about the Communist imperialism in effecting a World State he says: "In actual fact a new attempt of worldwide domination could succeed only by a new instrumentation or under novel circumstances in englobing all the nations of the earth or persuading or forcing them into some kind of union.. a powerful head like Communist Russia may have a temporary success in bringing about such an objective. But . there would be tendencies, resistances, urges towards other developments which would sooner or later bring about its collapse or some revolutionary change which would mean its disappearance." (*Ibid.*)

The rulers of China, the most populous Communist country, seem to be alert to the situation. Although they have the same view and animus towards religion like Lenin they seem to allow some concession in attaching some significance to the spiritual things in life. In their new constitution framed in 1982 they accepted the essential need of religious and spiritual freedom. In its 24th Chapter it is written—"The State strengthens the building of Socialistic spiritual civilisation through spreading education in high ideals and morality." Article 36 of the constitution declares: "The State protects normal religious activity." They have also been introducing a Capitalistic structure in their economy, contrary to the principles of State Socialism. These are all pragmatic adjustments in order to cling to power to maintain their hegemony and grow to a Super-power through possession of nuclear weapons, etc. Thus we find around us, in the Communist states, constant adjustments to keep themselves in power and position, at the same time criticising others and their predecessors for the very fault which they repeat. Things are repeated But Mao Tsetung's regime and the time of the

cultural revolution with its leader, the dictator Giang Qing, are over. We may in this context once again go back to Sri Aurobindo as to what he had foreseen even as far back as 1950 in a postscript chapter to *The Ideal of Human Unity*. He said: "In Asia a more perilous situation has arisen, in the emergence of communist China... two enormous communist powers, Russia and China... would overshadow with a threat of absorption of South Western Asia and Tibet and might be pushed to overrun all up to the whole frontier of India, menacing her security and that of Western Asia with the possibility of an invasion...."

(To be continued)

AJU MUKHOPADHYAY

NISHIKANTO: THE MYSTIC POET AND ARTIST

GOOD poets are not common, and rare are the born poets. But this latter phrase could be applied with great appositeness to Nishikanto. The bulk of his poetry is in Bengali, in the poetical literature of which he occupies a place of high eminence. However, his young years which he spent in Tagore's Shantiniketan have also much to do with the development of his innate poetical faculty. The great poetic movement, at the helm of which Tagore stood, had its effects on Nishikanto also, though he became a full-fledged poet only after coming to Pondicherry. Before Nishikanto's coming to stay here, Tagore had already visited this town.

The cordial relationship that existed between Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is well known. The bard's eulogy on Sri Aurobindo, written during the Nationalist Movement, a long poem, is still fresh in the minds of people. The Mother had met Tagore when she had been to Japan. He came here in 1928 to meet Sri Aurobindo and also saw, to his pleasant surprise, the Mother.

Apart from Rabindranath Tagore, we have received quite a few members from Shantiniketan of various callings—who were to play prominent roles here just as in Shantiniketan. Some of them were, one may say, cultural products of Tagore himself. Actually they came on their own, and not through any urge from the poet. They are, Sahana Devi, the singer and writer—Sisir Mitra, who became the principal and professor of history at the Ashram school—and finally Nishikanto.

After having overcome a few obstacles not uncommon in a new place for a stranger, he tried to get attuned to its atmosphere. Or rather he sensed some innate familiarity, as if he had seen something like this in a vision. He must have liked the place, and gradually felt quite at home. He resumed here his writing.

Just as in Shantiniketan here also, as luck would have it for Nishikanto, a poets' circle had already formed. And some of them were or became well-known. The atmosphere in the Ashram was then astir with creative activities; not only of a literary kind, but music, painting, drama, etc., were zealously pursued by quite a few. And for all these subjects there were some profound and illuminating pronouncements of Sri Aurobindo, which were written before or during this period in reply to questions or as comments.

Of all these men who practised the arts, the most well-known and talented was probably Dilip Kumar Roy. The others who were receiving grace from the muses were Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Nolini Kanta Gupta, Arjava (J. Chadwick), Anilbaran Roy, Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna), Nirodbaran, etc.

From a person who came to his lodging, Nishi heard that D.K. Roy was here, and got his local address. He thought of going to meet him, if not for anything else then at least out of common interest. And it was nothing difficult because Roy who divided his time between his sadhana and his writing, was a

social type of person. He also had the habit of regularly exchanging letters with Sri Aurobindo regarding yoga and the art of correct versification. Nishi might have known these things about Roy.

One day as Roy was busy in his drawing-room scanning poetry, repeating lines to himself and very little aware of the surroundings, the slight diversion caused by a darkish figure at his door was reason enough for him to lose his composure. But he observed that somehow in spite of the other oddnesses in the stranger's appearance, there was some fire in his big and round eyes. The flash of fire and warmth in them couldn't be missed. They were full of feeling too. Wisely the host chose to stay cool and put orthometry aside for a while. He asked, as if to those pair of eyes, about his identity. Nishi gave his reference of Tagore's Shantiniketan which brightened the features of the listener, for he had been there too, to meet the Tagores.

After explaining about his interest in Sri Aurobindo's yoga and his aspiration to live at the Ashram, Nishikanto added that he was aware of Roy's capacity of fruitful intervention in such matters. That was his reason for coming to him. "I've heard that you're a favoured son of Sri Aurobindo, right?" and he grinned.

D.K. Roy chuckled, laughed in a boyish manner. "Well," he observed, "I won't say exactly that." He looked at the visitor. The shabby dress, a thick dishevelled bunch of curly hair carelessly thrown over the shoulders, and his poor appearance told something of Nishi's story. Roy felt that far from home he might not be too properly placed; and furthermore he was from Shantiniketan. Consequently Roy was much moved. Actually both of them were away from their homeland. A wave of fellow-feeling welled up in his bosom. He became attentive and gave a patient hearing to what Nishi said in a smooth, simple and easy manner, without hesitation or halting, as though he had been long known to him.

After Nishikanto's long speech, the barrier of strangeness being broken. Roy invitingly told him to stay with him in his apartment instead of in the odd lodge. But to this proposal Nishikanto couldn't readily agree.

"No?" D.K. Roy exclaimed finding it quite funny. "Oh, but how are you going to kill your time, eh?" he enquired while continuing to hum some notes to himself.

D.K. Roy's tone and the words were now plainly inviting which made Nishi feel at ease, and he also said so.

"Till now your tone was like that of the in-laws; but now I breathe. Thank God! That's better! As for killing my time, I could build the stately rhyme, eh, what?"

"Oh fine, I also write a bit, call them poems if you please, just to kill time too," modestly said D.K. Roy. Though at times self-exhibiting, he could also be quite modest. Furthermore, Nishi was disarmingly frank and simple. So Roy was

sharply attracted by him. A man of natural humour and quite friendly disposition he suggested to Nishi at least to come daily, sit at the table on the verandah from where he could enjoy a view of the scenic beach, and write poetry to his heart's content. Nishi gladly agreed to this arrangement.

—"We'll get along well together," he said.

After shifting through various facts found in some articles, I have given here the correct story, if in short, of the first meeting of the two writers.

This meeting was the beginning of a long and enduring relationship which proved to be very fruitful for Nishikanto. An ear for music was added to his capacity for rhythm and style, as we shall see in the following pages.

Dark-complexioned, dreamy-eyed and with his flowing black hair, Nishi looked like a seeker and poet all right. Furthermore, he was trained by Rabindranath Tagore the *littérateur*. Consequently Roy was naturally drawn towards him. As for the other, he obviously felt very happy to personally know Roy, a debonair *homme de lettres* who was not only the scion of D.L. Roy (who has not heard of him?) but an institution in himself, having set—as a gifted composer—hundreds of poems to tune. He started taking much interest in Nishi after this acquaintance. He even got a few freshly written poems from his new friend and sent them to Sri Aurobindo for his consideration. The master liked them. Thereafter Roy often sent him Nishikanto's poems. Thus the newcomer was introduced to Sri Aurobindo

Even in this new environment Nishikanto's writing went apace with undiminished interest. If anybody paid him a visit in the afternoon, he could see Nishi absorbed in his creative work, sitting at a table for hours. And he would happily read out his creations to those who went to visit him. A few of the poems were in English too. He started writing poetry in English only after coming here. And he soon developed considerable faith. When he was asked (of course by one untutored in English) from where he had picked up such English that he could produce good poetry, his reply always was, "Is it I who write these poems? It is the guru who is getting them written through me." He was drawing inspiration from some deeper planes of consciousness than the ordinary poetic intelligence. Streams of poetry came flowing through his mind either in one language or the other. At first naturally his English was not good, but gradually he learnt that language enough to be able to express his thoughts correctly.

I shall now say something about how Nishikanto progressed in his writing and achieved poethood. The poet Harindranath Chattopadhyaya¹ (brother of Sarojini Naidu) who later became a cine-actor, does not require any introduction. Now Nishi came to live on the ground floor of the same house where Harindra lived. Sitting at his typewriter, the latter produced daily two to three poems, possibly more. Soon a time came when Nishikanto and he were as if competing with each other. Shortly the names of these two phenomena were on

¹ For more about his poetry see *Mother India* issues of October, November, December 1991

everybody's lips. But the word prolific could truly be applied to Harindra alone.

It was perhaps from or about this time that, like Harindra's and the others', Nishikanto's poesy also started being infused with spirituality—in its mood or feeling, in its rhythm and tone. In relation to his earlier products there appeared to be a great difference, an earth and heaven difference.

As the days rolled by the poet's writings reflected a deeper admiration and devotion for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He started to produce in earnest poems of which they were the subjects and which were dedicated to them. Being the poetic expression of a spiritual person's experiences or a yogi's feelings, they were quite different from his poems written at Shantiniketan, and could be a little abstruse or difficult of understanding for some. Even Rabindranath—whose *Gitanjali* is excellent spiritual poetry—remarked when a few poems were sent to him by post, "It is too yogic (esoteric) for me." Even greater writers could be quite abstract or abstruse even in prose. And Nishikanto was not an exception.

A note on his earlier verses wouldn't be irrelevant, in fact it will show how Tagore had a point in seeing a marked difference between those and the later ones. Young Nishi had written a few verses which were published in 1935 or so in a well-known journal called *Vichitra*. These were probably the only kind of verses with which Tagore had been familiar so far as Nishi was concerned. They were not quite connected one with another. Nor were they of a mystic genre like his later works. They owe much to a simplicity of thought and expression, they deal with human experience in life and have mundane themes. As such the poems themselves were also ordinary and direct, but beautifully written, and at the same time remarkable for their simplicity. Even so it must be noted that the real form of Nishikanto's spirit wasn't there, his poetic eye had not yet opened then.

After the passing of the poet they were not found in his personal collection here. No doubt after his coming to Pondicherry he had forgotten all about them or did not care to keep copies or the manuscripts. Under the circumstances Nolini Kanta Gupta, who remembered well having read them periodically in a magazine (along with his own poems which were published in the same journal) took interest in tracing them aided by his assistants. They could collect about thirty-nine of these juvenilia, and then posthumously republished them first in *Bartika* serially and later in a collected form.

(To be continued)

DHIRAJ BANERJEE

“CHILD OF THY SOUL”

We have selected five poems from the series of twenty with the above title, inspired by “The Rights of the Child” Proclamation, which was unanimously adopted in 1989 by one hundred and fifty-nine nations at the General Assembly of the United Nations.

1

It was Spring,
Wherever I looked it was Spring
Then I saw a child hungry
And there was Winter and Darkness
Inside and out.

2

I awakened with a terrible pain
For I heard a child cry for food and in vain.
Tearful, sad eyes won't leave my soul,
This awful vision will haunt me till dawn.
Then I leapt up with a stabbing joy,
My child isn't hungry, my child is home.
Hot tears were running down on my face,
I cried with gladness, my lamb is safe.
Then slowly the pain overtook my heart,
Each child is my child; I cannot sleep.

3

I heard a thunder throughout the night,
Great rain came down on thirsty ground
I wondered why none were awake
But I.

The houses were covered in deep darkness
That like a cosy blanket upon the sleepers lay
And I thought then, how faint is
Our light.

The babe in my arms so tenderly breathed,
 Protected by me, to whom he had come...
 Children of all, the earth is your mother,
 Your father is the sky.

4

THE HEROES OF WAR

To Valhalla he goes, he goes
 Amazed, ablaze, overcome,
 Released from earthly bond,
 Freed from the battlefield,
 He goes where the trumpet roars.

The hero, he goes to Valhalla,
 To Warriors' heaven, to rejoice in glorious battles
 Where do oh, the mothers go and the sprouting children,
 When slain by the means of early death
 Brought to them by brute men?

What must the abode be like,
 What splendidous paradise
 That awaits the innocents, the barely grown children?
 How is the sound of the mother's cry
 That makes the trumpet song a whimper?

Symphony of tears and sighs are
 Moving across circles of times.
 Bid the middle gate be opened
 Where separate dwells pain from victory.
 Let deed behold deed and flow into harmony

5

Two wondering eyes gazed
 Through the crowd,
 The boy stood dreaming and
 Leaned against the wall

Enchanted he wafted
Into that world we shut our gates
Upon oh, so long ago.
I watched him with longing
To float into dream-meadows.

Let me come with you,
Have me enter your realm,
Beautiful eyes, lead me—
I want to dream again.

GEORGETTE COTY

THE MAHATMA AND THE WORLD

IN SRĪ Aurobindo's opinion the philosophical poems in Indian literature constitute a class by themselves, "combining a supreme philosophical genius with a remarkable literary talent, not indeed creations, but noble and skilful constructions, embodying the highest possible thought, using well all the weighty, compact and sparing phrase of the classical Sanskrit speech, achieving the harmony and noble elegance of its rhythms" He goes on to add that "these merits are seen at their best in poems like the *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* attributed to Shankara".¹ Though the merits of this 'admirable' poem are many, here we are mainly concerned with one, nameiy, the 'highest possible thought' embodied in it.

1. *The Question*

The *Vivekacūdāmaṇi*, as we know, is a verse treatise on the nature of *jīvanmukti*. It offers two accounts about the *jīvanmukta*—in the one it shows how a bound soul becomes liberated even while it lives in the body and in the other it describes how a liberated soul serves the world by helping the bound souls to come out of their bondage and live in freedom and peace. In other words, it teaches how a *jīvanmukta* is not only a *muktātmā* but a *mahātmā* as well. Though the text speaks of these two as the two aspects of a *jīvanmukta*, we do not understand how they can exist side by side in the same person without contradiction. For the text repeatedly affirms that one becomes a *jīvanmukta* by *systematically severing all connections with the world. If he is to possess his soul by renouncing the world, how can he return to the world and work for the deliverance of others? If he returns to the world for the sake of helping his fellowmen, does he not get bound by the world and become dispossessed of his soul? If he does not, how?*

2. *Freedom from Bondage*

There are two things which account for man's bondage: one, the delusion that he cannot live without the world; two, the delusion that he is nothing more than his body. Strictly speaking, the first is the result of the second. The text says that the body is the abode of all delusions, *śarīram mohāspadam* (73). As long as we believe that we are not different from the body, so long we look upon the world as the source and support of our existence. Living in these delusions we live in bondage to the body as well as to the world, *dehādibandhaḥ* (548). We become free only when these delusions are destroyed.

He who identifies himself with the external world is subject to misery after misery, *upaiti duḥkhopari duḥkhaḥjātam* (331). Therefore, the first step to destroy this identification is the removal of the external world by living in

¹ *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (1971), p. 309

absolute aloofness, *bahirurodhaḥ* (335). The next step, which is the culmination of the first, is to give up the habit of dwelling on external objects, *bāhyānu-sandhiḥ* (334). And the third and final step is to constantly dwell in one's true Self, *svātmānusandhim* (334).

As long as we believe that the external world includes all objects except our body, our endeavour to be free from the bondage to the world will be inconsequential. We must recognise that our body too, like other things of the world, exists as a perceived object, *paridr̥śyamānaḥ* (155). We are identified with the body even as we are with the objects of the world, *mohāt ahamiti śarīra kalayati* (140). The identification with the body, like the identification with the world, is destroyed in three stages: first, by leaving the body at a great distance even as one does an outcast (287) and severing all connections with it, *na me dehena sambandhaḥ* (500); secondly, by totally ceasing to think of the body, *naśa smaryatārī* (414); thirdly, by transferring the identification from the body to the true Self, *cidātmani sadānande dehārūḍhāmahamdhiyam niveśya* (290).

By practising this discipline with regard to both the world and the body one becomes a liberated soul even while living here, *jīvanmuktaḥ*. He is now established in Brahman which is his true Self and sees nothing else but Brahman, for everything perceived as having objective existence, i.e. the body as well as the world, has vanished from his vision, *na dr̥śyate kaścidayam* (398).

3. Helping Others

To help others in distress is the true nature of a great soul, *mahātmā* (38). He helps them to cross the ocean of birth and death as he has himself crossed it. The text says:

तीर्णाः स्वयं भीमभयवर्णवै
जनानहेतुनान्यानपि तारयन्तः (37)

His help is spontaneous and without an egoistic motive. He is like the spring and the full moon, for they bring happiness to the world without any motive (38). The *mahātmā* is indeed a *jīvanmukta*, but greater than one who cares for his own liberation, *muktātmā*.

To help other bound souls in the world is to establish a positive connection with the body and recognise it as an effective instrument of selfless work, as also to take the external world into account and pay attention to the conditions of other living beings. How is it possible for him to accept the body which he rejected as the abode of delusions and the world which he gave up as the source of all miseries? Further, how does he take note of suffering humanity or how does he act in the world for the sake of helping his fellowmen? For he sees nothing but Brahman—neither the world nor the body which is the instrument of action.

If there is an answer to this question, it must be somewhere in the text itself

and our work is to find the relevant passage or passages which suggest the answer.

4. *The Mukta and the Mahatma*

Let us now look at the *jīvanmukta* a little more closely and notice how he dissolves his bonds. As long as one lives in the waking state the soul is ignorant of its true nature and subject to the delusions of that state. Therefore the text suggests that the soul be lifted out of the waking state and kept in a higher state where it is aware of its true nature, *svasvarūpa* (31), and where the play of delusions is completely suspended by keeping the sense-organs in abeyance. The soul's entry into this higher state is made possible by a steady concentration on Brahman called the *Nirvikalpa Samādhi*. When the soul enters into the higher state, it realises its oneness with Brahman and enjoys the bliss of freedom, *nirvāna sukham* (70). The text says that there is no other way except the *Nirvikalpa Samādhi* by which the soul is to be delivered, *nānyathā* (365). As liberation is attained by keeping the sense-organs in abeyance, the soul thus liberated is spoken of as a *jīvanmukta* who lives mostly in the trance state, forgetful of the world, *prapañco vismṛtaprāyah* (428).

As I have shown elsewhere¹, to become free by entering into the higher state through the *Nirvikalpa Samādhi*, though indispensable in the beginning, is not the ultimate goal of life. To leave that trance state without losing one's conscious identity with Brahman and establish oneself in the waking life without allowing its delusions to distort one's perception of the world is indeed the highest goal to be achieved by a knower of Brahman. The text says that one who achieves this goal is the best among the knowers of Brahman, *brahmavuttamaḥ* (554)

Let us see what the text says on the question of mastering the conditions of waking life. Look at the following verse:

लीनधीरपि जागर्ति जाग्रद्धर्मविवर्जितः ।
बोधो निर्वासनो यस्य स जीवन्मुक्त इष्यते ॥ (429)

We cannot find a better passage than this in support of our view that the ultimate goal of a *jīvanmukta* is the conquest of waking life. It clearly says that though the *jīvanmukta* is fully identified with Brahman in the trance state (*līnadhīrapī*), he gives up that state and returns to the practical world and stays there fully awake (*jāgartī*). That is, he lives in the midst of sense-organs fully awake and active. By returning to the waking state he does not become dispossessed of the knowledge of Brahman, but with that knowledge he conquers all the limitations of waking life (*jāgraddharma-vivarjītaḥ*). Hence the passage concludes that a *jīvanmukta* is one whose waking state (*bodhaḥ*) is without the latent impressions that impose the delusions of the body and the world through the sense-organs (*nirvāsanaḥ*).

¹ *Brahmaviद्या* (Adyar 1992)

Such is the highest state of a *jīvanmukta*.¹

Thus a *jīvanmukta* has to ascend not one but two steps. The first step is to live in the trance state and become a liberated soul, *muktātmā*, and the next step is to return to the practical world and live as a great soul conquering the limitations of waking life, *mahātmā*.

5. *The Answer*

The answer to the question how a *jīvanmukta* helps his fellow beings in the world depends on how we see him.

As a *Muktātmā*, he is mostly in trance, forgetful of the world. None of the things of the world is seen by him, *na dr̥ṣyate kaścidayam* (398). His aim is to be exclusively united with Brahman. He may occasionally step into the practical world. But such occasions are viewed as cases of compromise with his aim rather than opportunities for conquering the conditions of waking life. Hence he hardly takes note of the conditions of others or helps them attain liberation.

As a *Mahātmā*, he is established in the waking life. He has destroyed all the limitations of this life with the fire of knowledge, *bodhavaḥniḥ* (47). Though he is always lodged in his Self, he is not indifferent to the world. On the contrary, he is compassionate and helpful. He helps others to dissolve their bonds and enjoy freedom. For he is a friend of all, *bandhuh* (33). When he helps others, his help knows no barriers. As he lives purifying all things here, *pāvayan-vasudhān sarvān* (577), neither the body nor the world can do him any harm.

N JAYASHANMUGAM

¹ See verse 267. Even after the realisation of Brahman obstinate impressions continue to exist. They also must be eliminated, *vāsanātānavam*.

ESSAYS ON THE MAHĀBHĀRATA (I)

Śrī Kṛṣṇa—The Ritual of Departure

I am presenting here an interesting scene from the Mahābhārata, adapted from my thesis (Pune 1986). The text has been revised and translations rather than the original Sanskrit have been given. They are by J. A. B. van Buitenen.

Kṛṣṇa, after a long stay with the Pāṇḍavas, gets ready for his departure. What appears to be no more than an ordinary formality, reveals itself to be a very significant ritual, which is being analyzed in a slow-motion shot, as it were, to bring out its full meaning. The passage occurs at the beginning of the Sabhā-parvan.

After Janārdana had lived happily in the Khāṇḍava Tract, honoured to his deserts by the affectionate Pārthas, he became desirous of seeing his father and set his mind on going

Kṛṣṇa's stay with the Pāṇḍavas was of a very happy nature. The reason is given: the Pārthas are full of affection for him (*prīṭsamāyuktah*), but it is more than a mere friendly relationship—the Pāṇḍavas are aware of Kṛṣṇa's greatness and they honour him as one who deserves honour abundantly (*pujanārho'bhīpū-jitah*). As cousins the Pāṇḍavas are on a par with Kṛṣṇa; as seekers they recognize his superior standing and power. A motive is given for Kṛṣṇa's departure which ranks higher than his love for the Pāṇḍavas at this moment: his obligation and desire to be with his father Vasudeva (*piturdarśanalālasah*). All this may be regarded as mere formality and in a way it is. But we want to draw attention to the master hand of the poet who, like a skilled diplomat conceiving the wording of a communiqué on a high-level meeting, chooses words with care and consciousness so as to satisfy listeners and to assure them of the perfectly harmonious nature of Kṛṣṇa's stay with the Pāṇḍavas.

The large-eyed hero bade the King Dhṛma and Prthā farewell and he who is worshipful to the world worshipped with his head the feet of his father's sister. She kissed Keśava on the head and embraced him.

Kṛṣṇa bids good-bye to Prthā (Kuntī) and Yudhisthira. His great humility is shown: he who is worthy of worship by the world makes *praṇām* at the feet of his father's sister. Then Kṛṣṇa proceeds to see his sister Subhadṛā.

Thereafter famous Hṛṣikeśa went to see his sister and shed a tear of affection. The blessed Lord gave the gentle and gentle-spoken Subhadṛā meaningful, apt, helpful, brief, appropriate, and excellent advice.

The poet is making ample use of the device of alliteration in all these verses whose beauty necessarily gets lost in any translation. Note in verse 1: *pārthaiḥ prītisamāyuktaiḥ pūjanārḥo'bhīpūjitaḥ*. In verse 2: *prthām prthulocanaḥ pitṛṣvasuh* and *vavande jagadvandyaḥ*. The climax of this beautiful sound play is reached in the last line of verse 5: *bhagavānbhadrām subhadrām bhadrabhāsinīm*. The poetic device is used here not for the sake of itself as in the *alamkāra* type of Indian classical poetry, but as a colourful means of expressing deep and genuine emotion between an extraordinary pair of brother and sister. Kṛṣṇa has tears in his eyes (*bāṣpasamanvūtaḥ*) which speaks of his psychic love for his sister. His manifold advice to her (*arthyam tathyam hutam vākyaṁ .*) is not for the sake of advice but only a medium of his love, his wish to speak to her and caress her with words.

And she gave him messages for her family and honoured and greeted him with many bows. After he had taken leave of the radiant Subhadrā and bid her good-bye, Janārdana went to see Kṛṣṇā and Dhaumya.

In modern language and literature emotional scenes of this kind might be slightly unnatural. But here in the Sanskrit of Vyāsa we can feel at ease. The language is kept sober and does not try to convey anything which is not really there. Thus we can go along with the poet, even bear with occasional repetition. After Subhadrā has conveyed her messages, Kṛṣṇa bids good-bye to Draupadī and to Dhaumya, the priest of the Pāṇdavas:

Janārdana, greatest of men, saluted Dhaumya ceremonially, comforted Draupadī, and bade her farewell. Then the wise and strong hero, accompanied by the Pārtha, went up to the brothers: surrounded by the five brothers, Kṛṣṇa stood like Indra surrounded by the Immortals.

We have called this chapter 'The Ritual of Departure'. It is a ritual indeed, but not a dead ceremony. The outer forms are a living expression of the genuine inner feeling. We see an art practised here which is an integral part of ancient Indian culture. There is a prescribed procedure expressed through the word *yathānyāyam*: according to the etiquette. Verse 9 is a first climax of the scene. Kṛṣṇa surrounded by the five Pāṇdavas is likened to Indra in the company of the Immortals. By bringing in this comparison, the poet gives his characters a touch of the Divine: Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇdavas are like the very Gods moving on earth, and Kṛṣṇa is their Lord.

The bull of the Yadus worshipped the Gods and the brahmins with garlands, blessings, bows, and perfumes of many kinds.

After performing all his tasks, he, first of the steadfast, set out and distributed to those brahmins who were worthy of benedictions presents accompanied with bowls of curd and unhusked rice, and circumambulated them.

After saying farewell to those who are very close to him, Kṛṣṇa now turns to the crowds of brahmins watching his departure and honours them with garlands, many gifts and respectful bows. At the end he makes their *pradaksina*, circumambulation.

He ascended his swift golden chariot, which bore the emblem of Garuda and carried his club, discus, sword, and other arms. The day, the stars, and the hour were propitious when the lotus-eyed hero drove out with his horses Sainya and Suḡrīva.

The 'first round' of the farewell ceremony is finished now and Kṛṣṇa ascends his chariot which carries the emblem of Garuda. Kṛṣṇa has with himself his characteristic weapons, sword, discus and club. Now another feature of the Indian science of departure follows. Kṛṣṇa leaves at a moment which is auspicious from the astrological point of view ("the day, the stars, and the hour were propitious.. "). This is to indicate that the individual (in this case Kṛṣṇa) properly relates himself to the Cosmos and its functioning. A departure signifies a new turn in the life of an individual, and the new undertaking is supposed to be fruitful if the person concerned harmonizes himself with the cosmic forces with which he is in constant interaction. A spiritual genius like Kṛṣṇa may not consult the horoscopes but through his inner attunement he automatically chooses the right moment which is then recognized as 'auspicious' by the astrologers.

From affection King Yudhiṣṡhira ascended after him and, moving aside the driver Dāruka, ablest of charioteers, the lord of the Kurus himself took the reins. Arjuna too mounted on the chariot and waved a large white yak-tail fan with a golden staff sunwise around Kṛṣṇa's head. The masterful Bhimasena, too, and the twins followed Kṛṣṇa, surrounded by priests and townspeople.

We may expect Kṛṣṇa now slowly driving away, waving his hand in a gesture of blessing to the crowds looking on, but there is a delay. Moved by his love for Kṛṣṇa, Yudhiṣṡhira himself takes the reins, while Arjuna, also mounting the chariot, waves a fan around Kṛṣṇa's head in sun-wise direction, which again is another indication of the individual's attunement to the cosmic workings. Several other people, headed by the three Pāṇḡava brothers, provide an escort to Kṛṣṇa as he starts moving out of town in his chariot.

Keṣava, killer of enemy heroes, as he was followed by the brethren

shone like a guru amidst his beloved disciples.

Another climax is reached here in the poet's account of Kṛṣṇa's departure. If in verse 9 he was likened to Indra surrounded by the immortals, he is now said to be like a *guru* among his beloved disciples. We have here a first anticipation of his later role in relation to the Pāṇḍavas, and particularly to Arjuna in the *Gītā*. This verse marks a real turning point and is of the greatest importance. So far we saw Kṛṣṇa treated as a highly respected relative by the Pāṇḍavas. When he met the Pāṇḍavas at Drupada's palace after the *svayamvara*, he touched Yudhiṣṭhira's feet ("said Vāsudeva upon approaching Kuntī's son, best bearer of Law, 'I am Kṛṣṇa,' and touched with his hands the feet of king Yudhiṣṭhira Ajamīda"—1.183.4). This is hardly what we would expect a *guru* to do. Kṛṣṇa is very gradually assuming the role of a divine guide of the Pāṇḍavas. This already became obvious in a scene preceding the one being discussed here. An architect named Maya, who wanted to express his gratitude to Arjuna, offered to do something for him. But Arjuna as a quasi-disciple of Kṛṣṇa could not accept any gift in the latter's presence and therefore he referred Maya to Kṛṣṇa.

Govinda bade the sorrowful Pārtha farewell and embraced him, then saluted Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīmasena, and the twins. The twins clasped him hard with their arms in farewell. After making a covenant with the Pāṇḍavas and turning them and their followers back, Kṛṣṇa departed for his own city like another Sacker of Cities [Indra].

The departure scene is nearing its end now with some final mutual embraces, before Kṛṣṇa speeds home.

They followed Kṛṣṇa with their eyes as far as the horizon, then followed him in their thoughts with love. While their hearts were still unsated of the sight of Keśava, the gracious Śauri soon disappeared from their eyes.

V. Buitenen's English translation fully reveals the content of the Sanskrit original. It is a masterful verse expressing the Pāṇḍavas' deep affection for Kṛṣṇa. Their eyes refuse as it were to lose him out of sight, but in any case their loving thought will follow him even beyond the horizon. And yet some longing remains:

Listlessly the Pārthas, whose thoughts had gone with Govinda, all turned back and the bull-like men returned to their city while Kṛṣṇa on his chariot reached in time Dvārakā.

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

(Continued from the issue of January 1994)

17. THE COUNSELLOR'S DIG

THERE arose a misunderstanding between Adigaman, the reigning chief of Thakadur, and Thondaiman, the reigning chief of Kanchi. It could have been instantly cleared up, but God knows what happened. It grew over the years and the two chiefs turned bitter enemies.

Adigaman, who had a huge army under his command, never waged a war against any country, but used his armed force only to defend his own land from his enemies. And so he was not surprised to receive a message from his arch enemy, Thondaiman, which read as follows: "Get ready to defend your country from my onslaught." In reply to it, he wrote on silk: "Do come to die," and sent it through Thondaiman's messenger.

Avvai, the minstrel, living peacefully in the palace of Adigaman, got wind of the brewing war. She wanted to avert it. And so she spoke to Adigaman thus: "What do you gain by waging a war, O you broad-minded chief? You know it is nothing much. The victor gets a boost to his ego. The vanquished suffers a dent in his ego. But the real losers are the common people in both countries at war. They lose their peace. How could you, the guardian of peace in your country, ever think of destroying it?"

As Adigaman stood listening to Avvai in rapt attention, she continued: "Huts will be gutted Terraced buildings will be levelled to the ground. Hard-earned wealth will be looted. And the effort that every man has put forth to make his land prosperous will be erased from memory... Now calculate and tell me how many heads of soldiers will roll off their necks? How many will be crippled for life? Aren't you aware that the death of every soldier would give birth to a widow? The children of dead soldiers would beg in the streets for food. Imagine the plight of the fatherless children... Should you not take steps to avoid this impending disaster?"

Adigaman clicked his tongue and said: "O Mother! I always think of war as a killer of peace. This is the reason why I don't wage a war... I'll never do it. But isn't it my duty to defend my country and my people from my enemy?"

"But is there no other way out?"

"The only way I could think of is to submit myself to my enemy, which I will not do. It is not that I love my people less but that I love the honour of my country more," replied Adigaman, puffing out his chest. Seconds later, he added: "But if somebody could drive some sense into the war-crazy head of Thondaiman, then there is a chance. But all and sundry can't do it. Only someone to whose words Thondaiman would give heed could do it. Who is that somebody?"

“Well then! Let me try... Allow me to go to Thondaiman’s court as your messenger ”

“Please do. No matter what you tell him. Avert this disastrous war somehow.”

Avvai journeyed to Kanchi as Adigaman’s messenger.

Ancient Tamil literature speaks of two types of messengers: 1. Reporters (those who simply report what their king or chief advised them to tell), and 2. Advocates (those who rely on their intelligence to win over their king’s enemy). The second category is certainly superior to the first. No doubt, Avvai belonged to the superior variety.

Thondaiman jumped for joy at the very sight of Avvai. He was her great admirer and fan. He loved to be in her company and together they chatted for a long time. It is said that the adviser is more important than the advice itself. Avvai’s attempt to avert the war proved fruitful.

“Well then, Wise lady! You showed me the right path... I’ll never again draw my sword out of my scabbard unless in self-defence,” said Thondaiman.

Avvai stood pleased at the words of the chief, from whose mind she had succeeded in uprooting his obsession with war.

A couple of days later when Avvai wanted to leave Kanchi for Thakadur, Thondaiman took her to his armoury. As the huge doors of the armoury were thrown open, Avvai closed her eyes and couldn’t open them for a minute for every weapon kept there dazzled and gleamed.

Avvai opened her eyelids slowly. She saw a great many different kinds of swords—rapier, sabre, cutlass—all kept beside their well-polished scabbards.

The chieftain took the wise old counsellor around. Hanging shields adorned the walls, while spears, javelins, lances and pikes rested leaning against them. Thousands of spearheads were kept in huge wooden containers and their hafts were all tied up like faggots and kept on the floor.

“But for your arrival here, all these weapons would have gone to the battlefield.” Thondaiman said to Avvai. He was secretly laughing to himself for he was sure that the old lady would brief Adigaman about the numerous weapons she had seen in his arsenal.

Avvai thought awhile and said: “What a fool would Adigaman be to think of waging a war against you when you have such well-polished and sharp weapons that are yet to see a war. His weapons certainly would outnumber yours but all that he has are rusted, blunt, broken weapons most of them twisted out of shape. It may need hundreds of blacksmiths to put them back to use,” said Avvai and began her journey to Thakadur.

Thondaiman brooded over the words of Avvai. He then said to himself thus: “How clever is this old lady! I thought she praised me and made a dig at Adigaman. But in fact the dig was aimed at me. Good Heavens! What a fool am I to declare war against Adigaman who had fought several battles and I not even one!”

18. HE STOOPS TO CONQUER

“Oh what a surprise! I can’t believe my eyes,” said Pari, the chieftain of Parambu Hills, comprising three hundred villages. What was the cause behind such jubilation? It was the presence of Avvai in the Chieftain’s court.

Only an hour back, Avvai had left the court of Pari with a bag of gold coins she had earned as an award for singing panegyrics of the chieftain. But what brought her back?

“Even before I could cross the border of Paramu Hills, a masked robber on horseback snatched away the bag of gold that came from your ever-giving hands,” complained Avvai “The rogue carried away the bundle of my spare clothes too.”

Pari laughed like a child at the plight of a fellow who had stepped on a banana peel, slipped and fallen. He then said: “Grandma! Don’t you worry about the stolen things. Stay in my court and please us with your songs. I’ll give you another bag of gold and new clothes for you.”

Avvai stayed for a few more days enjoying the hospitality of Pari and his subjects. She in turn pleased them with her songs of wisdom. Pari gave her a bag of gold twice the size of the bag snatched away and quite a big bundle of silk saris too.”

“Generosity! Your name is Pari,” praised Avvai and continued: “I have visited almost all parts of your domain. All your subjects are prosperous. Poverty is unheard of in any part of your land. Yet I wonder why the man who snatched away my bags should make a living by waylaying people?... Further, my dear Pari! There is no guarantee that I will cross the borders of your Parambu Hills with this heavy bag of gold. Is it not your duty to find out the thief?”

“How would you like to punish the thief?” asked Pari.

“Punish him! Why? Give him a job. He will stop waylaying people.”

Pari stood up from his seat and bowed to the old lady. “Pardon me, Grandma!” he said, “I am the thief who snatched away the valuables from you. This I did because I was sure that you would come back to my Hills to lodge a complaint. I found no other way to make you stay here. Now I am happy that you have spent a few days with us. The stolen bag of gold and the bundle of clothes are all here with me.”

Tears of joy trickled out of Avvai’s eyes. She never thought that Pari, renowned for his generosity and valour, would stoop to play thief in order to bring her back to his Hills. What a man!

As Pari gave the stolen goods back to Avvai, she found them heavier than before.

“They are too heavy,” she said to Pari. “But I can’t expect them to be light, for they are laden with your love and affection.”

19. A LESSON FROM A COWHERD

It was a very sultry morning. Avvai who happened to pass through a jungle stood in the shade of a jamoon plum tree. Looking above she saw many ripe plums dangling from the tree. Her tongue began to water. No branch was within her reach.

“Oh, How tantalizing!” She said to herself. While her mind stood glued to the plums on the tree, her eyes searched for stones on the ground.

“What are you searching for?” The voice came from the tree.

Avvai shaded her eyes with her left hand and looked above. She saw a half-naked boy relaxing on one of the high branches in the tree.

“What are you searching for on the ground, old lady?”

“A stone,” replied Avvai.

“Is it to bring down some plums?”

“Yes. You are right.”

“Why do you want to hurt the tree by hurling a stone at it? Further, are you sure that you are a good shot?” asked the boy giggling.

Avvai felt insulted. She waited for the right opportunity to avenge the insult. “Who are you?” she asked.

“Me?... I am a cowherd. All those buffaloes that you see grazing around are mine... Do you want plums?”

“Yes! A few. . . to quench my thirst.”

“Well then! You want them hot or cold?” asked the boy with a mischievous smile on his lips.

Now it was Avvai’s turn to giggle. “You born fool! Son of a stupid! Are plums baked or cooked on the oven to be hot? Trying to pull my leg, eh? Come on, throw me some hot plums if you can find them. Let me see.”

The cowherd caught a branch in his hand and shook it vigorously. Plums—many of them ripe but a few unripe—fell to the ground.

Avvai picked a few very ripe plums up from the ground. But all of them had invariably gathered dust on hitting the ground and rolling on it. Hence she began to blow on them to take off the dust that had stuck to them.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” laughed the cowherd. “Old lady! Didn’t you call me a fool? But now what are you if not a fool? Why are you blowing on them? Aren’t they hot? Take care lest you should scald your mouth ”

Flabbergasted stood Avvai. Accepting her defeat, she burst into a song:

The axe that boldly splinters
the hardest ebony
has no way but
to acknowledge defeat
before a slippery plantain stem.

So am I to confess defeat
 before this cowherd
 grazing his dark buffaloes
 in the jungle.
 For two nights now,
 I can't have a wink of sleep.

Having listened to her song, the cowherd climbed down the tree and stood before the old lady

The old lady had the shock of her life. The boy who stood before her was not a cowherd but Lord Murugan in all His splendour.

As Avvai beamed with joy, Lord Murugan said "I loved to have some fun with you, my dear grandma! Pardon me for my mischief."

"But you have taught me a lesson, O Divine Cowherd!"

"Oh, have I? Well then! Let me learn from you now. What is cruel?"

"Poverty is cruel. But what is more cruel is poverty in youth. More cruel than that is the disease without a remedy. Even more cruel is an unkind woman. And the most cruel of all is to eat the food offered by her."

"What is sweet?"

"Sweet is solitude. Sweeter is it to worship the Mother. Sweeter still is to move with intellectuals. The sweetest of all is to think of them while awake and asleep."

"What is rare?"

"Rare is it to be born in the human form. More rare is the one born without any handicaps. Rarer still is that one who possesses knowledge and wisdom. The rarest of all is the one giving generously away all that he has, only to meditate upon the Divine. Only for him will the doors of Heaven open."

(More legends on the way)

P. RAJA

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THE poetic and lyrical opening of the book which introduces an eminent literateur of Pondicherry, makes the reader feel he is being led in person to meet the biographee—Shri M.P. Pandit. The description of the serene atmosphere of the Ashram is in itself a perfect prelude to the great soul.

Born in an affluent and religious family, spirituality was inherent in young Madhav Pundalik Pandit. In a family where love was not denied to him, love of Mankind and love of God came naturally.

His first spiritual contact was with Shri Vashishtha Ganapathi Muni at the tender age of twelve. His guru came in the form of Shri Kapali Sastry, a disciple of the Muni, who played a decisive role in his life. Spiritual literature brought unalloyed happiness to young Madhav. This helped him to tide over unhappy circumstances. The photograph and the works of Sri Aurobindo prevailed upon him to join the Ashram in Pondicherry. But he was advised to first complete his studies by his mentor Shri Kapali Sastry, who was also responsible for grooming Madhav as a powerful orator and moulding his future as a Sadhak.

While the Mother of the Ashram unseated herself as Guru, Avatar and Incarnation of Grace to others, to Panditji “she is SHE”. To illustrate the importance Panditji gave to the Ashram and the Mother, the biographer P. Raja quotes from the ‘Preface’ to *Mother of Love*. She is love incarnate. To serve her is the highest privilege in one’s life.

His direct contact with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother helped Panditji go through the rigorous discipline of the Sadhana of Integral Yoga. Besides, he derived inspiration from Sastriar’s scholarly writings, that represented a synthesis of Sri Aurobindo’s works and the Mother’s writings.

A profound sorrow engulfed him on the departure of Sri Aurobindo. Timely relief came with the great truth—“Man lives for the Divine”—dawning on him. He became a prolific writer on a wide range of subjects, bringing philosophy and spirituality from the high pedestals to the layman to satiate his thirst for knowledge. So great was his love for the Mother, that he was able to feel her Divine Presence even when she had left her body and this enabled him to continue his Sadhana uninterrupted.

Panditji’s lectures centred on Integral Yoga, stressing the need to change from self-centred man to universal man. He himself attained eminence in spirituality but disliked being called ‘Guru’. Such was his simplicity. He had implicit faith in the Gita and believed that true renunciation is of desire and ego. The real self is the soul. Its characteristic quality is Love.

Shri Pandit himself was a true example of the Manifestation. He upheld a universe of Love. Consequently he attracted a large coterie of absolute, diehard devotees,—P. Raja, the author of this book under review, himself being one.

The essay “Panditji as I know him” which forms the latter part of the book unfolds the author’s personal experience with the great soul. The book in many ways reveals the author’s unquestionable enthusiasm for Shri M.P. Pandit.

The biography stands unique in that the biographer P. Raja, has employed the story-telling technique throughout the book. This aspect of the book relieves one of the tediousness that routine biography gives. There is simplicity, yet there is strength in his prose, so much that it is poetic and unpretentious. It is vivid and earthy. The author quotes extensively from Panditji’s works, and an elaborate extract from the commemoration volume of Shri Kapali Sastry seems a digression. Yet, the quotes from Panditji’s works are sure to impel anyone to seek the treasure house of books authored by the eminent writer who spent all his days in writing. P. Raja has provided an exhaustive bibliography which is bound to help anyone interested in art and literature, especially one who has a flair for spiritual books or treatises.

M.P. Pandit: A Peep into His Past will gain pride of place not just because it is highly readable, but because of the powerful and genuine feeling with which its author P. Raja has recounted in a novel way the life and works of a sadhak and pen-wielder.

C.P. PRASITHA BALAKRISHNAN

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Special Seventy-fourth Seminar

25 April 1993

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

Speech by Sachidananda Mohanty

A Primer for Modern Life

SAMUEL JOHNSON'S lesser known narrative '*Rasselas*' offers a late Eighteenth Century account of the education of the being and the question of moral choice in human life. The tale of Prince Rasselas who must, against wiser counsel, step out of the "Happy Valley" in search of experience in the world outside, is a significant discourse upon the meaning of learning and socialization.

At the heart of Johnson's polemic is the implicit argument that man is unique and distinct from the beast because he has a moral being. Man's relative freedom, his propensity for Good and Evil are both his strength and his millstone. Human life merits attention because man is erring and capable of conscious change. While civilization is an attempt to enhance the quantum of Good over Evil, it also renders the question of moral choice that much more intractable.

In this debate Johnson has a worthy pedigree in Rousseau and Voltaire as well as successors in Darwin, Marx and Freud. However, the fact remains that if morality or ethics represents a conscious seeking after a virtuous life, then the lessons of life can be seldom translated into a set of *all-purpose* injunctions or imperatives, valid for *all* times.

One could, of course, always refute the argument by invoking the classical virtues: The Old Testament of the Hebrews, The Eight-Fold Path of Buddha, The Golden Mean, the approach of Socrates, Confucius, or Mahavira. However, the invocation of the classical models of virtue in a new context and manner does not necessarily guarantee newness to the present enterprise.

The newness involved in The Mother's approach lies in precisely discarding the traditional moral paradigm in favour of the spiritual. The shift is at once simple and daringly radical, for it confirms the older and unrealized wisdom dating back to Heraclitus that Life is infinitely complex and protean. At the same time, it repudiates our contradictory faith in the efficacy of any single set of keys to unravel Life's riddles.

Again, one could always speak of the universal Truths latent in the civilizations of the world: the search for pure Good and unmixed Bliss, of Progress, Perfection and Harmony, of Patience and Perseverance, Love, Compassion and Comradeship, Faith, Aspiration and Surrender. But what do these qualities precisely mean when one is not in any retreat or idyllic commune? When one is, shall we say, in the "dog eat dog" world? What then could be our primer for modern life?

Firstly, quite contrary to the older teachings which we seem to have effectively internalized, in life, honesty and charity do not always beget honesty and virtue in return. (Assuming that one can define such qualities in given circumstances.) Despite the so-called march of civilization, life unfortunately is more or less, as Thomas Hobbes described it during the 18th century, "poor, nasty, brutish and short." Anyone not convinced of this ought to consider the two World Wars, the Holocaust, the baneful ideological divide of the latest tragedies in Somalia, Palestine or Bosnia. The more civilization advances, the greater seems to be the human ingenuity for evil, greed and deception. Therefore, the only answer of idealism to expediency is that, like knowledge, virtue is its own end. If anything, a virtuous life makes for slower material progress and invites a considerable amount of worldly adversities. This is an inescapable fact of life. In all her commentaries, The Mother comes out as unusually sanguine about life and its problems, while directing our faith to a higher goal.

Secondly, one assumes that Honesty, Truth and Virtue are not dogmatic absolutes that can be used across the board in *all* situations. But the fact that they are not, often becomes a convenient plea for the morally righteous to deceive people and rationalize their patently wrongful behaviour. In a surprisingly large number of cases, the difference between right and wrong is quite clear. When called upon to act, we are often weak-kneed and flinch owing to our own fear, both real and imaginary. Moral explanations seem to come in handy to justify our behaviour, as The Mother always points out.

Thirdly, the old adage "Mind your own business" is one homily that has not outlived its utility despite the passage in time. Since we all live in glass houses, to be judgmental and condemnatory about others is to betray a gross ignorance about our own flaws and invite retributions. As the Christ says, "understand and thou shalt forgive." The answer is not to be sullen, cynical or morbid over one's faults. But a realistic self-awareness often prevents a totally uncalled for and uncharitable view of others. By so doing, we can put a seal upon much of the gossip and scandal-mongering that is our habitual pastime. This is something The Mother was never tired of repeating in all her speech, writing and acts.

Fourthly, much of our creative life at present is driven by the engine of the vital. The urge for creativity is usually for recognition and monetary reward, in short for love of the self in a plainly egoistic sense. The substitute for this driving

force, The Mother tells us, is the joy of creativity, for self-expression and self-transcendence. However, for all practical purposes, this remains an ideal. Wherever the lures of competitiveness and vital gain are taken away, it seems to result in stagnation, complacency and inertia. This is a challenge common to both spiritual and worldly communities. The answer, The Mother tells us, is to remain linked to the psychic being in us which is the fountainhead of energy, inspiration and creativity. Some of the models of creativity so far available to us are the romantic stereotypes of a Blake, Baudelaire and Lawrence. Many of us have inherited a view of art that links poetry with madness and creativity with the condition of the extremist. How to harness the Dionysian self without having to immerse oneself in evil or the "destructive element" (as Conrad puts it)?—this remains one of the foremost challenges of the future. However, the fact that this feat can be attained was exemplified in The Mother's own life as an artist.

Fifthly, how to establish human relationships, especially between men and women, on a permanent footing of mutual respect and harmony? More important, how to ensure this within and outside the boundary of marriage? Much of the relationship, as we know, is based on self-love and, therefore, inevitably leads to jealousy, possessiveness and rancour, a repetition upon the human plane of a drama essentially of the vital world. How are we to discover the joy of creative human relationships while discarding the vital drama of attraction and repulsion which is our present lot? Again, The Mother spent considerable time and effort in order to throw light on this vexing issue. To have an attitude of empathy towards others is clearly the first step towards the education of feelings and emotions. Progressively this love includes all, including Nature and the circumambient universe.

Johnson's view of life as expressed in *Rasselas*, that there is little to be enjoyed and everything to be endured, is obviously marked by a stoical temper, essentially alien to the Indian psyche and tradition.

Instead, to go through life with cheerfulness, accepting life's myriad joys, pitfalls and complexities with peace, equanimity and a sense of courage is the supreme lesson we can learn from The Mother's example.