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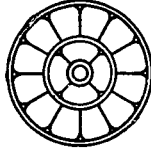
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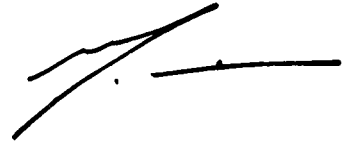
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE MOTHER ON HER RELATIONSHIP WITH US

“I AM WITH YOU”

“I am with you ” What does it mean exactly?

When we pray or struggle with a problem within ourselves, are we really heard, always, in spite of our clumsiness and imperfection, in spite even of our bad will and our error? And who hears? You who are with us?

And is it you in your supreme consciousness, an impersonal divine force, the force of Yoga, or you, Mother in a body, with your physical consciousness? A personal presence that really knows each thought and each act and not some anonymous force? Can you tell us how, in what way you are present with us?

Sri Aurobindo and you, it is said, form one and the same consciousness, but is there a personal presence of Sri Aurobindo and your personal presence, two things distinct, each playing its own particular role?

I AM with you because I am you or you are me.

I am with you, that signifies a world of things, because I am with you on all levels, on all planes, from the supreme consciousness down to my most physical consciousness. Here, in Pondicherry, you cannot breathe without breathing my consciousness. It saturates the atmosphere almost materially, in the subtle physical, and extends to the Lake, ten kilometres from here. Farther my consciousness can be felt in the material vital, then on the mental plane and the other higher planes, everywhere. When I came here for the first time, I felt the atmosphere of Sri Aurobindo, felt it materially at a distance of ten miles, ten nautical miles, not kilometres. It was very sudden, very concrete, an atmosphere pure, luminous, light, light that lifts you up.

It is now long since Sri Aurobindo has put up everywhere in the Ashram this reminder that you all know: “Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you, because she is, indeed, always present ”

This is not a mere phrase, not simply words, it is a fact. I am with you in a very concrete manner and they who have a subtle vision can see me.

In a general way my Force is there constantly at work, constantly shifting the psychological elements of your being to put them in new relations and defining to yourself the different facets of your nature so that you may see what should be changed, developed, rejected.

But that apart, there is a special personal tie between you and me, between all who have turned to the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and myself,—and, it is well understood, distance does not count here, you may be in France, you may be at the other end of the world or in Pondicherry, this tie is always true and living. And each time there comes a call, each time there is a need for me to know so

that I may send out a force, an inspiration, a protection or any other thing, a sort of message comes to me all of a sudden and I do the needful. These communications reach me evidently at any moment, and you must have seen me more than once stop suddenly in the middle of a sentence or work, it is because something comes to me, a communication and I concentrate.

With those whom I have accepted as disciples, to whom I have said Yes, there is more than a tie, there is an emanation of me. This emanation warns me whenever it is necessary and tells me what is happening. Indeed I receive intimations constantly, but not all are recorded in my active memory, I would be flooded, the physical consciousness acts like a filter. Things are recorded on a subtle plane, they are there in a latent state, something like a piece of music that is recorded without being played, and when I need to know with my physical consciousness, I make contact with this subtle physical plane and the disc begins to turn. Then I see how things are, their development in time, the actual result.

And if for some reason you write to me asking for my help and I answer "I am with you", it means that the communication with you becomes active, you come into my active consciousness for a time, for the time necessary.

And this tie between you and me is never cut. There are people who have long ago left the Ashram, in a state of revolt, and yet I keep myself informed of them, I attend to them. You are never abandoned.

In truth, I hold myself responsible for everyone, even for those whom I have met only for one second in my life.

Now remember one thing. Sri Aurobindo and myself are one and the same consciousness, one and the same person. Only, when this force or this presence, which is the same, passes through your individual consciousness, it puts on a form, an appearance which differs according to your temperament, your aspiration, your need, the particular turn of your being. Your individual consciousness is like a filter, a pointer, if I may say so, it makes a choice and fixes one possibility out of the infinity of divine possibilities. In reality, the Divine gives to each individual exactly what he expects of Him. If you believe that the Divine is far away and cruel, He will be far away and cruel, because it will be necessary for your ultimate good that you feel the wrath of God; He will be Kali for the worshippers of Kali and Beatitude for the Bhakta. And He will be the All-knowledge of the seeker of Knowledge, the transcendent Impersonal of the illusionist; He will be atheist with the atheist and the love of the lover. He will be brotherly and close, a friend always faithful, always ready to succour, for those who feel Him as the inner guide of each movement, at every moment. And if you believe that He can wipe away everything, He will wipe away all your faults, all your errors, tirelessly, and at every moment you can feel His infinite Grace. The Divine is indeed what you expect of Him in your deepest aspiration.

And when you enter into this consciousness where you see all things in a single look, the infinite multitude of relations between the Divine and men, you

see how wonderful all that is, in all details. You can look at the history of mankind and see how much the Divine has evolved according to what men have understood, desired, hoped, dreamed and how He was materialist with the materialist and how He grows every day and becomes nearer, more luminous according as human consciousness widens itself. Each one is free to choose. The perfection of this endless variety of relations of man with God throughout the history of the world is an ineffable marvel. And all that together is only one second of the total manifestation of the Divine.

The Divine is with you according to your aspiration. Naturally that does not mean that He bends to the caprices of your outer nature,—I speak here of the truth of your being. And yet, sometimes he does fashion himself according to your outer aspirations, and if, like the devotees, you live alternately in separation and union, ecstasy and despair, the Divine also will separate from you and unite with you, according as you believe. The attitude is thus very important, even the outer attitude. People do not know how important is faith, how faith is miracle, creator of miracles. If you expect at every moment to be lifted up and pulled towards the Divine, He will come to lift you and He will be there, quite close, closer, ever closer.

“TO BE NEAR ME”

In order to be always near me really and effectively you must become more and more sincere, open and frank towards me. Cast away all dissimulation and decide to do nothing that you could not tell me immediately.

*

Do only what you could do before me without feeling embarrassed, say only what you could repeat to me without difficulty.

*

Be very sincere and straightforward, harbour nothing within yourself which you cannot show me without fear, do nothing which you would be ashamed of before me.

*

Try to be spontaneous and simple like a child in your relations with me—it will save you from many difficulties.

*

*Be simple,
 Be happy,
 Remain quiet,
 Do your work as well as you can,
 Keep yourself always open towards me.
 This is all that is asked from you.*

—
—

Be simple,
 Be happy,
 Remain quiet,
 Do your work as well as you can,
 Keep yourself always open towards me—
 This is all that is asked from you.

(Collected Works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 75-79.)

YOUNG PEOPLE AND DIFFICULTIES ON THE PATH

A LETTER BY SRI AUROBINDO

It may be said generally that to be over-anxious to pull people, especially very young people, into the sadhana is not wise. The sadhak who comes to this yoga must have a real call, and even with the real call the way is often difficult enough. But when one pulls people in in a spirit of enthusiastic propagandism, the danger is of lighting an imitative and unreal fire, not the true Agni, or else a short-lived fire which cannot last and is submerged by the uprush of the vital waves. This is especially so with young people who are plastic and easily caught hold of by ideas and communicated feelings not their own—afterwards the vital rises with its unsatisfied demands and they are swung between two contrary forces or rapidly yield to the strong pull of the ordinary life and action and satisfaction of desire which is the natural bent of adolescence. Or else the unfit adhar tends to suffer under the stress of a call for which it was not ready, or at least not yet ready. When one has the real thing in oneself, one goes through and finally takes the full way of sadhana, but it is only a minority that does so. It is better to receive only people who come of themselves and of these only those in whom the call is genuinely their own and persistent

SRI AUROBINDO

(Letters on Yoga, Cent Ed., Vol. 24, Part 4, pp 1615-16)

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

ON November 25, 1993, my eighty-ninth birthday, I visited Sri Aurobindo's room after nearly fourteen years. My physical disability had deterred me from becoming a burden to friends who would have had to carry me in a chair. They said it would be a pleasure, but I had no heart to impose on them such pleasure. Now my young friend Saurav, who is one of a small group of youngsters most willing to help me and who often goes out of his way to make life easy and interesting for me, pleaded that I should go to the Room of rooms. I just could not disappoint him. So he took me in my wheelchair to the Ashram's ground-floor-space outside Nolini's room. Then he and others helped me transfer myself to an ordinary chair. This chair was carried upstairs and put in Sri Aurobindo's room near the door which is close to Nirodbaran's office "den".

When I reached the Holy of Holies, there was a rush of delightful memories. This was the unforgettable room whose every aspect had been so familiar to me in those days when, along with a few other people, I would spend my time from nearly 8.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. in its proximity. From 12.30 to 1.30 I would be alone nearby waiting for the Mother to finish her lunch with Pranab and go to her bathroom and then meet me before going for her short siesta.

As soon as my chair was placed in the sanctum I became keenly aware of the Presence that had lived there in an embodied form for twenty-three years. Again and again during those years I had touched his feet in the darshan-room while he would be sitting on a couch with the Mother on it to his right—the beautiful executive and manifesting Light of him, armed with his full power. It is worth noting that in all sacred sculpture of India, Ishwari, "the Eternal Feminine", is shown always to the Ishwara's left. Even in the grandiose representation where the God and the Goddess are fused as one supreme Entity in a single form—*ardhanārīśvara*—the left half expresses her. But Sri Aurobindo has created a new age of spiritual dynamism in which the Divine Mother shines forth with the total force of the Lord. Symbolic indeed is her position in a world-work which is figured not only as an aeonic many-featured sustainment of her original creative activity but also as the source of a novel era in which the foundation is laid of an ultimate all-round divinisation of the human being, down to the very body. In that era the final salvation is not a rapturous resort to the Beyond: it is an ecstatic establishment here on earth of the entire contents of that glorious Otherwhere. In that superb Secrecy awaits, according to Sri Aurobindo, the godlike original of every part of us. Not merely are an ideal mind and life-force there, ready to descend, but a perfect body exists as well—a super-physicality which will transfigure the present "vesture of decay" in which the soul has had to play its role on the terrestrial stage in life after life for millennia.

While I sat in Sri Aurobindo's room, the Master of the Integral Yoga was an intense presence all around me, a large enfolding power which seemed to surround me and permeate me and—wonder of wonders!—have its most living centre in my own heart. It was as if he were filling the room with a starting-point deep within me. It must have been a supreme act of Grace that gave me this feeling, a special boon to one who had come as a sort of prodigal son after a long exile. Or was it a lesson brought home to me that, after all, the real place of Sri Aurobindo at his most Avataric was not in any particular physical spot but in the profundity of love in a devotee's being?

On one side of me was Saurav and on the other my friend Ruth who had asked for the favour of accompanying me as a permitted associate. At first we three were alone. After a while the whole room filled up. At the end of the time allotted for meditation I asked to be taken to the other parts of the first floor with which I had been familiar in the past. My chair was carried into the room where the Mother used to sit every morning with her secretaries in a semicircle in front of her, discussing matters of the day before or of the day ahead. At one end of this room was the easy-chair in which the Mother used to sit every afternoon to eat her lunch. Here Kumud now put some special blessing-packets for me on the cushion of the chair along with some flowers. I took them all with happy gratitude.

At the other end of this room was the entrance facing across a little space the room which at one time had served as the Mother's dressing-room. Here every afternoon she would be seated in a chair and sip her glass of fruit-juice. Those who were to meet her would be squatting opposite her in the room from which I was now viewing her dressing-room. On rare occasions I would come up in the afternoon to have a few words with her on some urgent matters. I well remember how once I, kneeling before her, reported the latest news I had heard from "home". Sharply the Mother said: "I have caught you out. Where is what you call 'home'? Is it still in Bombay or is it here?" I was shamefaced and blurted out: "I am sorry, Mother. Of course my home is with you." She made a glad forgiving gesture with her eyes and lips.

As now I looked around, the old days were getting revived in my mind. Now the presence of the Mother began to fill the space upstairs with a smiling centre in my heart.

What most struck me was that there was no sense of emptiness anywhere—no sense of departure by Sri Aurobindo or the Mother. They have left their own luminous atmosphere as a living legacy to the Ashram.

(24 12 1993)

*

Your present state has only one solution. Of course, it is, as you say, "offer,

offer everything, every act, every thought as soon as possible.” But there is a slight slip in the last phrase. “As soon as possible” is not soon enough. No talk of possibility should be there. You must not wait a single fraction of a second. You must not start thinking about your thought and wondering whether you can sweep it away towards the Mother quickly enough.

I am glad your son has been watching sunrises. To get a spur for a better day there is nothing to match this act. What you say about the Gayatri is very true. The sun spoken of in it is the Supermind, the Creator, the Re-creator, the Transformer, whose representative symbol in the physical universe is the luminary that makes our day. The Gayatri may be considered the key to “the Secret of the Veda”, for clearly the sun addressed is not just this luminary. The power that can impel our thoughts must be something psychological and spiritual which the sun we behold shadows forth. “Shadows” must strike you as a peculiar word to use about the brightest thing we know. But it is appropriate, as a line by a poet well known to you reminds us by addressing the Supreme Light:

Lustre whose vanishing point we call the sun,

or again:

Truth-pulsing gold to which the sun were black (21.9 1982)

*

I know that the day of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* hasn't yet come. The Symbol Dawn in which its truth and beauty will be seen by all hasn't broken in people's consciousness. But here and there we shall find inner wakers. They have to be people with a wide sense of poetry and not sticklers after one kind or another and they must be ready to feel and see and hear even when they can't quite grasp. By sensitive feeling, penetrative seeing and sympathetic hearing they will begin to make out the substance and realise the traffic of the gods both as they move in their own empyrean and as they cast their shining shadows on the earth. A profound aesthetic approach is demanded by all poetry, for here is an art and, although art should not be cut off from life nor meaning be a matter of indifference, it is by a receptivity to form, a response to the gesture made to the sensuous heart by the suggestive way the words are linked, the images interplay, the sounds get woven together to evoke by the vivid expression a sense of the inexpressible, that poetry is meant to go home to us. The epithet I have prefixed to “aesthetic approach” is important: the approach, for all its aestheticism, has to avoid being superficial—else we have only a preoccupation with the technique. I have spoken of “the sensuous heart” and my epithet “profound” points to it. What I am trying to say with regard to *Savitri* is that if one searches the art

of it with no fixed ideas as to what a poem should convey and how it should do so, one is bound to be touched by it.

I cannot pronounce anything definite on the line you have quoted from Rilke:

Da stieg ein Baum, O reine Übersteigung,

for I am almost at sea in German. What Stephen Spender seems to have tried by his translation which you quote from memory—

A tree arose, O pure transcension—

is to get a polysyllable word at the end in English to match the original's "Übersteigung" His "transcension" is rather abstract: its sole merit is its being a coinage of his own on the analogy of "ascension". Your observation strikes me as appropriate: "A tree cannot transcend anything. And 'reine' has more of 'clear' ('it got clear away') or 'clean' (in the sense of something coming away clean), than 'pure'." From what I have heard, "reine" translates most commonly "pure", but ultimately the significance would depend on the particular drift of the poetic vision and emotion. Do you think "sheer" would go beyond Spender's sense sufficiently to catch yours without straining the general usage? I agree that non-Latin words would be best in rendering Rilke, for a German polysyllable is quite likely to be concrete in its evocation and need not be echoed by a similar vocable in English from a Latin origin which would lack concreteness. If I may take Spender as a *point de départ*, I may venture on something like:

A tree rose up, O sheer soar-away.

Perhaps my ignorance is flying away with me?

I know there comes a turning-point in life when some mystery pressing obscurely from within has to be given a face and a form in day-to-day movements. I can only guess in rather vague terms at your predicament. Of course I'll pray for you to choose the right path or, like Rilke's up-soaring tree, get clear away into a new dimension instead of wrestling with problems within the old. This would be a peaceful outlet following a peaceful "inlet", a smiling contact with that intrinsic freedom which is your soul. To help the contacting, just pull out "the perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart" and, without trying to resolve it with the mind, offer it to the Mother. Don't offer it in a horizontal line but in a vertical one so as to pass the gesture through the mind and, clearing it of its perplexity, its tangle of thoughts, push everything towards the Divine with a silent plea to Her to make your problem Hers. When you have done this, it is very important that you don't dwell upon it any more. Be as if the question

didn't exist. Let the Great Presence deal with it in Its own mystical masterly manner. Once this offering is done, the soul's innate liberty will be felt. The gesture I have spoken of may have to be repeated many times. Whenever the impulse to start thinking out your difficulty comes up, do again the heart-cleansing mind-numbing handing over of your situation to the All-knower, the All-lover, whose glance can pierce through every knot and work out the Will in which alone is our peace, as Dante knew long ago. I am telling you this method not merely out of any wise book but out of my own life which has realised on its pulses that

All can be done if the God-touch is there.

Now a side-glance at your missionary friend Poh San, St. Paul and the question of translating him. I don't see how she can escape the literal rendering of Galatians 2:19: "Through the Law I die to the Law .." What she has to do is to make a comment on the paradox. The key is supplied in brief by what follows. I am quoting the Jerusalem Bible: "... so that now I can live for God. I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in this body I live in faith: faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake." Yes, the key is here but it rightly deserves to be called a skeleton key. It needs to be fleshed out with the help of other passages in Galatians: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by being cursed for our sake, since scripture says: *Cursed be everyone who is hanged on a tree*" (3:13)—"God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject to the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law and to enable us to be adopted as sons" (4:4-5) I may add a passage from 2 Corinthians (5:21): "For our sake God made the sinless one unto sin, so that in him we might become the goodness of God."

If Poh San would like me to elucidate the paradox in my own words, I would say. "We are all sinners and according to the Law of Moses we deserve to be punished, but Jesus got born like one of us and paid the full penalty on our behalf of a Law-transgressor, the penalty of the lowest of deaths, the death of a 'felon' who is crucified ('hanged on a tree'). Thus he brought it about that we can escape the rigour of the Law by means of faith in him which makes us one with him and hence die to the Law by sharing the sense of the utmost Lawful punishment that he underwent—the crucifixion—and, by so dying, be reborn as God's sons, filled with God's goodness and win salvation." (4.12 1987)

*

Since you entered the Ashram atmosphere as a teenager and paid your respects to the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at that early period of your

life—presumably your first contact with a spiritual power—the influence of these two Masters of Yoga is bound to have been basic. If afterwards you dabbled in other supposedly spiritual or occult influences, what can you expect other than a confusion in your being? Especially Krishnamurti, with his intellectual seductiveness, must have been a contra influence—he strives to strike at the very root of Indian spirituality which lays a stress on guidance by and devotion to a Guru. The Integral Yoga is a very positive power and the personal presence of its teachers, whether physical or subtle, has to be felt all the time with a consistent single-minded fervour. Also, you must plunge as much as possible into their writings. Read the Mother's Talks and Sri Aurobindo's Letters on Yoga. I would advise you to keep with you as a constant companion Sri Aurobindo's small book, *The Mother and the Mother's Prayers and Meditations*. I am enclosing a blessing-packet. By turning to the Mother you will surely get out of the mental and physical deterioration you have marked, particularly after taking a mantra from someone who has nothing to do with our Ashram. (29.9.1993)

*

You say you are torn between two pulls. On the one side you are “career-minded” and on the other you feel “the intense need to give myself away to something higher and bigger than myself”. You ask me to steady you and help you “to have a single orientation in life”. I am sure that basically you are cut out for the spiritual life or rather for a self-dedication to the Divine which will yet leave room for a deeply idealistic love-relationship with a fellow-aspirant. But the push in you towards careerism is also an undeniable element of your nature and it is all the more strong because you have a sharp intelligence and an amiable disposition which easily makes friends and wins people over. I don't think it will ever do to suppress this element. It is common sense to equip yourself, as you are doing at present, to carry it to success. And there is no reason why you should not go ahead nor is there any reason why at the same time you should fail to practise genuine spirituality. The conflict in you arises because you are under the impression that genuine spirituality can be practised only within the confines of the Ashram at Pondicherry. But remember that the Ashram too is a hive of activity. We are not reclusive navel-gazers or preoccupied with “sacred” ceremonies. We work in the Ashram variously as non-Ashramites do in the outside world: the only difference is that our activities are geared to help the Ashram become the centre of a new humanity. What, however, may prove missing for you if you settle down here and seek some sort of scope for your special skills is “rising in life”, moving to a more and more effective position, a greater managerial post or a field in which a wider influence and power can be exercised. If this is your aim when you call yourself “career-minded”, the Ashram is not the place for you to opt for your future. Besides, not all workers

for the Ashram can become officially Ashramites—that is, get supported wholly by the Ashram Trust. One may require to have the wherewithal for one's day-to-day sustenance.

If one does not have the necessary means, what is one to do if one longs to lead the spiritual life? First of all, one must get over the idea that while pursuing a career one gets debarred from spirituality. Essentially, if one can practise spirituality in the midst of the work all Ashramites do, why can't one do the same along with one's activity outside? To attempt such a venture is no chase of a mere will-o'-the-wisp. I know of several cases in which the Mother has asked aspiring Aurobindonians to keep working outside and help the Ashram in any capacity open to them. So there can very well be a class of authentic aspirants who carry on their Yoga with the Mother's own approval in Madras or Bombay or Calcutta or even in England, France, Switzerland or the U.S.A. With the Mother quitting her body, this line of Yoga approved by her does not cease to be eligible. Whether it is meant for one or not has now to be decided by one's inmost instinct. But even if one decides to be an outsider Ashramite, so to speak, one must now and again come into the in-drawing atmosphere that plays about the Samadhī of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Those who live outside India can't do it often. Those who live within our country should drop in as frequently as they can to drink at the fountain-head. (1993)

*

The question you have put me is based on silly ideas about Yoga in general and Sri Aurobindo's Yoga in particular. You think that to be a yogi means to neglect everybody and attend only to one's own good. Yoga essentially means giving oneself wholly to the Divine. All pampering of one's ego, all selfish absorption in oneself is taboo. One has to stop thinking of one's own self and one's ordinary habits and indulgences. God should be all in all to one, in preference to one's attachment to ways conducive to one's egoistic interests. It is true that a good part of one's ego-serving life is attachment to "family, parents, friends, companions" (to employ your own list). This attachment has to go but its going is purely an internal affair: one is not asked to be harsh to anyone. In the old world-renouncing Yogas, there had to be a breaking of ties in a very external way, because one became a sannyasin or at least a kind of recluse. Yet even there the separation or aloofness was done in order to give oneself wholly to God. Surely the old-time life of the sannyasin or the recluse was a difficult life devoid of comforts and conveniences. How could such sacrifice of the props of ordinary existence be dubbed selfish? In Sri Aurobindo's Yoga one does not resort to a forest or a cave or break away altogether from relatives or friends. This Yoga is also a collective process. One does not plough a lonely furrow. One has to work co-operatively with people and there has to be mutual consideration.

Naturally if one's family is far from Pondicherry, one lives separately here, but there is no bar to the family and friends coming here. This Ashram is also an international centre of education. Hence a lot of youngsters are present. We are one big family. However, there is a good deal of freedom for the individual. Ordinary social norms and constraints fall away. But in the midst of all individual or social life the central concentration is on the Divine, never on oneself as you imagine.

Picking out lines at random from *Savitri* and applying them to your own situation is not wise. When it is said, "Pain is the signature of the Ignorance", you can't take it as an indirect message for you, dubbing you an ignorant fool because you have been suffering. Sri Aurobindo means that as long as one lives without God-realisation—that is, without transcending the state of Ignorance in which people ordinarily live—they are bound to undergo pain in one form or another. Sri Aurobindo's term—"the Ignorance"—denotes the common consciousness in which the majority of people live: it does not cover only you and your heart-aches.

(27 8.1993)

AMAL KIRAN
(K.D. SETHNA)

ASHRAM CHILDREN

How sweetly love toddled in,
It played in the Sunlit meadows,
And pearly Moonlit vistas.
It sucked the honey of life,
It danced to the rhythms of spring
And lo it flew away on wonder's wing,
When suddenly we had time to say,
"Come again, sweet children,
Stay forever in our Mother's care."

ANTOU

KALYAN “SAHEB”

SOME MEMORIES

CRICKETER, footballer, tennis player, keen hunter, littérateur, a good translator, and bon vivant, Kalyan took his exit from the playfield of life like a sportsman: quietly and quickly, without any fuss or regret. He was 84 when he went out of this world. As I stood before his dream-like sleep wrapped in linen I heaved a sigh and said to myself “So one of the few old guards departs!”

Kalyan came from an aristocratic family of Calcutta. Originally belonging to Bangladesh, the zamindar Chowdhury family had settled in Calcutta during the British rule and become well-known in élite circles, including the Tagore family, for their cultural contributions in various fields. Kalyan had been to England and Italy to study engineering and was employed for some time in a Russian firm. His cousin distinguished himself in the Indian Army in the liberation of Hyderabad and Goa and, as Chief of Staff, led the army to victory against Pakistan. He had visited the Ashram.

His cousin Dilip-da’s coming to the Ashram inspired Kalyan to follow suit when he had returned from England, leaving his stately ancestral mansion to come to his soul’s spiritual home, never to go back or regret it. Dilip-da is said to have remarked that Kalyan was a Prahlad¹ in the Daitya Kula of their family.

I don’t remember how or why exactly we came to know each other and became good friends. It may have been due to my contact with Sri Aurobindo. Kalyan’s mother too became fond of me for the same reason. She had come to the Ashram for the first time to seek peace and consolation for the loss of her brilliant second son in the last war as a flight-lieutenant of the Royal Air Force. She had an interview with the Mother and was received with great love and was told that the soul of her son was with Her. That and the darshan of Sri Aurobindo consoled her and restored her peace of mind. She was given a spacious room on top of the Dining Room where she lived in style and comfort. She lavished affection on me as if I were her own son. Her aristocratic demeanour could not be mistaken. Kalyan and I would often go to her for lunch and tea.

Later on, our love of sports, particularly of tennis, furnished another bond of friendship between us. The history of tennis in our Ashram life played a very significant role in our sadhana as well, for we came very close to the Mother through this game. It is well known that she loved tennis very much. She had played it in her younger days in Paris. It was an outdoor game which gave her ample scope for physical exercise.

Kalyan was a good tennis player, the best among us at that time, the other

¹ Prahlad, a great bhakta of Vishnu, was born in the family of the great Asura Hiranyakashipu

players being teenagers or beginners. He and I had learned the game before we came to the Ashram. The Mother herself took some tips from him. He also taught the youngsters the fine points of the game. He was given the great favour of carrying the Mother's rackets as soon as her car arrived at the Tennis Ground and, at the end of the game, following her to the car with the rackets on his shoulder. There are many photographs showing him as a fine young man with a radiant face, very proud of the Mother's favour.

When tournaments began to be held, the Mother took great interest in them. On occasion we enjoyed her divine diplomacy at the time. The Puranas abound with stories of gods and goddesses backing their own favourites, particularly Lord Shiva and his Shakti,—Shiva, however, remaining rather impersonal and tolerant. We understood the reason for this belief when we saw how the Mother would playfully want one side to win against the other for no apparent reason. I have cited one instance in my book, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*. To repeat it briefly: Kalyan and myself as partners were to play the finals against a younger couple who were the Mother's favourites and better players. She wanted them to win, but previous to the game she employed her diplomacy, telling me in front of Sri Aurobindo that we had no chance at all to win, that they were far better players, and so on. Sri Aurobindo was listening quietly. I too; I could not utter a single word. While leaving for the game, I asked Champaklal to request Sri Aurobindo to give us force.

When the match started the Mother was present and was watching our fate with keen interest. A subdued excitement among the old and the young in the audience added to the zest of the game. We were badly beaten. When Sri Aurobindo learnt about it, he was much amused and laughed aloud.

There is a similar interesting story showing the Mother's divine strategy. This time Kalyan and I were rivals in an athletic competition. I had every chance of becoming the champion of our group, for I had many items in my favour whereas Kalyan excelled only in tennis ball throw and putting the shot. These three items were my weak points. The Mother quietly instructed Kalyan to go and practise the two throws diligently, which he did. The result was as you would expect: he became the over-all champion. The Divine's ways are beyond our ken.

Another incident worth recounting: we both were also good football players. Once, during the early 'sixties, there was a friendly match between us veterans and the youngsters. The Mother had made Kalyan the captain of the Veterans' Team. She was present in the Sports Ground. A photograph on that occasion was taken where She is seen kicking the ball to start the game. The play started amidst huge excitement. Suddenly something went wrong. Kalyan had fallen down and had broken his elbow, causing unbearable pain. We took him to our Dispensary. The doctor was supposed to have set right the fracture, but the poor fellow had no sleep two or three nights. The pain persisted and was

constant. Then it was decided to take him to Puttur, a place famous for bone-setting along with herbal treatment. We started by car with the Mother's blessings and her precise instructions. This was a big event for me as I was going out after about 30 years. Everything looked fresh and beautiful and we were in the best of spirits. Kalyan was insisting that if the bone was properly set he would like to drive the car himself. He had the reputation of being a good driver though a rash one. Needless to say we enjoyed the trip immensely, particularly the South Indian breakfast we had on the way, consisting of hot *idlis*, coffee, etc., things we had not tasted for years. There were so many restaurants on the roadside, as if the entire local population had their breakfast in the shops. When we reached Puttur we were given a royal welcome. After the examination the Vaidya said that he would set the bone right in no time. If I remember correctly, we saw him palpating the bones, then, he applied some herbs turned into a paste and asked us to wait. After some time he called us and while he was again palpating, he gave the arm a sudden twist. It made a clicking sound. The bones had set. They were bandaged after a herbal medicine had been applied. Kalyan's face wore a broad grin and we started for the secretly planned diversion: the Tirupati temple.

There too we were accorded a special reception, for one of the Trustees of the temple happened to be the father-in-law of a former Ashram sadhak who had become a householder. Thus we were given a V.I.P. treatment everywhere. The Tirupati temple was then not so crowded as it is now. But what wonderful surroundings—zig-zag motor road, hills, waterfalls and vast terrain! Our excitement and joy were beyond imagination after a long cloistered life. We saw the grand spectacle of the Deity wakened up from "sleep" by the bells ringing and the performance of all the rituals on the occasion. We saw the Hundi filled with money and all the riches being counted. After having our fill we turned homeward next day and reached the Ashram. Kalyan enjoyed smoking all the way.

The Mother was happy to see us back, specially with Kalyan cured of his pain and the fractured bones set in place. She gave me an interview and enquired about everything in detail. She listened silently, occasionally nodding her approval. But when she learnt that we had made previous arrangements with the erstwhile sadhak to visit Tirupati and that we had kept it secret from her, fearing her disapproval, she remarked with a smile, "*Quels farceurs!*"—"What jokers!"

Then our lives took different courses. After his mother's death he received a large sum of money, much of which he offered to the Mother, but never uttered a word of it to others. If anyone referred to it, he simply answered, "It's Mother's money, not mine!" He was also generous by nature. However, a farm was bought with part of that money and he was given the charge of running it. Thus he became a farmer and I a professor! He was a professor before he became a farmer. He had to give up all sporting activity while I kept it up. But

there was no break in our friendship. I think it was after the Mother's passing that he started coming to my "tea-club" and kept it up till the end of his life. It was at this time also he became familiar with two girls—sisters—who used to look after him till the end of his life.

My tea-club became famous for its good tea and Kalyan and myself were reputed to be connoisseurs. As its popularity increased, visiting friends began to frequent it, always bringing with them 'Orange Pekoe' tea, reported to be the best tea, from Calcutta. Even our names became familiar to the Calcutta tea-brokers. Our friends would warn them not to try to cheat them by giving inferior tea, for their deception would at once be caught by us. Kalyan himself never failed to gift me superior Orange Pekoe tea on my birthdays. My tea-club was the main diversion in his busy life as a farmer.

Here he had a chance to meet people of various types and nationalities who came to meet me, particularly Italians. Some of them knew no English and, embarrassed to find that they could not communicate with me, were very happy to find Kalyan talking fluently in their language and answering their questions, interpreting between us and also entertaining them with his talk. Tea and innocent talk have been the fare of the club. Subjects ranged from sports, news, reminiscences. Politics was, however, avoided as it tended to become controversial, especially with Kalyan.

Kalyan never failed to turn up at my teas even though he had, of course, his own circle of friends who visited him in his house. One of them has written to me: "I am sorry to hear about the sudden demise of Kalyan-da. Hardly could I even imagine him having any physical problems as he looked the picture of good health and well-being. He gave his unstinted service to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Certainly it came as a shock to me who knew him only in the Ashram for brief periods and was charmed by his scintillating conversation and pleasing personality." These two epithets sum up his cultural accomplishments at times broken by his 'Saheb' temper for which I used to call him 'Kalyan Saheb'.

Lately we noticed a change coming over his jovial mood. A bit indrawn, reticent and leaving the company quietly, his gait somewhat unsteady because of a bad knee.

The unexpected happened a few weeks ago when Kalyan did not turn up for tea. I was told that he had high fever. When I went to see him the next day, I found him sitting in an armchair. He was drowsy and his speech was slurred, breathing laboured. The day after that his condition worsened and at night he became unconscious and was taken to the Nursing Home. Broncho-pneumonia had set in and his respiratory tracts, already troubled by a persistent dry cough, were choked with phlegm. In the day he recovered somewhat, only to comment to the nurses, "Why take all this trouble since I will be leaving soon?" And leave he did—all on a sudden—without any show of distress.

He left a diary in which he has expressed, in chaste English, his inner

feelings and aspirations. This is indeed a find. For he was by nature very reticent about them and never allowed any glimpse of his inner life to others. The diary confirms what we already knew about Kalyan: that he was a true devotee of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. To give one example: when Golconde was being built and the Mother threw all the able-bodied sadhaks into the job, Kalyan was one of them. He worked day and night for years till the huge mansion stood up in its lone majesty.

Now I shall end my reminiscence with the quotation of a prayer from his diary which he never allowed any one to handle.

“O Master Supreme,

How many times in the day one forgets the Lord and to offer to Him all his actions? The offering has to be detailed and minute as well as high and vast. The action of offering is inner always although it can be also in the exterior but that must always be as a sort of projection of that which is within. To remember to offer ever with a one-pointed devotion and an all-covering love which does not come at once but in stage by stage increasing all the time when it is directed exclusively towards the Divine in an inspiration true and sustained, never vacillating. This can only come when the aspiration is ardent to know the Lord and give oneself to the Mother's work wholly. The Mother has to be seen as the sole guide and executrix—all belongs to Her.

Oh! Sadhak, cling to the Lord and His Shakti, the Mother, all thou mayst need will be thine but remember never to be exulted to make a show.”

NIRODBARAN

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SOME EPISODES FROM THE LIFE OF “AN EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1994)

Illness of My Elder Uncle

I WAS facing a crucial situation. In fact, it was a big dilemma. My elder uncle, about whom I have told you a lot, had fallen seriously ill. His lower limbs were gradually losing their strength. Recently the pains had increased. The doctor seems to have said that arterial circulation of the heart was becoming sluggish. It was a serious case. A by-pass surgery had to be done. He was asked to go to Bombay for a further check-up and, if advised, for an operation as well. His relatives were all in Bombay. He had written to me not to worry and that I didn't need to go to Calcutta to meet him. But that couldn't be, for he who had been by my side for the last thirty years helping me in all my needs without any expectation, how could I stay away from him during his hour of distress? If some misfortune overtook him, how would I face it? Would I not suffer a life-long guilt? On the other hand I was all the time hearing my Thakur's voice, "Don't go, don't go!" This was causing the dilemma: "What should I do?"—"Why, when your Thakur insisted that you shouldn't go, you had to listen to him."

"But I couldn't console myself. I had been telling Thakur that the man who had been helping me so much and without whose help I would have been a wreck, should I not see him once at this hour?" He replied, "Whether you go or not, the result will be the same. But if you go you will face a lot of trouble and I shall have to work hard to save and protect you. Be at peace."

After you had left the other day, I wrote to uncle I would start on a certain date. I went to buy a ticket disregarding Thakur's advice. But I was told, "No ticket will be available for a week." A strike was on in Madras. There were riots between Pondy and Madras and in Madras itself I thought, "Well, there is still time. Let me wait until the week is over." But no ticket was available even after it. When a friend heard about it she said, "How's that? I got my ticket all right." Well, here is a puzzle. I thought of phoning to Calcutta. I did, to find that Uncle had already left for Bombay on receiving an urgent wire. I told Thakur, "Why have you done this?" He simply said, "You would have been in real danger." After some days a letter came from Uncle saying that all tests had been done. The operation would soon take place. All his relatives had arrived there. Though I was somewhat quiet, I could not be entirely free from anxiety and fear. Uncle had told me long ago that according to Bhriugu 1988 was a critical year for him. He would have to undergo a serious operation and his life might even be in

danger. I had told him to inform me beforehand about it wherever I might be.

The date of the operation was over and still there was no news. Imagine my condition. After two or three days I received a note of two lines scribbled by him saying that he was all right. He was allowed to pace a few steps in the corridor of the hospital. The doctor had said that a difficult operation like that had been finished in a very short time! I was immensely relieved. Beside myself with joy, I stood before the Lord's picture and said, "You have saved me. You have heard me." As I went on repeating these words, tears began to flow. Then something unbelievable happened. Slowly, Thakur's face began to fade and in its place appeared a face of unparalleled beauty illumined with the sweetest smile. I was watching with my eyes transfixed. Slowly that also faded. I was so overjoyed that I had to lie down on my bed to contain the ecstasy. I prayed to him, "Let my life end at this hour of supreme delight and do take me to you. Otherwise I shall be a prey to the same human reactions of fear, doubt, etc. At this moment when my heart is filled with infinite gratitude, let me leave the world." Thakur said, "Man forgets his gratitude to God, but not to man."

You know, from the day the date of the operation was fixed, I used to get up at midnight and offer the Lord my prayer: "Thakur, save him, save my friend." Who says prayers are not heard?

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

THE BOOK OF JOB

A NEW COMMENTARY

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1994)

Chapter 2

Verses 1 to 6.

FOR the second and last time the verses take us back to Heaven. On another day appointed by God for his “sons” to meet him, Satan went along with them after destroying not only Job’s prosperity but also his posterity. The first two verses are a repetition of verses 7 and 8 of the previous chapter—God’s question as to where Satan came from and the Adversary’s answer that he came from the earth. God after repeating the praise of Job said that Job was constant in spite of Satan moving God against him to destroy him without cause. Satan replied that Job had still his life and a man would give everything if only he could live. God asked Satan to inflict pain on his body without taking his life. God was sure that he would curse Satan to his face: that is, keep his integrity.

Verses 1 and 2. See above.

Verse 3.

After telling Satan that Job had kept his integrity after all his loss, God made the Adversary responsible for the good man’s loss. We know that Satan did not move God against Job or destroy him. It was God who provoked Satan to challenge Him by drawing His attention to Job and praising him handsomely. God’s purpose was to provoke him further to bring more evil to Job. He would bring infinite good out of that evil.

Verse 4.

Answering the Lord’s statement about Job’s integrity, Satan said,

Skin for skin, yea, all that a man has he will give for his life.

Terrien¹⁶ notes that “skin for skin” or “hide for hide” was a popular expression among the bartering traders of the time but that the meaning is obscure. In a general way Satan must have meant that property or even posterity was less precious than physical existence and well-being.

Verse 5.

When Satan argued that Job’s keeping integrity after his loss was not anything extraordinary God asked him to put forth his hand once again and

“touch his bone and flesh” He would still curse Satan to his face, that is keep his integrity.

Verse 6

While asking Satan to put forth his hand, God, as before, reminds him of his limit: “he is in thine hand but save his life.” The Lord wanted Job to live in order that He might make his life deeper and greater than ever before

Verses 7 to 10

Unlike the presentation of Satan’s first infliction of suffering on Job, which is intensely dramatic and highly stylized, that of the second is direct and simple: Satan went straight from God and smote Job with boils from head to foot. Job scratching himself sat in the midst of ashes. His wife asked him to curse God and die rather than live such a life Job only told her that she spoke like foolish women We must receive evil from God even as we receive good from Him without question or hesitation. We see how Job did not speak sinfully even after suffering the worst.

Verse 7.

Commentators and exegetes discuss at length the nature of the skin disease that Satan smote Job with. Earlier commentators thought it to be leprosy of the worst type. In recent years a number of identifications have been made. Terrien¹⁷ believes it to be a disorder known as *pemphigus feliaceus* which appears suddenly and reaches almost at once an acute stage Quoting chapters and verses from *Job* he brings before us the dreadfulness of the disease in the most picturesque way possible.

. It is characterised by bulbous inflammation (cf 30:30) which produces intense itching (verse 8—his scraping himself with a broken piece of earthen ware—a potsherd) Atrophic changes appear on the skin of the face (verse 12—we will see that his friends could not recognise him) and generalised blistering produces an offensive and musty odour The patient becomes extremely emaciated (19:20) and suffers from cyclical evening rises of temperature followed by periods of apparent improvement These are terminated by relapses of constant deterioration, until death eventually comes, sometimes after twenty years

Verse 8.

See the above note, second line Unable to bear the itching he scrapes himself with a broken piece of earthen ware. He sat himself among the ashes: Terrien¹⁸ points out that the ashes referred to are outside Arabian towns, a heap of dung ashes called *mazbala*

Verse 9

The words of Job's wife, "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die," have been variously interpreted. No less a person than St. Augustine called her "the adjutant of the devil" "a spiritual sister of Eve in her asking her husband to forsake his maker."

It is possible, as Terrien¹⁹ suggests,

the desperate and the bewildered woman, still confident of her husband's integrity, unable to hope for his healing, and profoundly sympathetic with his plight, found her only recourse in the idea of euthanasia, and prescribed for her husband a theological method of committing suicide.

Verse 10

Job did not call his wife foolish. He knew that she would not talk that way under normal circumstances. She talked *like* one of the foolish women. The perfect and upright man that Job was, he did not want her, who knew better, to descend to that level. He wanted her to remember that they should receive good as well as evil from God's hands with the same gratitude. The remark that "in all this he did not sin with his lips" means that he continued for all practical purposes to fear God and eschew evil. To curse God would be evil. He avoided it. (See comment on Chapter 1: verses 11 and 12 above and on Chapter 3 below).

Verses 11 to 13.

The last three verses of the second chapter introduce us to the three friends who call on Job.

Verse 11.

The expression, "Job's three friends" indicates his most intimate friends, the only friends that mattered to him. They came all the way to comfort him. If they took the liberty to argue with him it was perhaps, in their limited light, a friendly anxiety "to save his soul"¹ That they made an appointment to go to meet him shows their living in three different places and communicating with one another about their friend's condition. That, in its turn, reveals quite some lapse of time.

The first of the three friends was Eliphaz; he belonged to Teman in Edom; Job himself belonged to Edom, proverbially known for its wisdom, that is, wisdom that the cultivated mind could offer.

The name Eliphaz meant "God crushes" The next friend was Bildad, belonging to the tribe of Shua, which according to Terrien,²⁰ was associated with Aramaean nomads who migrated somewhere to the Southeast of Palestine. His name meant "the beloved of the Lord". (What a contrast to the earlier name! Of

course, God could crush the evil, even the good only to raise up as in the case of Job. Does the contrast in their names also mean a contrast in their natures? We shall see.)

The third was Zophar, hailing from Na'amah, perhaps, Djebel-el-Na'ameh in North-western Arabia. Remarking that the name Zophar is of uncertain meaning, the Exegete offers three alternate meanings: twittering bird or sharp nail or goatlike jumper—which of the three possible meanings suits his nature will be obvious in the debate.

Verse 12.

When the three friends, as they neared the *mazbala* or the heap of dung-ashes where he sat, saw Job they did not know him or saw him not as the man they had known once—such was the change that the disease had brought over him. On seeing him they raised their voices and wept; they tore their mantles and sprinkled dust upon their heads directing it upward (toward heaven) as was the custom when people mourned the dead: though Job's life was spared he appeared as good as dead.

Verse 13.

The friends neared him, sat down with him on the ground for seven days without speaking a word. They saw that "his grief was great".

The last words prepare us for the cry of grief with which the work proper begins, the cry which starts off the debate, the central part of the work, where the protagonist's consciousness is gradually evolved and made ready for the great theophany leading on to his regaining all he had lost with a new value and meaning.

(To be continued)

K.B. SITARAMAYYA

Notes

- 16 P 919
- 17 & 18 P 920
- 19 P 921
- 20 P 922

NISHIKANTO: THE MYSTIC POET AND ARTIST

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1994)

ALTHOUGH poetry flowed easily through Nishikanto's hand it never occurred to him that he could produce any lyrical verse. It was as though not in him. Or it only seemed so. That faculty had not quite developed in him even when he was at Shantiniketan which was a well-known base for song and music. But it did develop gradually, especially after his acquaintance with D.K. Roy. And it is known how. As I said earlier, Roy spent his time in doing sadhana, composing poems and music. Nishikanto in his leisure time visited him. One day Roy, with his melodious voice, sang to him a song composed by his father D.L. Roy. The listener liked it. Whereupon the rhyme and reason or nitty-gritties of lyrical composition were explained to Nishi; after that Roy suggested to him to compose an imitation in words of the same kind. He could do it, and came back with the piece the very next day. Roy found it quite good. Thereafter he used to sing to him a song and then ask him to compose an imitation of it, which Nishikanto would gladly do. It was like a parody. The only difference was that it was not a jocular re-creation as a parody often is, rather it maintained the tone of the original verse-form. It was therefore less easy to write than a parody. This way he transcribed the creations from other languages also, like Hindi, Sanskrit or Bhojpuri, of such authors as Kabir, Mirabai, etc.

This was the technique by which Nishikanto learnt later to compose his own original lyrics. Thus a poet almost without any music in him bloomed into a lyricist as well. Generally persons who are not thoroughbreds in music cannot compose songs properly. But Nishikanto picked up this skill well. He was a breed apart. Even having been a stranger in the realm of music, he developed into a regular composer of lyrics of undisputed merit. And for this he had great regard for D K. Roy who introduced him to this field.

Nishikanto had undiluted praise not only for the songs but also for the melodious voice of D K. Roy, and he gave it expression by honouring him with the name "Song-bird" on one of his birthdays. Steeped in the mystique and spirit of the Ashram, the 'Moon-poet' of Tagore and the 'Song-bird' together produced a series of lyrics which have a distinctness of their own and which always charm us because they retain something of the atmosphere prevalent at that time. These songs were later published in book-form. The credit for enlivening them with tunes and giving them a form of melodious presentation goes to D.K. Roy and Sahana Devi. These songs were heard and appreciated by numerous listeners (including Tagore) through the golden voice of great singers like Smt. Subbulakshmi, Sahana Devi and some others.

About their activities Shri Roy writes in his memoirs, "I did much research in collaboration with Nishikanto in the field of Bengali prosody and syllabic-

metre use. It was great fun, to say the least, just like playing a game, in T.S. Eliot's simple words." It goes to their credit that at times they could draw into it Sri Aurobindo also. Their endeavour was aimed at the systematic exploration of melodies, working from one song or tune to another, day after day, composing a considerable amount of verse not only of technical virtuosity but also filled with devotional ardour, totalling no less than four hundred of them. Says Roy, "This activity in collaboration with the poet Nishikanto Roychoudhury helped me experience what the delight of creation could be."

They ceaselessly experimented with diction and caesuras. As such they could very well be ranked second perhaps only to Madhusudan who had ushered in a new age in Bengali poetry. While Roy and Nishikanto were engrossed in research on the art of correct versification, the new forms based on rhyme-and-rhythm, they wisely kept in touch (through numerous, lengthy and scholarly correspondence) with one who was a master in the field. He, Probodh Chandra Sen, lived in Shantiniketan. D.K. Roy's book on Nishikanto and his poetry is dedicated to this person. Rabindranath Tagore, who also was aware of their experiments, felt that everything was probably somewhat exaggerated. His own poetry, though, never ran short of any lyrical qualities. It perhaps came to him without difficulty, so he felt amazed and amused when people broke their heads over the details or *minutiae* of quantitative verse. To him poetry was always more than rhyme, rhythm and measure.

The search for perfect rhythm and measure continued into the war-years. And if the year 1940 seemed gloomy for those affected by the ravages of war, it was also a year to be remembered for our poet whose first volume *Alakananda* appeared the same year carrying the message of peace, a collection that marks the maturing of his talent. And happily Tagore was alive for another year; a copy of the first book of his moon-poet reached his hand all right. This time the grandee's comment was favourable, and could safely be used as a valuable certificate for the ensuing volumes by the publishers. Yes, the king of melodies was astonished how Nishikanto could produce such mature poetry, and rhythmic too, not to talk of other qualities. An adept in handling lyric themes and forms, some of his poems which were not included in this volume were nonetheless used as lyrics for gramophone records; these songs also Tagore seems to have heard and appreciated. But Nishi's best writings were yet to come, reading which Sri Aurobindo was to comment. "He is the Brahmaputra of inspiration." Before, however, writing about his creations of poetry as well as art, a personal note about his life would come in handy at this point.

After Roychoudhury got settled in the Ashram, his niece came over also and joined him. A house with a small nursery was allotted to them, a red-coloured building behind the GPO called by the name Santhal.

Now, among those who knew the poet Nishikanto there were a few, like some visitors touring Pondy, who wondered why Nishikanto Roychowdhury

should have thought of moving down south renouncing the company of the great Tagore and was also further followed by some of his clan members. In the mind of such people Nishi's image as the Moon-poet of Tagore was still very much there. With this point considered, my earlier account describing the details of his coming to Pondicherry will, I believe, suffice as explanation. As for his relation with Tagore, what Nishikanto has stated about the poet laureate as part of a reply to an interviewer is actually a fine pointer to Tagore's thoughtfulness and kindness towards his fellowmen. Nishikanto gave this scoop no doubt to clear all misgivings and doubts regarding the good relationship between Tagore and others, including himself.

The anecdote he related to a journalist is as under.

One morning at breakfast Tagore brought up the subject of X, a young man, and his sister with whom Nishi (age 22 years) had formed a close connection at a much younger age. A long time had elapsed since he had seen them last. But Tagore must have had some contact with them.

"Do you remember X?" Tagore softly asked. There was a feeling of anxiety in the voice.

"X? oh yes, oh yes; certainly I remember him," Nishi eagerly replied to the aged bard. He further related:

"We used to play together at Sriniketan" (That is, what is now being called by that name).

"You remember quite well, quite well," nodded the poet. "Yes, you used to play together. But alas," suddenly Tagore sighed. He paused for a while. A look of sorrow clouded his wrinkled brow.

Nishi felt very much puzzled as he sat eating his toast. He couldn't quite guess what was the trouble. The suspense made him feel uneasy.

"Yes, sir, I remember quite well," he repeated for the convenience of exchange.

"I wonder whether or not I'll be able to save him," Tagore seemed to be vexed, and Nishi too.

"Why, sir, why are you speaking like that? What happened?" Nishi exclaimed, a plain surprise in his voice. His mind raced with numberless thoughts.

"He has been very sick, you know, seriously ill," Tagore explained. "I'll bring him here and then send him to Switzerland if necessary. Yes I'll send him to Switzerland, cost what it may."

The journalist who was interviewing Nishi was much moved hearing this small piece of enlightening story about Tagore.

The new house where the poet now came to stay and where this interview took place has, as I said earlier, a nursery and the plants and trees there had much influence upon him. He could easily attune himself to his new surroundings. In particular he developed kinship or rapport with a fairly big old tree

there, a Spanish cherry, which became for him a source of inspiration. It is a tree with innumerable tiny fragrant flowers. The result was a lengthy and substantial poem divided into eight parts, with a series of strophes, forty in total, the work of a mature literary genre artist. Wholly autobiographical as it is, it unrolls as a tapestry of recollections, telling us about the different phases and angles of his life: as a yogi, as a poet and as a man continually suffering from one illness or another. As such it may seem to have more than one mood. It is a mixed genre, so to say, a sort of documentary narrative, expressing sorrow, happiness, humour and other emotions. But it has consistency and a harmonious rhythm all through. This too, in spite of its length, attains the artistic level and poetic excellence of his best verses.

Like this he produced many stanzas of poetry. His notebooks were full of them, sublime poetry, mostly with high thoughts. The poet as a seer (Kavi) was coming more and more in front. He wrote with depth and freshness. It may be noted that Nishikanto's poetry doesn't owe its status to the spiritual alone. His output was of a diverse character, and had many technical qualities. There are ornamentation, aestheticism and symbolism. He is known for his penchant for symbolist poetry. We find that thought, image and dream elements are reflected through symbols in the light of his vision. His poetry achieved quality not only because of these experiences as a spiritual seeker, but also because they are combined with his subtle sensibility proper to an artist and his literary technique. This imagist has seen the world and life through the eyes of a mystic, a visionary. No doubt these things, these qualities were there inherently even when he was in Shantiniketan (though perhaps not in such a developed state) or else how could he have indulged in writing poetry following his own bent, how could his creation have shone, if not for these, even when he was under the shadow of the great Tagore?

If his readers don't always decipher or enjoy the abstruseness of his expression in the poetry, yet the lilt and the rhythm are there to satisfy them. Some of his poems are anthologized and used as texts for their fine qualities. One comment of Sri Aurobindo on his poems was, "He does not repeat his images... and they are exceedingly striking and forceful." True to his calling, he was a real 'Kavi', a seer. His poetry also developed in this line to make him a creator of immortal verse.

(To be continued)

DHIRAJ BANERJEE

FREEDOM IS THE ULTIMATE CHOICE

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1994)

HISTORY records that Tibet was an independent country inhabited by a peace-loving, hard-working people with their own distinct culture. They were more concerned with spiritual than mundane affairs. They were not so much involved in politics, state-machinery, etc. It was a common saying that 'The business of Depa Shung (The Tibetan Government) would be handled by the flat-headed Desi—an allusion to a former *de facto* Prime Minister (*Significance of March 10, 1959 Uprising* by B.K. Tsering, Rangzen, Spring 1993, p. 13), suggesting that the common people did not need to worry about it. There were many invasions of Tibet and many times the Tibetan people entered into agreements with other sovereign governments. It was Communist imperialism that finally knocked Tibet down. Mao Tse Tung invaded it in 1949. In the name of liberating the Tibetans he subjugated them. It is reported that the Chinese killed more than 1.2 million people, destroyed 6000 temples and monasteries, tortured lamas and monks. This barbaric and systematic destruction of the Tibetans' religious life and institutions, so dear to them, roused their national feeling, deeply wounded as it was. There was a popular uprising on March 10, 1959 and as a result of subsequent events the Dalai Lama fled to India and the Tibetan Government in exile was established at Dharamshala. Till today the Tibetans are under Chinese tutelage. The six million Tibetans have been greatly outnumbered by a large body of landless and jobless Chinese people. In the name of development of the land the Himalayan ecosystem is being ruthlessly destroyed. Felling of trees and destruction of flora and fauna are daily affairs, as per reports. Their devastating effect will be felt throughout the region in due course. And the Chinese invasion of India in 1962 is a well-known fact.

It is not that Sri Aurobindo loved to make prophecies. In fact he sees each thing from different angles and he also considers alternative possibilities. Again, before being a yogi and philosopher he was a poet and politician and remained so till the last, though not in the field of ordinary life. He was at the beginning of the present century a revolutionary politician, entirely dedicated to the cause of freeing his motherland. Later his views widened to encompass the whole earth. But politician as he was, with the deepest insight into human nature, he could apprehend the possible move of each country. The Rishi could foresee each step of men and nations. We have already seen how infallible were his ideas about the outcome of the Communist Movement. The Bolshevik Revolution to succeed had to pay a toll of millions of human lives and the state had to be always alert to keep itself in power, killing a few more millions in the meantime for its own existence. Yet it had to prostrate itself, after living a life of 70 years, before the people. Its unpredictability might have baffled the Communist world, the

people who had firmly believed in its eternal existence, but not those who had real wisdom.

If we go to the root of the malady we find that all these ideas and their applications were external. Effort was made to uplift the society and solve human problems by external means. There was no real regeneration of man. According to Sri Aurobindo's ideas man should grow from within. He wrote in the pages of the *Arya*: "Nothing can be real in life that is not made real in spirit. It is only if men can be made free, equal and united in spirit that there can be a secure freedom, equality and brotherhood in their life."

To Sri Aurobindo real brotherhood was the basis for the establishment of equality and liberty. In his "The Resurgence of Asia" (April, 1921) he observed:

"In the Communism of Russia, we fail to find the brotherhood which alone can make possible the liberty or the equality, for which everybody in the world is hankering .. the brotherhood which the world seeks since the French Revolution."

The great revolutionary and once a great Communist leader M.N. Roy in his ripe old age realised the inherent defect of Communism and wrote of the path 'Beyond Communism'. He also realised the ultimate value of Freedom in the absence of which nothing really stands for long. But in spite of his search he ended in his new-found path of 'Radical Humanism'. Without a guardian-God his logical path perhaps ended without a follower.

With the downfall of Communism gradually spreading everywhere, some newer possibilities are emerging in the international arena. One is that the Western democratic capitalism, with its technological force, will have its sway under the leadership of America. And with the disunion and detachment of the central Muslim countries from the powerful control of the USSR, there is the possibility of Muslim fundamentalism raising its head there in collaboration with other Muslim nations of the world. But all such things will not help towards the establishment of better human relationship and unity. The third alternative is the spiritual regeneration of mankind helping towards forming a World Union, and India for that purpose is the fittest country to lead the world. Swami Vivekananda spoke about the Vedic lore of India and its regeneration through spiritual awakening. On 8.6.1967 the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram said: "India ought to be the spiritual leader of the world. Inside she has the capacity, but outside.. for the moment there is still much to do for her to become actually the spiritual leader of the world." Towards forming a true basis of human unity Sri Aurobindo, the author of spiritual nationalism, said:

"A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future... A religion of humanity means a growing realisation that there is a secret spirit, a divine reality in which we are all one, that humanity is the highest present vehicle [of it] on earth.. ." (*The Ideal of Human Unity*, p 378)

He also emphasised in his *Synthesis of Yoga*: "We have to recognise once

more that the individual exists not in himself alone but in collectivity.... The free use of liberty includes also the liberation of others ..”

A similar chord of thought has been struck by a contemporary Japanese thinker. Ikeda in his *Choose Life: A Dialogue* asserts: “A total reformation of the individual from below the depths of consciousness is essential. Of course this reformation cannot be imposed from without.” (as quoted by Prof. M V. Nadkarni in his lecture. ‘Inner change for Human Unity’, dated 3 1.91)

Sri Aurobindo expressed the idea that a natural grouping of small but free and independent nations would pave the way towards forming a World Union. Though Gorbachev’s idea of a single confederation could not come to fruition, the formation of a Commonwealth of free and independent states is a step on the right path. All now depends on the goodwill of the nations. We also find that the movement towards the arrangement for a free grouping of the nations has taken place in Europe. And in many parts of the globe unnatural divisions of the same race and nation are done away with. Such divisions of our country, Sri Aurobindo said, should go. Are we through many troubles and turmoils moving towards that end? While it seems there is a Divine Guidance behind all these happenings, around us we find some opportunist leaders who the other day called someone Capitalist and Bourgeois, but are today praising him for sheer self-interest. Somewhere they criticize their opponents in the public forum but eulogise them privately for personal gains. Should such insincere persons and their insincerity not go before the establishment of a better world order?

India has a great role to play, as foreseen. With the rise of India there will be the regeneration of Asia. India’s role is becoming more and more pronounced. Unlike Russia, India has been united in spirit since time immemorial. Our work is to make ourselves realistic and reawakened. With the reawakening, Indian spirituality will lead the world towards forming a peaceful World Union in the course of time.

(Concluded)

AJU MUKHOPADHYAY

BHARAT SHAKTI AND INDIAN CULTURE

IT WAS in the International Youth Year—1985—that a Degree College in Madhya Pradesh (India), founded some time in the late 'sixties, started a weekly extra-curricula-class of questions and answers with a view to enlightening the young students of different faculties so that they might feel interested in evaluating their priceless heritage and learn anew all about Bharat and finally to become her worthy children. that is to say, the Standard-bearers of LIGHT, LOVE and POWER.

On the 24th October 1985 the 'Question-Answer Class' was inaugurated by Dr. S.N. Sharma, Vice-Principal of the college His brief address and its sequel ran thus:

Perhaps you all know that we have been thinking of organising this weekly class of questions and answers from the very beginning of this session which generally starts after Diwali. Since this year has been declared as the 'International Youth Year' we decided to inaugurate the class on the happy occasion of the 40th Foundation Day of the UNO. And accordingly we, in a festive mood but with keen eagerness, have assembled here not only to set forth on the journey but also to get ourselves ready to accomplish the task ahead

We are happy that most of the young students of our college have responded. I feel very encouraged to see that some students from other colleges too have joined.

The purpose of running this class, as you all know, is to guide the young students of different faculties together to grow inwardly so that they may realise their real business on earth and proceed accordingly. In their first step in the journey they are expected to know what India really is, and what is her mission. And then to determine the role that they themselves have to play in the fulfilment of it. The programme of work has therefore been chalked out to highlight the inherent intention of the Declaration that dedicates the whole year to the youths. Though this is extra-curriculum yet we must see that it is continued for at least five years till the end of the present decade.

Now has anybody got any question?

Vijay: Yes, sir! Yesterday I had the chance to meet a group of students who had come from the University of California to visit a few Universities in India and had some dialogues with them on various subjects This education-tour, they said, was a part of their programme for the International Youth Year. One of them asked me—"How does this very old country still survive with full vitality? We are told that the peoples of this land are backward and uncivilised. But what we see is quite different. How is it? We believe that there must be some perennial source of strength somewhere, but where is it? and how is it functioning?" Since then, sir, I have been thinking of the questions.

Dr. Sharma. Oh! you couldn't answer them? It is a pity that we the people of this marvellous land cannot fully realise what India actually is! But the young students of a far-off country have been able to get hold of some glimpses of that luminous realisation during their short stay of one or two months. However, we must discuss the question.

Vijay: My friend from California presumes that the answer to his question may be traced out if we can determine the source of India's strength which he believes to be perennial and which makes her still remain young.

Dr. Sharma: Yes. I think Nirmal will be able to find the source.

Nirmal: I believe, sir, the source of her strength is latent in the very foundation of her culture

Dr. Sharma: Very good. Can you elucidate your point?

Nirmal: Yes, sir, but before doing that I would like to suggest that a few cardinal points pertaining to the basic differences between the Western and Indian cultures may be discussed because the question has been raised by a student who, I'm afraid, may not have any idea of spirituality.

Vijay: Yes! I think Nirmal is quite right in his proposition. If you and my friends in the class permit I shall open the discussion.

Dr. Sharma: All right. You may start.

Vijay: An intensive and deeper study of the history of Indian culture reveals that spirituality is the master key of the Indian mind. India saw from the very beginning that life cannot be rightly seen in the sole light of its externalities nor can it be perfectly lived by its sole external power. She saw too that man has the power of exceeding himself, of becoming more entire and profound than what he is. Europe has recently begun to realise this truth. Though the history of medieval times states that Europe had a culture in which the spiritual motive took the lead and that was by the dominance of the Christian idea—and we all know that Christianity was of Asiatic origin, yet it is seen that differentiation of cultural temperament between Asia and Europe has on the whole been constant. We the people of this land believe that the harmony of the inner and the outer man is the true meaning of civilisation and the effective condition of true progress. Whereas the people of the West treat material comfort, material progress, material efficiency as their gods of worship. All violent attacks on Indian ideals by the modern European civilisation represent the effective form of this materialistic culture. India, true to her spiritual motive, has never shared in physical attacks of Asia upon Europe. .

Dr. Sharma: Excuse me, Vijay; I'm sorry that I have to interrupt you. I think that you should be more precise as well as concise and so you need not go into detail. It'll be very nice if you can pinpoint the differences which are fundamental without elucidating them.

Vijay: I'm sorry, sir. Now I realise that I was a wee bit emotional when I was indicating the points. So, I request Nirmal to conclude the issue.

Dr Sharma: But there is also Krishnamurty, I suppose that he will be able to deal with the matter

Krishnamurty But, sir, time is nearly up Perhaps I cannot finish what I have got to say on the issue within such a short time

Dr Sharma: Very well We'll hear from Krishnamurty in the next class.

(To be continued)

SAMAR BASU

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1994)

SRI AUROBINDO always cherished a respectful sense of gratitude for Lele, but their spiritual relation was broken when he found his inner guidance. Lele went back. After that Sri Aurobindo was a Yogi-Politician as we have already said. He not only foresaw the future but had to work in the present in order to prepare the future. He could not let the present slither and reel into a shipwreck of its possibilities of progress. Nor could he retire to his spiritual work before he received God's direction towards it. The yogi knows that in a divinely directed course failures carry the seed of success, and even a large destruction, if it is inevitable in the inscrutable dispensation of Providence, prepares the world for a new creation. Sri Krishna had to play his central but veiled part in the battle of Kurukshetra, though its disastrous end was not hidden from his knowledge. The greatest leaders of mankind combine in themselves the knowledge of the Brahmin and the power of the Kshatriya in order that chaos may be converted into order and harmony and darkness be laundered into light. It was proved later on that failure of the Nationalist Party in the Surat Congress was the seed of the National freedom-fight for Indian Independence. A letter Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple runs:

“When Lele came to Calcutta in February, 1908 he asked me about my Yoga. I had stopped the old kind of meditation as it was practically going on all the time. Then he said the Devil had taken possession of me and wanted to give me instructions. I did not act upon his advice—but I did not want to insult him. I then received the command from within that a human Guru was no longer necessary for me now¹

“All that I wrote in the *Bande Mataram* and the *Karma Yogin* was from this yogic state. It used to run down to my pen while I sat down to write. I always trusted the inner Guide even when it seemed to be leading me astray. I no longer use the method now.” (13.4.1923. Evening Talks)

Sri Aurobindo felt the need to base the National awakening and freedom-fighting on spirituality and proper organisation. To quote his own words:

“The aspiration towards freedom has for some time been working in some hearts, but they relied on their own strength for the creation of the necessary conditions and they failed. Of those who worked, some gave up the work, others persisted, a few resorted to *tapasyā*, the effort to awake in themselves a higher Power to which they might call for help. The *tapasyā* of those last had its effect unknown to themselves, for they were pouring out a selfless aspiration into the world and the necessary conditions began to be created. When these conditions were far advanced, the second class who worked on began to think that it was the result of their efforts, but the secret springs were hidden from them. They were

merely the instruments through which the purer aspiration of their old friends fulfilled itself

“If the conditions of success are to be yet more rapidly brought about, it must be by yet more of the lovers of freedom withdrawing themselves from the effort to work through the lower self. The aspiration of these strong souls purified from self will create fresh workers in the field, infuse the great desire for freedom in the heart of the nation and hasten the growth of the necessary material strength

“What is needed now is a band of spiritual workers whose *tapasyā* will be devoted to the liberation of India for the service of humanity.. . We need an institution in which under the guidance of highly spiritual men workers will be trained for every field, workers for self-defence, workers for arbitration, for sanitation, for famine relief, for every species of work which is needed to bring about the necessary conditions for the organisation of Swaraj. If the country is to be free, it must first organise itself so as to be able to maintain its freedom. The winning of freedom is an easy task, the keeping of it is less easy. The first needs only one tremendous effort in which all the energies of the country must be concentrated; the second requires a united, organised and settled strength. If these two conditions are satisfied, nothing more is needed, for all else is detail and will inevitably follow. For the first condition the requisite is a mighty selfless faith and aspiration filling the hearts of men as in the day of Mazzini. For the second, India, which has no Piedmont to work out her salvation, requires to organise her scattered strengths into a single and irresistible whole ..”²

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References

- 1 *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A B Purani, p 104
- 2 *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Vol I, pp 765, 766

THE PANDYAS AND THE DATE OF KALIDASA

THERE are two important Ślokas in the *Raghuvamśam* to which the attention of Sanskritists has, I think, not yet been directed and which to my mind almost settle the date of Kālidāsa. In the sixth Sarga which describes the Svayamvara of Indumatī we have the following Ślokas:

*athonaḡākhyasya purasya nātham dauvārakī devasarūpametya
itaścakorākṣi vilokayeti purvānusistam niḡagāda bhojyam* (59)

*pāṇdyoyamaṃsārputalambahāraḡ kḡrptāṅgarāḡo haricandanena
ābhātī bālātaparaktasānuḡ sanirjharodḡāra ivādritājah* (60)

Now these Ślokas mention that the capital of the Pāṇdyas in Kālidāsa's days was a city called Uragapura Mallinātha of the fourteenth century had no antiquarian knowledge, and says in his commentary on *uragākhyapura*, "*pāṇdyadeśe kānyakubjatīravartī-nāḡapurasya.*" But so far as I know, there is no Nāḡapura in the Pāṇdyā country. I was suddenly put in mind, while reading this Śloka, of Uraiyur, the ancient capital of the Colas. Uraiyur is the usual Prakrit translation from *uragapura*, *ga* and *pa* would be dropped according to the tendency of the Prakrit language. I almost feel certain that here there is a clear reference to Uraiyur, about which Vincent Smith says, "the most ancient capital of the Colas was Uraiyur or old Trichinopoly." But that Kālidāsa represents it as the capital of the Pāṇdyas in this passage, is a sure indication of the date of Kālidāsa. How, I proceed to show

The noted Dravidian peoples of the South in old Sanskrit literature are the Cola, Pāṇdyā and Kerala and Cera (and Satyaputra). These always fought among one another for political supremacy and sometimes one was predominant and sometimes another. In the *Mahābhārata* (of about 250 B.C.) we find *cola-pāṇdyavapī dvāram na lebhāte* (B II. 52. 35-K. II. 78. 114). Here the Colas and the Pāṇdyas are treated as equals. In the *Rāmāyana* (of the first century B C) we find the Pāṇdyas alone mentioned and not the others *yuktam kapātam pāṇdyānām gatā drakṣyatha vānarāḡ* (Bombay Edn , IV 41. 19). The Pāṇdyas were then apparently paramount. In the description of the Pāṇdyā King in the *Raghuvamśa* in this Sarga about Indumatī's Svayamvara, the Pāṇdyā King is also said to be the paramount lord of the South (*ratnānuvidhārnāmekhalāyāḡ dīśaḡ sapatnī bhava dakṣiṇasyāḡ*: verse 63).

It appears that this supremacy of the Pāṇdyas was overthrown by Karikāla Cola about the first century A.D. Karikāla, it is also said, neglected Uraiyur and removed the capital to Kāveripattanam. After Karikāla, the Pāṇdyas again gained supremacy in the days of Selyan or Neduni Selm Pandyo (See Chapter VI of *The Beginning of South Indian History* by Krishnaswamy Aiyangar). He re-established the Pāṇdyā power about the 3rd Century A.D., and in his time the

Sanghaṁ was formed and the best Tamil poets flourished. But the capital of the Pāṇdyas in his days and afterwards was Madura, which continued to be the capital of the Pāṇḍya country hereafter. The Pāṇdyas were overthrown in the fifth century by the Pallavas who were foreigners and who became the overlords of the South in the 6th and 7th centuries of the Christian era. Now as Kālidāsa describes the Pāṇdyas as supreme lords of the South with their capital at Uragapura, Kālidāsa to my mind must be referred to the first century B.C. If Kālidāsa lived in the fifth century A.D., he would undoubtedly have described his Pāṇḍya as lord of Madura, which is a very famous town in India ever since the formation of the Sanghaṁ and which could never have been substituted by Kālidāsa with Uragapura, which was in ruins for centuries, and afterwards known only to antiquarians and which had no religious or historical associations attached to it. In fact had it not been for antiquarians, Urayur could not have been known to people at all. Thus to my mind the time of Kālidāsa must be the time of the supremacy of the Pāṇdyas when their capital was Uragapura (left by Karikāla in the first Century A.D.).

We will here quote the opinion of Prof. Krishnaswamy Aiyangar regarding the changes in supremacy in the South about the beginning of the Christian era. "When this period begins, the Colas are supreme under Karikāla who ascended the throne probably after defeating the Cera and Pāṇdyas in battle at Vennil in the Tanjore district. Thereafter the ascendancy passed to the Cera. The Cera ascendancy under the Red Cera (Senguttuvan) lasted only one generation and in the reign of his successor, the Pāṇdyas rose to greater importance. This Pāṇḍya ascendancy lasted on somewhat longer till about the rise of the Pallavas at Kāñchi", *op. cit.*, pp 129 and 130. As Kālidāsa does not speak of the Pallavas at all, he cannot have belonged to the fifth century when they had become supreme in the South. As he speaks of the Pāṇdyas as supreme, he must either be referring to the Pāṇḍya supremacy after Karikāla and his successors or to that before him. But in the former, their capital was Madura, and hence we are compelled to place him before Karikāla whose date is certain. Thus we must assign Kālidāsa to a time before the beginning of the Christian era.

There is another important reference to the Pāṇdyas in the fourth Sarga of the *Raghuvamśa* giving the digvijaya of Raghu. From the conquest of Kalinga, Raghu is said to go towards the South and the only king and people mentioned in the South are the Pāṇḍya. Thus this also shows that in Kālidāsa's days the Pāṇdyas alone were supreme in the South. The verse is:

*dīśi mandāyate tejo dakṣinasyām raverapī
tasyāmeva raghoḥ pāṇḍyāḥ pratāpam na viṣehire*

It cannot be argued that Kālidāsa had very little information about India and speaks haphazard and not as a knowing man. His description of the South is

however very accurate and he exhibits an intimate knowledge of its peculiarities. The Kaveri, the Tamraparni with the pearl fishery at its mouth, the Malaya Dardura Mountains are well-described. The Kerala women on the West Coast with their hair sprinkled over with powder are also happily described. We are impressed with the correct geographical knowledge of Kālidāsa even in other places—especially in his description of the Himalayas. Hence the fact that Kālidāsa mentions Uragapura as the capital of the Pāṇḍyas, places him almost to a certainty in the first century before Christ from the now known facts of the ancient history of the South

Before concluding I must advert to another circumstance in support of this date, which is to be found in the *Raghuvamśa*. In the same fourth Sarga describing the conquests of Raghu we are told that in Afghanistan Raghu conquered the Yavanas or Greeks. Now it is well known that there were no Yavanas in Afghanistan in the 3rd, 4th, or 5th centuries, A.D., the Kushanas having destroyed the Yavana kingdoms in the North West of India. It is only in the first century B.C. that we have Yavana kingdoms in the North-west both on the East and West of the Indus. No doubt Kālidāsa mentions the Pārasikas also as conquered in the West, and the Hūṇas as conquered in the North on the banks of the Indus. Prof. Pathak argues from the mention of the Hūṇa conquest to the North of the Indus that Kālidāsa must have lived in the fifth century A.D. But the mention of the conquest of the Greeks or Yavanas before the conquest of the Hūṇas has also to be taken into account. For there were no Greeks in Afghanistan in the fifth century A.D. If there was any time when the Persians, the Greeks and the Hūṇas were on the Western, North-western and Northern borders of India, it was in the first century B.C., and we are compelled to assign this century to Kālidāsa, a date, as we have seen above, deductible from the mention of the Pāṇḍyas in Uragapura. Prof. Pathak thinks that the Hūṇas could not have been on the North bank of the Indus before the fifth century A.D., but the Hūṇas were there from ancient times. Even the *Mahābhārata* mentions the people to the North of India as Hūṇas and Cīnas. We must remember the fact that there were numerous tribes of the Hūṇas. The Hūṇas in fact represent the Mongolian tribes to the North of India generally including the Tibetans. The realms to the North of India are always known to India as *cīnahūṇaniṣevitān*. Prof. Pathak probably refers to a particular tribe of the Huns coming to the North of the Indus in the 5th century A.D. But we must concede that there were many tribes of the Huns inhabiting the regions to the North of India. It is a mistake to believe that we came to know the Huns only in the 5th century A.D.

It is necessary to give a little more information about Uraiur. Smith's statement that it was the ancient capital of the Colas has already been given. It appears however that Uraiur must have been in still more ancient times the capital of the Pāṇḍyas. For Smith at page 461 (*Early History*, 3rd Edn.) says that Karikāla conquered the Pāṇḍya capital and subsequently found it convenient to

transfer his capital to a more advantageous position on the sea coast, Urayur being inland. The principal Cola port was Kaveripattinam situated on the Northern mouth of the Kaveri. Smith clearly says that Karikāla founded Kaveripattinam. The desertion of the old capital Urayur and the founding of the new capital must have led to Urayur falling into ruins. This information Vincent Smith gives on the authority of "The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago". This work shows that in the first century A.D., Madura was the most famous town in Tamilakam, being the capital city of the Pāndyas who were then the most renowned kings of the Tamil land and munificent patrons of poets, while the capital of the Colas was Kaveripattinam on the mouth of the Kaveri. The following quotation relates the removal of the capital by Karikāla Cola from Urayur to that port. "Karikāla's sagacious mind was not slow to discover that the position of his capital at Urayur so far from the sea-coast was disadvantageous to commerce. He therefore fortified Kaveripattinam the grand emporium of trade at the mouth of the Kaveri and made it his capital." The authority quoted here in the footnote is Paddinap-palai II, 285-288. It seems thus clear so far as I have been able to satisfy myself, that since the beginning of the Christian era or rather the time of Karikāla, Urayur had ceased to be the capital of the Colas and had fallen into ruins. It was also never the capital of the Pāndyas on this side of the Christian era, the capital always being Madura

If this fact is so,—and I have given the authorities from Tamil which Tamil antiquarians will certainly be able to further scrutinise—then Kālidāsa must be placed in the first century before Christ when only it is possible for Urayur to have been the capital of the Pāndyas. Urayur in still more ancient days appears to have been the capital of the ancient Nāgas and hence that name. That place seems to have been conquered first by the Pāndyas whose capital it was for a long time. They were conquered by the Colas, who then moving further south made Madura their capital in the first century A D I will conclude this paper by quoting a very interesting Tamil Poet's description in support of this theory. When a son of the conquered Pāndya king and Karikāla Cola were seated together, a poet sang about the former: "This king is a lion of the warlike race of the Pāndyas: who not disheartened by the death of his elders valiantly protects his subjects, like the long shoots of the Banyan tree which strike root in the ground and keep the tree alive, although the parent trunk is withered." (*The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, p. 68) This clearly indicates that the Pāndyas were driven from Urayur and established themselves at Madura.

C. V. VAIDYA

(*The Annals of the Bhandarkar Institute*, 1920-21, pp 63-68)

IMAGE OF THE CHILD AND AMERICAN LITERARY SENSIBILITY

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1994)

IN their book *The American Mind in Action*, Harvey O'Higgins and Edward H. Reede demonstrate how the puritanism in America was responsible for repression at a national level. The book relates the case of Mark Twain (1835-1910) as an example. Mark Twain suffered from a repressed hatred of his mother and of the awful biblical God whom she used to thwart his desires. The authors consider his humour, and all American humour, as an "outlet for repressed emotions in disguise." Both *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*, according to them, are disguised expressions of filial impiety. And the American reads them because he too like the author "retains in his subconscious mind a dynamic, repressed and undrained emotion of filial revolt, caused by his hatred of the Calvinistic puritanism of his parents."¹⁵ However, the two novels apart from being "disguised expressions of filial impiety" are also complementary in the sense that the novels read together represent the "tormented man" that Mark Twain was: Tom and Huck represent the conforming and revolting polarities of Twain's psyche. Peter Coveny's remarks on Twain strengthens this observation:

Mark Twain's reproachful self-contempt suggests an uncomfortable, disturbed, and at times tormented man. His maxims maintain an unmistakable burden.¹⁶

Van Wyck Brooks also approaches the problem, more or less, in the same way. In his book *The Ordeal of Mark Twain*, he observes:

It is generally understood, therefore, that when people in middle age occupy themselves with their childhood, it is because some central instinct... has been blocked by internal or external obstacles. Their consciousness flows backward until it reaches a period in their memory when life still seemed to them open and fluid with possibilities.¹⁷

Thus for Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* enacts the revolt of the natural and healthy instinct against its suppression by a so-called moral society. As D.H. Lawrence speaks of Cooper's Leatherstocking novels, Twain cherished a recurrent fantasy that life should begin old and regress continuously towards youth. Everything in him suggests that he would produce a work idealizing boyhood, that his sensibility would regress towards the past. And it was his genius to fuse his personal nostalgia and his social awareness into the universal commentary of *Huckleberry Finn*. However, Mark Twain's art like that of

Dickens exists on that narrow frontier between creative fulfilment and neurotic destruction. In both these writers a personal nostalgia, with an acute awareness of the past, created their art. It is a great distinction for Mark Twain as an artist to have achieved purification and expansion of his feelings through regressing escapism.

Mark Twain's success as a novelist also depends on the fact that he unfolded the story of *Huckleberry Finn* through Huck's own eyes. The successful employment of the child narrator finds its breakthrough in this novel which paved the way for Henry James (1843-1914) for further exploration.

Henry James uses the child personae in his novels to inquire into the fate of innocence when it is introduced into the clotted complexities of society and the turbulence of time. He uses the innocent, candid, outside eye as a strategy, subjecting it to a dynamic, unprogrammed education. He watches "the naive character" assimilating, misconstruing, as he or she is faced with the task of appropriating the world. This provides the artist with an opportunity to observe, and learn something about the whole question of veridical knowledge, about the whole problem of verifying impressions. His child personae, as subject and strategy, opened up new modes of gaining a holistic vision of reality. It leads him to explore a new morality of vision itself. It is worth remembering here that quite unlike the passive serenity of the child's eye of which Emerson speaks, the naive eye of James's personae like Maisie in *What Maisie Knew* are not passive; rather they are caught in a state of "bewilderment."

Thoreau's notion of "seeing without looking" and Whitman's "first step" reflect the general American interest in the recovery of the faculties of childhood towards establishing an authentic firsthand relationship with existing reality. Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) addresses herself to this problem with great seriousness. In her works,¹⁸ she concludes that the greatest hindrances to this contact were memories of other comparable impressions which blur the uniqueness of the present perceptual instant.

Comparable to Thoreau's notion of "seeing without looking," Stein has an ideal of what one may call "seeing without remembering, without associating, without thinking." She wants the eye to open to the reality of the material world as though it had never opened before, for then we catch the reality at the "realest," unfiltered through the schemata of the sophisticated eye which is dimmed from too long a domestication in the world.¹⁹ In this context she cites the child's way of looking as exemplary. That is, naivety must be cultivated in order that we may be in touch with reality, not through memory, but as it is.

Gertrude Stein in her discussion on Picasso considers memory as an inadequate aid to vision. According to her, Picasso commenced his attempt to express not things felt, not things remembered, not established in relations, but things which are there really, everything a human being can know at each moment of his existence and not an assembling of all his experiences. For him,

she asserts, "remembered things are not things seen, therefore they are not things known."²⁰ She goes on to say that "remembering is only repetition" and it is "the only confusion." As the child doesn't have to remember, as it is unburdened with a memory, it can see reality free from the grime of old emotions. In other words, the child's mind is the ideal perceiving medium, which a writer should possess to establish contact with reality.

Stein's distaste for the conventional narration is understandable as it ignores "the basic miracle of what is." She is against the narrative which fosters a casual time sense. Memory deflects our attention into the past and thence into the future. Better seize the moment in its fullness and stillness, throbbing with latent movement²¹ And only a mind free from the tyranny of memory, a mind endowed with the faculties of childhood, could perceive this latent movement in the moment. It alone can respond to and immerse itself in the total present.

Like Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941), endorses the view that it requires a child-like response to perceive the actuality. He believes that a man, if he is any good, never gets over being a boy.²² His interest in the child's mode of responding to the world is most obviously demonstrated in his autobiography, *Tar: A Midwest Childhood*. The whole of *Tar* reveals a happy immersion in childhood experiences recalled from a child's point of view. Tony Tanner considers Anderson's interest in the child's mode of perception as very significant to the study of modern American literature:

To say that he seemed most at ease with what he considered to be the child's manner of assimilating the world is to say something with relevance for a great deal of modern American Literature.²³

Like Mark Twain and Henry James, William Faulkner (1897-1962) too is profoundly concerned with the theme of childhood in a way that it becomes at once an integral part of his vision and a literary means to study the nature of human corruption and vulnerability. It is well demonstrated, for example, in the two stories of the Compson children, "That Evening Sun Go Down," and "A Justice." In both stories children face dark foreboding experiences without adequate support. In his novel *The Sound and the Fury*, there is a moving story of four children and their inadequate parents. The novel is regressive and thus represents a move back towards home, family, childhood and a move towards the interior. The regressive principle of the novel is seen in the use of memory as a formal device. In the moment, Faulkner took possession of the pain and muted love of his childhood, its forbidden needs and desires. The loss in *The Sound and the Fury* is associated with parental weakness and inadequacy with parental frigidity and rejection.²⁴

Vladimir Nabokov (1899-) represents a very significant facet of American sensibility in terms of the human response to the problem of time. He

is an artist of the past, of nostalgia and recollection. His goal is the discovery and exploration of human consciousness through playing with the past. Memory and time are vital themes and structuring principles in Nabakov's art. Memory presents complex layers of consciousness, and is responsible for making patterns. One could very well discover this pattern-making process of memory in his autobiography *Speak, Memory*. It is based on vivid acts of physical observation symbolizing acts of perception. He utilizes the private past as a key to the nature of time and art. And in that private past, childhood is the most luminous state. He says:

In probing my childhood (which is the next best to probing one's eternity) I see the awakening of consciousness as a series of spaced flashes with the intervals between them gradually diminishing until bright blocs of perception are formed, affording memory a slippery hold.²⁵

Nabakov's autobiography thus begins with the infant child's awakening to consciousness. Awareness of self is born simultaneously with the awareness of an imprisonment in time, a time stranded between two eternities of darkness, a time defined as "walls... separating me and my bruised fists from the free world of timelessness."²⁶ Rebellion against this tragic state of affairs is also born with consciousness of it and seeks in consciousness itself the heightening of consciousness we call imagination, a way out. Yet through consciousness, through reflection on the riddling and cryptic appearance of the world in which the prisoner finds himself immured, he begins to discover or invent patterns and themes which hint at or gesture towards the possibility of transcendence into the freedom of timelessness from which he has been banished through the tragic accident of biological birth.

(To be continued)

P.M. SANKARAN KUTTY

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THE DIVER OF THE DEEP SEA

BEYOND the trembling veil of sight he disappeared
When with purple dusk the wind surged towards the sea.
In slow advancing night the dim boat sailed
To an island crowded by shadow-birds of Time:
The shouts of broken wings, of waves, beings
Falling not with their weight but with deathfulness
Of thickening gravity—they soon led him leeward.
His name drifted under the flood where fishes
Lived by an inexorable law; grief nor joy
But a strange devouring was at the base of things.
In that weird mansion of the belle of the gulf,
Filled with jewelled lights of a hooded force.
The Past he met; there nude and hostile she lay.
From below her mattress a ghastly silence
Whispered of the queer atomic beginnings.
Then even the Nirvana of the sombre infinite
Made room for a greater Nothing; but suddenly,
As in a bright magic's sequence, the Gleam-Eye
Opened to his soul all invisible widenesses
And took him to a sky where the solar waters flow.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

56 B.C. AND ALL THAT

UNOFFICIAL HISTORY COLLECTED BY RICHARD LEDERER*

*It is truly astounding what havoc students can wreak upon the chronicles of the human race. I have pasted together the following history of the world from genuine student bloopers collected by teachers throughout the United States, from eighth grade through college level. Read carefully, and you will learn a lot.—RL**

ANCIENT Egypt was inhabited by mummies, and they all wrote in hydraulics. They lived in the Sarah Dessert and traveled by Camelot. The climate of the Sarah is such that the inhabitants have to live elsewhere, so certain areas of the dessert are cultivated by irritation. Early Egyptian women often wore a garment called a calasirin. It was a sheer dress which started beneath the breasts which hung to the floor.

The pyramids are a range of mountains between France and Spain. The Egyptians built the pyramids in the shape of a huge triangular cube.

The Bible is full of interesting caricatures. In the first book of the Bible, Guinessis, Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree. One of their children, Cain, asked, "Am I my brother's son?"

God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Montezuma. Jacob, son of Isaac, stole his brother's birthmark. Jacob was a patriarch who brought up his 12 sons to be patriarchs, but they did not take to it. One of Jacob's sons, Joseph, gave refuse to the Israelites.

Moses led the Hebrew slaves to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread, which is bread made without any ingredients. Afterwards, Moses went up on Mount Cyanide to get the ten commandments. He died before he ever reached Canada.

David was a Hebrew king skilled at playing the liar. He fought with the Finkelsteins, a race of people who lived in Biblical times. Solomon, one of David's sons, had three hundred wives and seven hundred porcupines.

Later came Job, who had one trouble after another. Eventually, he lost all his cattle and all his children and had to go live alone with his wife in the desert.

The Greeks were a highly sculptured people, and without them we wouldn't have history. The Greeks also had myths. A myth is a female moth.

One myth says that the mother of Achilles dipped him in the river Stynx until he became intolerable. Achilles appears in *The Iliad*, by Homer. Homer

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also wrote *The Oddity*, in which Penelope was the last hardship that Ulysses endured on his journey. Actually, Homer was not written by Homer but by another man of that name.

Socrates was a famous Greek teacher who went around giving people advice. They killed him. Socrates died from an overdose of wedlock. After his death, his career suffered a dramatic decline.

In the Olympic Games, Greeks ran races, jumped, hurled the biscuits, and threw the java. The reward to the victor was a coral wreath.

Eventually, the Romans conquered the Greeks. History calls people Romans because they never stayed in one place for very long.

Julius Caesar extinguished himself on the battlefields of Gaul. The Ides of March murdered him because they thought he was going to be made king. Dying, he gasped out: "Tee hee, Brutus." Nero was a cruel tyranny who would torture his poor subjects by playing the fiddle to them.

Rome came to have too many luxuries and baths. At Roman banquets, the guests wore garlics in their hair. They took two baths in two days, and that's the cause of the fall of Rome. Rome was invaded by ballbearings, and is full of fallen arches today.

Then came the Middle Ages, when everyone was middle aged. King Alfred conquered the Dames. King Arthur lived in the Age of Shivery with brave knights on prancing horses and beautiful women. King Harold mustarded his troops before the Battle of Hastings. Joan of Arc was burnt to a steak and was cannonized by Bernard Shaw. And victims of the bluebonnet plague grew boobs on their necks. Finally, Magna Carta provided that no free man should be hanged twice for the same offense.

In the midevil times most people were alliterate. The greatest writer of the futile ages was Chaucer, who wrote many poems and verses and also wrote literature. During this time, people put on morality plays about ghosts, goblins, virgins, and other mythical creatures. Another story was about William Tell, who shot an arrow through an apple while standing on his son's head.

The Renaissance was an age in which more individuals felt the value of their human being. Martin Luther was nailed to the church door at Wittenberg for selling papal indulgences. He died a horrible death, being excommunicated by a bull. It was the painter Donatello's interest in the female nude that made him the father of the Renaissance.

The government of England was a limited mockery. From the womb of Henry VIII Protestantism was born. He found walking difficult because he had an abness on his knee.

Queen Elizabeth was the "Virgin Queen." As a queen she was a success. When Elizabeth exposed herself before her troops, they all shouted "hurrah." Then her navy went out and defeated the Spanish Armadillo.

It was an age of great inventions and discoveries. Gutenberg invented

removeable type and the Bible. Another important invention was the circulation of blood. Sir Walter Raleigh is a historical figure because he invented cigarettes and started smoking. And Sir Francis Drake circumcised the world with a 100-foot clipper.

The greatest writer of the Renaissance was William Shakespeare. Shakespeare was born in the year 1564, supposedly on his birthday. He never made much money and is famous only because of his plays. He wrote tragedies, comedies, and hysterectomies, all in Islamic pentameter.

In one of Shakespeare's famous plays, Hamlet rations out his situation by relieving himself in a long soliloquy. His mind is filled with the filth of incestuous sheets which he pours over everytime he sees his mother. In another play, Lady Macbeth tries to convince Macbeth to kill the King by attacking his manhood. The clown in *As You Like It* is named Touchdown, and Romeo and Juliet are an example of a heroic couplet.

Writing at the same time as Shakespeare was Miguel Cervantes. He wrote *Donkey Hote*. The next great author was John Milton. Milton wrote *Paradise Lost*. Then his wife died and he wrote *Paradise Regained*.

During the Renaissance America began. Christopher Columbus was a great navigator who discovered America while cursing about the Atlantic. His ships were called the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Fe.

Later, the Pilgrims crossed the ocean, and this was called Pilgrim's Progress. The winter of 1620 was a hard one for the settlers. Many people died and many babies were born. Captain John Smith was responsible for all this.

One of the causes of the Revolutionary War was the English put tacks in their tea. Also, the colonists would send their parcels through the post without stamps. During the War, the Red Coats and Paul Revere was throwing balls over stone walls. The dogs were barking and the peacocks crowing. Finally, the colonists won the War and no longer had to pay for taxis.

Delegates from the original 13 states formed the Contented Congress. Thomas Jefferson, a Virgin, and Benjamin Franklin were two singers of the Declaration of Independence. Franklin invented electricity by rubbing two cats backwards and declared, "A horse divided against itself cannot stand." Franklin died in 1790 and is still dead.

George Washington married Martha Curtis and in due time became the Father of Our Country. His farewell address was Mount Vernon.

Soon the Constitution of the United States was adopted to secure domestic hostility. Under the Constitution the people enjoyed the right to keep bare arms.

Abraham Lincoln became America's greatest Precedent. Lincoln's mother died in infancy, and he was born in a log cabin which he built with his own hands. Lincoln said, "In onion there is strength."

Abraham Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address while traveling from Washington to Gettysburg on the back of an envelope. He also freed the slaves.

by signing the Emasculation Proclamation.

On the night of April 14, 1865, Lincoln went to the theater and got shot in his seat by one of the actors in a moving picture show. The believed assassinator was John Wilkes Booth, a supposingly insane actor. This ruined Booth's career.

Meanwhile in Europe, the enlightenment was a reasonable time. Voltaire invented electricity and also wrote a book called *Candy*. Gravity was invented by Isaac Walton. It is chiefly noticeable in the autumn, when the apples are falling off the trees.

Johann Bach wrote a great many musical compositions and had a large number of children. In between, he practiced on an old spinster which he kept up in his attic. Bach died from 1750 to the present.

Bach was the most famous composer in the world, and so was Handel. Handel was half German, half Italian, and half English. He was very large.

Beethoven wrote music even though he was deaf. He was so deaf he wrote loud music. He took long walks in the forest even when everyone was calling for him. Beethoven expired in 1827 and later died for this.

France was in a very serious state. The French Revolution was accomplished before it happened and catapulted into Napoleon. During the Napoleonic Wars, the crowned heads of Europe were trembling in their shoes. Then the Spanish gorillas came down from the hills and nipped at Napoleon's flanks. Napoleon wanted an heir to inherit his power, but since Josephine was a baroness she couldn't have any children.

The sun never set on the British Empire because the British Empire is in the East and the sun sets in the West. Queen Victoria was the longest queen. She sat on a thorn for 63 years. She was a moral woman who practiced virtue. Her death was the final event which ended her reign.

The nineteenth century was a time of a great many thoughts and inventions. People stopped reproducing by hand and started reproducing by machine. The invention of the steamboat caused a network of rivers to spring up. Cyrus McCormick invented the McCormick reaper, which did the work of a hundred men. Louis Pasteur discovered a cure for rabies. Charles Darwin was a naturalist who wrote the *Organ of the Species*. Madman Curie discovered radio. And Karl Marx became one of the Marx brothers.

The First World War, caused by the assignation of the Arch-Duck by an anahist, ushered in a new error in the anals of human history.

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1994)

20. FOUR CRORE SONGS

ONCE a millionaire wanted to have some fun at the expense of the poets. He thought and thought, and finally hit upon a plan. "I'll make these word-churners go crazy over the reward I announce. But no fellow will be able to bag it," so saying, he roared with laughter.

It was during the busy hour at the market place. A town-crier on the advice of the millionaire beat his tom-tom and announced thus: "A thousand pieces of gold awaits those men and women who can compose and sing songs... Approach the millionaire for further details."

The news spread and all those blessed with imagination and speech thronged at the spacious hall of the millionaire. At the centre of the hall dangled from the roof a silken bag heavy with a thousand pieces of gold.

Every poet with his mouth agape eyed the bag as if it was from another world.

"O gifted sons and daughters of Goddess Saraswati!" The millionaire addressed the poets thus and continued, "The bag of gold you see above your heads is yours... Let me see who would be able to win it."

"Let's be informed of further details about your competition," the poets said in unison.

"There's nothing much to say. All that you have to do is to make your own poems and sing them," said the millionaire.

"On what topic?" asked a young man brimming with curiosity.

"I believe in the poet's freedom. Your poems can be on any topic of your choice and can be any number of lines," answered the millionaire in all humility.

"Who is to judge our poems?" asked a grey-haired poet.

"Time," pat came the reply from the millionaire.

The poets looked at one another and blinked.

"In this strange competition, Time will act as the judge," said the mischievous millionaire, and added: "Whoever sings four crore songs within a day will be declared winner and the silken bag of gold goes home with him."

"Say that again, slowly. I can't believe I heard you correctly," said a poet in his late eighties.

The millionaire repeated himself.

"What? Four crore songs? And that too within a day? Who could do it? The Divine Songster too would miserably fail, however fast his mind and tongue cooperate," muttered one.

The poets began to giggle at the millionaire for arranging such a funny

competition. They then giggled at one another for reasons known only to themselves. And as they trickled out of the hall they giggled at their own inability.

The millionaire laughed to his heart's content as the poor poets had their last look at the dangling bag of gold, and sighed a deep sigh.

Avvai who happened to pass by that city heard the poets grumble and punch the air with their fists, perhaps to vent their anger. She inquired into the matter and found the cause for their disappointment.

Avvai threw her head back and guffawed. "It's quite simple. Follow me to the millionaire's hall," she said.

The poets raised their eyebrows. Curiosity rose in their hearts. They obeyed the old lady's words.

The presence of Avvai in his hall made the millionaire jittery. He wasn't unaware of the fact that Avvai would not fight a losing battle. He was also certain that the bag of gold would not be his if she participated in the competition. But something in him said that it would be humanly impossible to sing four crore songs within a day.

Mustering courage, he welcomed Avvai. And then with a sheepish grin he asked her: "Are you here to sing four crore songs?"

Avvai nodded her head.

"But will you be able to complete them within a day?"

"I think it is too long a period for just four crore songs," replied Avvai casually to the surprise of everyone there.

When the millionaire looked askance at the wise old lady, she began to sing thus:

1. Not to step into the house of one
who has scant respect for you,
is worth in gold a crore.
2. Not to dine in the house of one
who doesn't serve you with love
is worth in gold a crore.
3. To strike up a friendship with
the noble-minded at the expense of a crore
is worth in gold a crore.
4. To abstain from telling a lie
even at a bribe of several crores
is worth in gold a crore.

No sooner did Avvai finish singing her four 'crore songs', than the millionaire astonished at her wit and wisdom gave the bag of gold to her by cutting the cord that held it.

As Avvai shared not only her joy but also her gold with the other poets who had assembled there, the millionaire pitied himself for the fun the poets had at his expense.

21. THE LEARNED EXORCIST

It was cow-dust hour. Tired of a tedious long journey on foot, Avvai longed for rest.

"Where can I spend the night in your village?" Avvai asked a cowherd.

"I don't know," he said "But if you are bold enough at heart you can spend the night in that old inn over there."

"Why should one be bold enough at heart to spend the night in an inn?"

"If you are not, you may die of heart-failure. It is a haunted inn."

"Oh! Ghosts do no evil to fellow ghosts," said Avvai unconcerned. As the cowherd took to his heels, not turning back even once, she started moving towards the country inn.

Not a soul was found in the inn and a sepulchral silence prevailed. Only darkness ruled.

Avvai groped her way, found a mat, dusted it clean, spread it on the floor, and stretched herself on the mat. Sleep was heavy on her eyes. She snored

It was a little after midnight. The nocturnal birds began to hoot from tree-tops. Spine-chilling and blood-curdling voices came from perhaps a cremation ground nearby. They were punctuated by barkings and howlings

The unruly wind too joined hands with the weird creatures. It banged the windows shut and open, and thereby made Avvai wake up with a start.

She looked around. The moonlight that filtered through the windows was trying its best to drive away darkness.

In that dim light Avvai saw the spirit of a woman, dressed in a white sari, with her unbundled hair flowing against her breasts. As she let out a peal of devilish laughter that would freeze any coward, Avvai didn't fail to notice her protruding canine teeth.

Undaunted, Avvai closed her eyes for a few seconds, meditated upon the Divine and spurted out the following song:

Go and give a good thrashing
to the sinful woman
that bore the ignoramus,
who failed to learn a stanza

having heard it twice repeated;
 whose eyes stared at a blank palm-leaf
 while his hand knew not to write on it
 and who thereby made himself a laughing-stock.

The ghost heard the song that Avvai sang. The mysterious chapter in its life-story began to unravel itself. It broke into tears.

Avvai soothed the perturbed ghost by singing three more songs. And then she asked, "What can I do for you, O spirit?"

"I want you to listen to my story."

"Story! I'll be glad to listen."

"I am the spirit of a Princess, the daughter of an eminent ruler of this land. My father never once said 'no' to any of my wishes, and gave me freedom to choose my life-partner.

"One evening as I stood on the balcony of my palace, I saw a handsome man standing at a grocer's shop. It was love at first sight. I wrote a letter requesting him to meet me at a secret rendezvous outside the city. I gave it to one of my maids of honour, to pass it on to the handsome lad. I saw her give him my letter.

"When it grew darker I tiptoed out of the palace and waited outside the city. Time passed. But the handsome man didn't turn up. The moon was playing hide and seek among the clouds. When it was nearly midnight, a stranger approached me and said, 'Your Majesty! The receiver of your letter is eagerly waiting for you in the nearby inn. He has ordered me to escort you there. And in order to make you believe me, he gave me your letter that was passed on to him.'

"I believed him though I had to strain my eyes to know if it was my letter. He then escorted me to this very same inn, all the time maintaining a respectable distance.

"No traveller was seen taking rest in the inn. The inn-keeper too was not seen anywhere around. 'Where is he?' I asked the stranger. He began to laugh villainously and attempted to molest me. I struggled to release myself from his clutches. But his brute force overpowered me. Then I killed myself in this inn. But my soul couldn't reach its abode for my mind nurtured a doubt. How did the lecherous fellow get my letter? What had happened to the man I loved? Since my soul couldn't leave this world, I began to harass all the travellers who rested here."

After listening to the ghost's story in rapt silence, Avvai said: "It's true that your maid delivered your letter to the right man. But you never knew that the fellow was an illiterate. And so he showed it to a stranger to tell him what was written there. The evil-minded fellow wanted to make the best use of the opportunity. Hence he tricked the handsome man by telling him to run for his life, since the letter was an intimidating one. Having succeeded in driving him away from the scene, the stranger tricked you too "

“Yes, grand old dame! Your songs made everything clear to me,” said the ghost.

“Well then! Now that your doubt is cleared, what are you waiting for?”

The spirit of the princess left the world once for all, thereby giving Avvai the credit of exorcising the spirit that had made the inn unsuitable for human habitation.

22. THE GIFT OF KORAIKAL AZHWAN

“The learned and the wise are honoured wherever they go,” so goes an old Tamil adage.

Avvai, the very incarnation of Saraswati, Goddess of Learning, was honoured by not only kings and nobles, but also by the common people. In fact, Avvai was and is a household name and even today the Tamil children are given *Āttichudi* (Alphabet-Aphorisms) of Avvai as soon as they learn to read. It’s no wonder that the Tamils have honoured this grand old lady of Tamil literature by dedicating shrines to her in the Tanjore and Kanyakumari districts in Tamilnadu.

Yet there were occasions in which Avvai was frowned on and looked down upon during her lifetime by people who had little knowledge of her worth.

Once Avvai happened to sojourn in Koraiikal and, having heard of a very rich man named Azhwan, she went to his mansion, met him and sang a panegyric on him.

Azhwan listened to her song. Avvai saw a sense of joy spreading all over his face. She felt sure of a great reward that awaited her. Poor old lady! She didn’t in the least know that Azhwan was a miser and would even chase away a crow while he was eating, for fear that the food particles sticking to his hand might fall off from him and the crow enjoy them.

Whenever poets visited him and sang songs in praise of him, it was customary of Azhwan to dismiss them by saying: “Thank you for singing to me. And you must thank me for listening to you. I’ve already rewarded you with my patience.” He opened his mouth to repeat his usual words to Avvai. But on second thoughts he strangled them in his throat.

He thought: “I must not let this old lady go cursing me. Instead I shall give her great hopes, drag on for several days and finally ditch her. Let her know that men like me can’t be bought for a song.” Seconds later, he praised Avvai and added: “You deserve an elephant for the song you sang in praise of me. Come tomorrow to take away the elephant that will be yours.”

Happy at heart, Avvai went off praising Azhwan’s generosity all the way home.

On the morning of the next day, when Avvai approached Azhwan, the latter said, “Avvai, my dear mother! I was about to get you an elephant. But on second thought I withdrew my plan. Won’t it be beyond your means to satiate the gift elephant’s hunger, when you yourself make a living by singing songs? And so

I've decided to give you a high-bred horse. Come tomorrow. The horse will be waiting for you."

Avvai went away thinking that Azhwan was a reasonable man. She eagerly waited for the next day to dawn. And when she approached the supermiser, he said, "O, poor old lady! What would you do with a horse? I have seen highbred horses misbehaving with their own masters. You are after all an aged woman. I don't want to put you into difficulties. And so I've decided to give you a milch buffalo, so that you can be sure of milk and curd for the rest of your life. Come tomorrow. I myself will choose the best milch buffalo for you from my cattle-shed."

Avvai went away thinking that Azhwan was a sensible man: "A milch buffalo will be definitely of more use to me than an elephant or a horse. Long live Azhwan!"

It was the third day. Azhwan welcomed Avvai with glee and said: "Yesterday I chose the best milch buffalo for you."

Happy at heart Avvai smiled showing her gap-toothed mouth.

"But today a doubt rose in me," said Azhwan driving away the smile that lingered in the old lady's wrinkled face. "Buffalo milk and curd won't get digested in your system, because you have already one foot in the grave. I like you so much, you know, I can't bear to see you wriggle in pain holding your stomach with your hands. Hence I've opted for a bullock. Go now and come tomorrow to take away your animal."

On her way back Avvai spoke to herself thus: "Milch buffalo is definitely more useful to me than a bullock. I don't find any use for the bullock I am about to get as a reward. All that I can do is to barter it for some bags of rice."

As Avvai entered the millionaire's mansion on the morning of the next day, Azhwan welcomed her with greater glee than before and in a sad tone said: "I'm sorry for delaying the award to be given to you. But what'll you do with a bullock? It'll butt you to death. Come tomorrow. I'll try and give you the best cotton sari. That at least will cover your frail and haggard-looking body."

Disappointed Avvai slouched out of the mansion. A cowherd who saw her come and go every day with empty hands, took pity on her and said: "Azhwan would skin a flea to have its coat. Don't even dream of getting an old and tattered garment from him as a reward, leave alone a cotton sari."

Avvai nodded her head in approval. In a frustrated mood she said to herself: "I wasn't aware that the gift of Koraiikal Azhwan never would be received at all. If I am fated to learn this lesson only at the expense of my time and of my energy wearing out, so let it be."

Avvai immortalised the supermiser by cursing him in one of her songs, and thereby made his name a by-word in Tamil literature for an avaricious trickster.

(More legends on the way)

OLD NEIGHBOURS AND FALSE FRIENDS

D.J. Enright's Review of Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell's Hobson-Jobson: A glossary of colloquial Anglo-Indian words and phrases, and of kindred terms, etymological, historical, geographical and discursive. Second edition, edited by William Crooke with a new foreword by Anthony Burgess. 1,021 pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul, £ 18.95. 0 71002886 5

ARRIVING not so very long ago, as a relic of colonialism, in a newly independent and ostensibly socialist country, I was taken aback on meeting the university department's servant or messenger, called a *peon* (pronounced *pūn*). In my book the term smacked of "peasant" and "pagan" and other ancient wrongs (in which my book was mistaken); or at least of "pawn", and true, the word comes via Portuguese from the Latin for "foot", hence its use as "foot-soldier", "orderly", "footman". However, no one considered it offensive, and not, before long, did I. After all, as late as 1761 an honourable position in the East India Company was that of Scavenger, an official who inspected goods offered for sale and collected duty on them. In fact that was what the word (of Germanic origin, cognate with "show") originally signified, though back home the scavenger had been down-graded to cleaning the streets some 200 years earlier.

We know words. Words are what we know. Or we think we know, for in practice they are continually surprising or discomfiting us. For one thing, once we look into this great language of ours, it turns out to be mostly other people's. Bosh, I hear you saying?

That so indigenous, so British monosyllabic interjection comes from the Turkish *bosh*, meaning "empty, vain, useless, void of sense or utility". We may have guessed that, despite its deceptive "low", *bungalow* was an Eastern import (from Hindi *banglā*, "pertaining to Bengal"), and that *bandanna* (Hindi), *cheeroot* (Tamil, "roll") and *tariff* (via French, Italian and Turkish from Arabic, "the making known") have a touch of the tar-brush about them. And likewise *banana* (from Guinea, though a pundit cited by Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell suggests that the resemblance with Arabic *banāna*, "a single finger or toe", can hardly be accidental), *sugar* (via Arabic from Sanskrit *sarkara*, "grit or gravel") and *candy* (from Sanskrit *khanda*, "broken", or possibly the Dravidian for "lump").

But did we know that *dinghy* ("legitimately incorporated in the vocabulary of the British navy, as the name of the smallest ship's boat") is Hindi from Sanskrit for "trough", *shawl* comes from the Persian, itself possibly from the Sanskrit for "variegated", and *punch* (potable) derives from Persian *panj* or Hindi *pānch*, "five". i.e., consisting of five ingredients (though the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* says "orig. unkn.")? Or that *chicanery*, immediately from the French for "quibble", is "really traceable" to Persian *chaugān*, the game of polo? (Our name *polo* is taken from a Kashmiri dialect word for "ball".) Yule

and Burnell propose that the modern sense of “chicanery” is a reflection on the tactics employed in this up-market sport: taking every possible advantage of the terrain and so forth.

The first edition of *Hobson-Jobson* appeared exactly a hundred years ago, and the present reprint is of the second edition, edited and added to by William Crooke and published in 1903. Little is divulged about the authors. In the preface, Colonel (later Sir) Henry Yule pays tribute to his collaborating correspondent, Arthur Burnell, of the Madras Civil Service, who died in 1882, four years before the book appeared. Yule was living in Palermo, possibly in retirement from overseas service, he died in 1889. In his foreword, Anthony Burgess observes that the work “breathes the warmth of amateurism” while telling us more about the impact of Indian languages on English than any professional dictionary does. Random checks against up-to-date authorities suggest that, notwithstanding traces of rough-and-readiness, it is pretty professional in its etymologies, as well as engaging in its comments and graphic in its anecdotes. For it, “Anglo-Indian” embraces practically anywhere and anything east of Alexandria.

The term *Hobson-Jobson* itself, “a native festal excitement”, is a garbling—a British soldiers’ version of the cry, during the Muharram ceremonies, commemorating the deaths of the Shiite imams. “Yâ Hasan! Yâ Hosain!” Through the age-old contempt for foreign lingos, or perhaps as an attempt among the soldiery to domesticate the disease, *cholera morbus* emerges as *Corporal Forbes*. Not that the French are any more respectful: *mort-de-chien* (briefly anglicized in 1716 as “Dog’s Disease”) is a corruption of Portuguese *mordexim*, itself deriving from Indian names for cholera, ultimately from a Marathi verb *modnen*, “to collapse”. *Cheechee* is (or was) an odious term applied to people of mixed European and Indian race, alluding to their “mincing accent” (*chī*, “fie!”, indicating genteel reproof), as perhaps acquired in the Christian schools and preserved as a defensive measure of “identity” *vis-à-vis* those of so-called pure blood. It is distinct in its history from the French *chi-chi*, adopted by us, though the expressions convey much the same sense—of affectation—and both are onomatopoeic. *Lip-lap* was the equivalent of *cheechee* in the Dutch East Indies.

Buxee, “a word of complex and curious history”, signified “military paymaster”, though its original Sanskrit, *bhukshu*, denoted “beggar” and hence religious mendicant. From early times *bakshu* and its variants were used by diverse peoples to signify variously a lama, scribe, doctor, teacher, minstrel. Confusion appears to have arisen with the Persian term *bakhshīsh*, “payment”, from which, presumably by way of Egypt, *baksheesh*, “tip, alms”, entered our language. There is no mention here of the slang *buckshee*, “for free”, which may have arrived on the scene a little too late for Yule and Burnell. The slang expression *dekko/deck*, in “let’s have a dekko”, is a direct and respectable

borrowing from Hindi *dekho*, imperative of the verb “to look”. Eric Partridge also mentions a separate derivation, from Romany *dik*, “to look”; and *Collins English Dictionary*, I note, lists a Northumbrian dialect imperative, *deek that!*, “look at that”, perhaps of Romany origin.

The entry on *pug*, footprint of an animal, from Hindi *pag*, Sanskrit *padaka*, “a foot”, offers a brief example of the “Anglo-Indian” language in operation, in a sporting magazine of 1831: “sanguine we were sometimes on the report of a *burra* [‘great’] *pug* from the *shikaree* [‘sportsman’, applied equally to native guide or trapper and European hunter]”

Not surprisingly, a *faux ami* raises its treacherous head from time to time. *Talisman* doesn’t mean what it seems to say, but stands for “mullah” and possibly (Yule and Burnell are not quite sure) is a corruption of Arabic *talāmiza* or *talāmi*, “disciples, students”, whereas our word “talisman” comes from the Greek, “to complete a rite”. *Cowtail* is a deformation of *chowry*, from Sanskrit *chāmara*, meaning the bushy tail of the Tibetan yak as used as a fly-swat or royal insignia or a decoration attached to the horse-trappings of native warriors; and hence it is absurd of one Bogle to call yaks “cow-tailed cows” in his Journal, “though ‘horse-tailed cows’ would have been more germane!” *Compound*, the enclosure in which a house or factory stands, in effect often a complex of buildings, has nothing to do with our Latinate word but is Malay *kampong*, a village or settlement. Yet a modern (1877) and “most intelligent” but unnamed lady novelist is discovered in unseemly confusion: “When the Rebellion broke out at other stations in India, I left our own compost ”

That *shampoo* (Hindustani *chāmpo*, “kneading”) was diverted in transit to signify the washing of hair may conceivably have been helped by the fact that massage was sometimes performed by barbers in the realms of Anglo-India. But *solar topee*, though indeed a sun helmet, had no connection with the sun, since Urdu *solā* and Hindi *sholā* are the names of the plant from whose pith the *topee* (Hindi for “hat”) was made. A rather jolly deformation in the *Hobson-Jobson* line is *upper roger*, for heir apparent or “what we generally render in Siam as the ‘Second King’ ”: viz. the Sanskrit *yuvarāja*, “young King”. Similarly, *college-pheasant* is not a wise old bird or a swan reserved for the dons of St. John’s, but “an absurd enough corruption” of *kālīj*, the Himalayan name for a genus of birds intermediate between the pheasant and the jungle-fowl.

A not altogether false friend is *organ*, for an oriental form of mitrailleuse or machine-gun. It comes, Yule and Burnell say, from a Persian word deriving from the Greek *organon*, “tool”—which, others say, comes from an Indo-European word which gives us our “work”. There is a lengthy entry here on *typhoon*, rejecting the popular and plausible derivation from Chinese *tai fung*, “big wind”, for “since there is no evidence that the word is in Chinese use at all, it would perhaps be as fair a suggestion to derive it from the English *tough ‘un*”. Yule and Burnell prefer to derive it from the Greek *tuphōn*, “whirlwind”, by way of the

Arabic *tūfān*, acquired through maritime intercourse or translations of Aristotle, and then, picked up from Arab pilots, the Portuguese *tufão*.

Umbrella, *padre* and *pale ale* find a place here, not because they pose any difficulty but simply because they were a common feature of everyday life, the last named item having been brewed specifically for use in India from the late eighteenth century onwards. *Suttee* gets an entry of eight columns, with illustrative quotations going back to 317 BC, although the word itself couldn't be found in any European work older than the seventeenth century. It is properly the Sanskrit *satī*, meaning "a good woman" or "true wife", and the Sanskrit term actually used for the rite is horridly euphemistic. *sahagamana*, "keeping company". Other generously informative entries are on *music* (the one kind of Western music the Indians enjoyed, it seems, was that of the bagpipe: "they would much rather listen to this instrument a whole day than to an organ for ten minutes", according to Captain Munro's *Narrative of Military Operations against the French, Dutch, and Hyder Ally Cawn, of 1789*) and on *a muck/amok*, from the Malay "to make a furious attack", possibly originating in the Sanskrit *amokshya*, "that cannot be loosed" (i.e., bound by a vow) W. W. Skeat's theory that running amok was the national mode of suicide in that no one had ever heard of Malays committing suicide in any other way is politely dismissed on the grounds that women and children, unlikely to hit back to much effect, are frequent victims of such attacks.

Nine columns are devoted to *tea*, ultimately from Fukien dialect pronounced *tay*; Mandarin: *ch'a*. Pepys was introduced to tea, "a China drink", in 1660, while a Dutch traveller first encountered it in 1681 and "could not understand how sensible men could think it a treat to drink what tasted no better than haywater". *Caddy*, as in "tea-caddy", is the Malay *kātī* or *catty*, a unit of weight, 1½ lb. still in common use today

Some fun is had with *musk-rat*, whose odour is "so penetrative that it is commonly asserted to affect bottled beer by running over the bottles in a cellar"; *musk* is said to come, by way of Latin and Greek, through Persian, from Sanskrit *mushka*, the literal meaning of which is glossed here as "in the old English phrase 'a cod of musk'", and in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, less delicately, as "scrotum (from shape of musk-deer's gland)" *Caravan*, as we knew, is the Persian *kārwan*, a convoy of travellers, and the watchful authors remark that the abbreviation 'van' seems to have acquired full rights in English whereas "the altogether analogous 'bus' is still looked on as slang". While *chintz* (Sanskrit *chitra*, "speckled") and *nankeen* (yellowish cotton cloth, from the city of Nanking) are listed, there is no mention of the wickedly appropriate material, "the fabric that caresses the skin", from which the knickers of James Joyce's Gerty MacDowell were made: *nainsook*, from Hindi *nain*, "eye", and *sukh*, "delight".

Gong, once thought to be Chinese, is a Malay term, imitative of the sound

produced And the authors suggest that the word *gumgum*, which “we had supposed to be an invention of the late Charles Dickens” (see *Sketches by Boz*, “The Steam Excursion”) is feasibly a genuine if rare “Anglo-Indian” locution, an approximation to the plural of *gong*. Malay plurals are sometimes made by doubling the singular form (*pěřěmpuan*, “woman”; *pěřěmpuan-pěřěmpuan* “women”); *mata* is “eye”—as in Mata Hari, the Dutch dancer and beautiful spy, “Eye of the day”, viz. “Sun”—and hence, by a slight change of process, *mata-mata* is a policeman, who needs at least two eyes.

It is interesting, too, to learn that among the various people credited with the invention of the *jennyrickshaw* or *jinricksha*, abbreviated as *rickshaw*, is an Englishman known as “Public-spirited Smith”. The word is Japanese, *jin-rikisha*, literally “Man-Strength-Cart”, and a humorous friend of the authors observed that the term was an exact equivalent of “Pull-Man-Car”. More humour stems from the appellation *daimyō*, a feudal lord, the Japanese pronunciation of Chinese *tai ming*, “great name” A pertinent extract from Basil Hall Chamberlain’s *Things Japanese* (1890), a compilation with which, as also with J. Dyer Ball’s *Things Chinese* (1892), the present work has some affinity, notes that in medieval times warrior chiefs of lesser degree were known by the title *shōmyō*, “small name”, but this soon fell into disuse, perhaps because those who bore it didn’t find it grand enough.

Opium, we discover, must be attributed to the noble Greeks (*opion*, “poppy-juice”), not to degenerate Arabs, whose *afyūn* was taken from the Greek, nor to depraved Chinamen, whose *a-fu-yung* came from the Arabic. A late nineteenth-century lexicographer’s attempt to blame the word on Sanskrit *ahiphena*, “snake venom”, is gently put down as “not probable”; and an extract dated 1726 states: “It will hardly be believed that Java alone consumes monthly 350 packs of opium, each being of 136 catis [see *caddy/catty* above], though the East India Company make 145 catis out of it.”

According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* the word *rice* comes to us via Old French, Italian, and Latin, from Greek *oruza*, of Oriental origin. With more space for speculation, Yule and Burnell remark on the “strong temptation” to derive the Greek term from Tamil *arisi*, “rice deprived of husk”. Arabic *al-ruzz* may have been taken directly from the Dravidian, while the Greeks probably acquired the word during Alexander’s expedition, on the Oxus or in the Punjab, possibly from the Sanskrit *vr̥ihī* in some such dialect form as *vr̥īsi*. Simpler, but amusingly illustrative of the twists and turnabouts that language can experience, is the case of *joss*, as in *jossstick*. To begin with, this was a borrowing from the European, *joss* being a pidgin reproduction in the Chinese ports of the Portuguese *deos* (Latin *deus*) *Joss* was subsequently taken back from the pidgin by Europeans under the impression that it was a Chinese word referring to some native graven image. *Joss-house* came to denote not the house of God but heathen temple.

One of the epigraphs or mottoes to *Hobson-Jobson* comes from a seventeenth-century book with the inspiring title *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*: “As well may we fetch words from the *Ethiopians*, or East or West *Indians*, and thrust them into our Language, and baptize all by the name of *English*, as those which we daily take from the *Latin* or Languages thereon depending...” Well said. In the words of the pious Anglo-Indian oath, it doesn’t matter a dam—*dām* being an Indian small copper coin comparable in metaphorical value to a brass farthing.

(*The Times Literary Supplement*, April 11, 1986, pp. 397-98)

CREATOR FIRE

O SACRED creator Fire,
 Kindle Thy flames in me,
 Reach up Thy peaks in me,
 Bear me in Thy burning arms,
 Take me to the core of my being.
 Let brightly burn Thy Tongues,
 Let blaze Thy pure Delight.
 Illume my hidden darkness,
 Lick up all scum and dross in me.
 Inside are Thy oceans of radiance,
 Outside reign these days of disturbance.
 O Bride of the Lord, raise upwards
 All my misused energies
 With the wonder of Thy Beauty
 Revelling on His higher planes.
 Light up my helpless life,
 Transmute it into Thy strength.

SHYAM KUMARI

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

The Eternal Wisdom (Central Sayings of Great Sages of All Times) 1993. Pub: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry-2, India. Pp: 595. Pb. Rs. 120 00.

The Eternal Wisdom is a collection of the sayings of great thinkers and sages of the East and the West spanning a period of over five thousand years, from the time of the Rig Veda to the present. It represents a kaleidoscope of spiritual and philosophic traditions. The book contains highly valuable words of wisdom of great sages and also sayings from various scriptures. Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Lao Tse, Confucius, Li Chi, Seneca, Homer, Socrates, Porphyry, *The Ramayana*, *The Bhagavad Gita*, *Upanishads*, *Dhammapada*, *The Old and the New Testaments* to name a few.

The sayings express great truths of life in condensed and concentrated forms. In their terseness and simplicity they drive home a moral, emphasise a point, define a concept and express a particular thought.

The volume is divided into three books under suitable headings. Book II and III are further divided into four sections each. Browsing through this volume will no doubt make a religious fundamentalist quit persuading himself or others that his religion alone is the sole one. For, all the sages and the doctrines aim at improving human life and give codes of conduct which constitute real religion. In fact, the central idea with regard to God is that He manifests in all living creatures. He resides within oneself; therefore to seek Him outside will only be a futile attempt. Man can enjoy happiness and become divine when he recognises God within.

Many of the quotes stress the importance of the Quest within, where one will find true riches—the Divine Self. Unless man understands himself fully, he cannot hope to understand others rightly. Above all, “He who knows himself, knows God”. “Ignorance is bliss” goes an old adage. But what the great sages assert is that Ignorance is the state of doing evil. An ignorant mind can be purged by knowledge. An intelligent mind should be our guide, then we can overcome all obstacles in life. Says the Gita: “When thou possesseth Knowledge thou shalt attain soon to peace.”

While these wise men of all times can only be our beacon, we all should be our own torches, our own masters, for which the sages and scriptures emphasise self-confidence, concentration, sincerity, uprightness and unshakable faith in the religion of love. Simplicity and modesty are considered to be the supreme form of virtue.

What one understands from the reading of this book is that true knowledge, as is expounded by the sages, cuts across the barriers of religion and narrow sectarianism. All these revered, awakened souls, though belonging to different ages, religions and traditions, stay united in their expressions of concepts and

teachings, thereby proving to the world that languages may be many, but wisdom is the same everywhere.

We have here an ocean of wisdom. A plunge into its deep waters will enrich one's mind, replenish it with infinite riches—perfect knowledge. This knowledge will make him see the world in a new light. "At each instant he will see a wonderful world, a new creation." These words of wisdom become tools of a new life. They kindle our thoughts and stir our emotions. Living as we are in a disillusioned material world, one can hope to get guidance and solace from this book. The sayings lay a demand on us to think. That is to say, the principles held forth in this text need contemplation not explanation. They are all applicable to our daily needs, whether we are sadhaks or commoners or sceptics.

The publisher has done a fine job in elegantly designing and producing the book which makes it eminently worth reading and possessing. There is a list of authors and scriptures for ready reference at the close of the book. To conclude, the volume is worth its price.

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 Arvind Akki

THIS year, Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education celebrates its 50th Anniversary, its Golden Jubilee. We are immensely fortunate and privileged to have been the products of this Centre of Education. Let us recall in this year our past associations and experiences with our Centre and the ever-unfailing help and guidance of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, in this ever-vibrating spiritual atmosphere of the Ashram. On this occasion, it is imperative to recollect the soul-stirring words of the Mother in a letter written in 1953. Let us make a sincere reassessment of ourselves and ponder, with all humility, over how far we have been worthy of the unique expectation and sacred responsibility laid upon us by the Mother in this message. Here are her most eloquent and inspiring words:

“I am perfectly sure, I am quite confident, there is not the slightest doubt in my mind, that this University, which is being established here, will be the greatest seat of knowledge upon earth.

“It may take fifty years, it may take a hundred years, and you may doubt about my being there; I may be there or not, but these children of mine will be there to carry out my work

“And those who collaborate in this divine work today will have the joy and pride of having participated in such an exceptional achievement.”¹

During the Mother's Birth-Centenary in 1978 a similar topic was given for the Seminar of the New Age Association. Therefore some of us who took part in it at that time are rather reluctant to speak again. The reason is that it will be merely repetitive with nothing new to add. But let us pose this question, “Haven't we learnt any more new lessons after the Mother's Centenary?” The new generation of students can say that since they had hardly any opportunity or privilege of having the Mother's direct guidance or Darshan, they have nothing

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 12, p 112

much in particular to say nor any substantial stuff to add. But if we are truly sincere and open to the Mother's Force, life cannot but be a series of lessons that we are constantly learning and re-learning through our previous mistakes, failures and experiences. It is a continuous process. We may be conscious or unconscious of it but the process of learning goes on in many parts of our being.

For those who are brought up here in this Ashram from childhood, it is indeed a difficult task to pinpoint what exactly they have learnt from the Mother. But if we ask ourselves: "What have we not learnt from the Mother?" we may perhaps say: Everything. The Mother in one of her answers to a question spoke these deeply moving words:

"I am with you because I am you or you are me.

"I am with you, that signifies a world of things, because I am with you on all levels, on all planes, from the supreme consciousness down to my most physical consciousness. Here, in Pondicherry, you cannot breathe without breathing my consciousness. It saturates the atmosphere almost materially, in the subtle physical, and extends to the lake, ten kilometres from here. Further, my consciousness can be felt in the material vital, then on the mental plane and the other higher planes, everywhere."¹

We are exceptionally fortunate to be here in this all-pervading spiritual atmosphere, where we constantly breathe the Mother's consciousness. We may say also that those who have gathered here have come not just by chance or coincidence. For we all had some past link with the Mother. As she reveals to us, "We have all met in previous lives. Otherwise we would not have come together in this life. We are of one family and have worked through ages for the victory of the Divine and its manifestation upon earth."²

All those who have come here, have some interesting stories to narrate. But while narrating them one should remember that whatever one has to say one has to be absolutely sincere, since the human ego and nature have normally a tendency of colouring, exaggerating, magnifying and deforming the truth and this ultimately leads us to self-deceit and self-hypocrisy, hollow sham and pretension. Keeping this in mind, I shall now narrate a few of my experiences.

In 1966, I visited the Ashram for the first time during my school holidays along with my brother. I had the Darshan of the Mother on 24th April. I was very much moved by my stay here. When I went back to my native place, I felt a sort of magnetic pull from the Ashram. Somehow I felt that I should study in the Ashram school. I soon began pouring letters to my uncle to ask the Mother if I could join the Ashram school. Finally, the Mother approved after seeing my

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 13, p 75

² *Ibid* , Vol 3, p 3

photo and gave me permission to join Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in 1968

If we open ourselves to the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's Force, the lessons that we can learn from them are countless and endless. One entire life is not sufficient to practise even a few of their marvellous and luminous spiritual teachings which cover the entire gamut from the most material plane to the most spiritual. Those who feel that they did not have the external contact with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo should not in any way feel inferior or discouraged nor think that they are unfortunate beings. The Mother has given us this unique proclamation and divine assurance that, "... there is a special personal tie between you and me, between all who have turned to the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and myself,—and, it is well understood, distance does not count here, you may be in France, you may be at the other end of the world or in Pondicherry, this tie is always true and living. And each time there comes a call, each time there is a need for me to know so that I may send out a force, an inspiration, a protection or any other thing, a sort of message comes to me all of a sudden and I do the needful."¹

I may recall here that some years ago, I went to my home town along with my cousin. While travelling, the bus halted at a bus-stand for about 10 minutes or so. We got down and went a little further on the main road to have some refreshments. When we came back, to our great shock the bus had already left. My cousin was worried as he was carrying some valuables in a suitcase, which had remained in the bus along with our other suitcases. We at once rushed to the inquiry counter and requested the person on duty to ring up the next bus-stand to the effect that if our suitcases were traced the bus-stand staff should keep these with them and we would collect them later on. He asked us to go elsewhere and ring up from there. We even offered some cash but he was stubborn in his decision. With utter disgust and frustration we came out from there to find a taxi which could help us to catch up with our bus. We found a taxi but when we tried to reduce the fare demanded, the taxi-driver was not willing to scale it down. Then we approached the other taxi drivers. Realising our dire need, they asked a much higher amount and played all kinds of tricks with us. With no way out of this trap, I remembered our Divine Mother and prayed to her to help us out of this bitter crisis. With no hope whatsoever we came out to the bus-stand, contemplating deeply as to what to do next. We went up to a bus-driver and told him of our serious problem. He felt pity for us and told us to get inside the bus and said, "Sir, I shall try to catch up with your bus at the next stop." I intensely prayed to the Mother to speed up the bus so that we might reach our bus at the next stop. The tension was building up in us as we arrived at the next stop. The bus-driver told us to get down quickly as the bus in which we had been travelling earlier was about to leave. We rushed at once into the bus and found that our

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 13, p 76

suitcases were safe there. There was a great sigh of relief!

I thanked the Mother profoundly with all my heart for she had indeed responded to my prayer. I may add here that like myself innumerable devotees and disciples have had several kinds of concrete experiences through the grace of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo

I was fortunate enough to visit the Mother on my birthdays for a couple of years and to see her at the balcony darshans which she used to give on four special occasions. The most memorable and unforgettable day was her Maha-samadhi on 17th November 1973 I have rarely breathed such heavenly peace and silence and her divine presence as I felt during that period till her body was laid in the Samadhi on the 20th November On one of my birthdays, I offered to the Mother a table-lamp made out of papier-maché which I had prepared myself in the school. Those are the golden moments with the Mother which will remain fresh for ever in my heart. The Mother once said, "In truth, I hold myself responsible for everyone, even for those whom I have met only for one second in my life"¹

When I was in B group in 1970-71, on one occasion I told my group captain that I had received a card from the Mother in 1966, where she wrote my name as Anand Akki although I had not asked her to give me a new name. My captain and some others were of the opinion that I adopt the new name. Finally I did so. In the long run, somehow I did not feel very comfortable with it. It was at this time that someone told me that my age was not correct. All this added more confusion in my mind. So I thought it best to put this matter to the Mother. When I went up to her room on my birthday, I carried with me a notebook in which I wrote a letter, "Divine Mother, I am not sure about my age so I pray thee to give my age and thy blessings." Well, I had forgotten to ask about my name in my letter. Anyway, the person who was attending to the Mother read out the letter and asked her if she wanted to write down something. He then brought out a pen and gave it to her and she wrote:

"Keep silent and you will know.

Blessings"

Within a week or so the Mother appeared in my dream, almost in a Kali-like appearance and asked me in a very powerful voice, "What is your age?" I answered, "14". Then she asked me, "What is your name?" I said, "Arvind". After this she disappeared. Later on, I narrated this experience to our school's registrar and requested him to make the changes wanted by me He asked me to write to the Mother again and verify the truth of my experience. I felt it was needless to ask again when she had given me the full assurance in her statement However he was willing to change my name if I wanted to but not the age. Then I changed my name. Personally, I feel the name "Anand" which was given by the Mother has something to do with my inner need, development and experience

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 13, p 77

What I have learnt from the Mother is mighty little when compared to what is still to be learnt. We can be eternally grateful to her for what we are today and we can pray to her to mould us not only in this life but in future lives also, according to what she wants us to become

Sri Aurobindo in one of his letters to a sadhak sums up the most essential and the most valuable lesson of life. "It is a lesson of life," he declares, "that always in this world everything fails a man—only the Divine does not fail him, if he turns entirely to the Divine. It is not because there is something bad in you that blows fall on you—blows fall on all human beings because they are full of desire for things that cannot last and they lose them or, even if they get, it brings disappointment and cannot satisfy them. To turn to the Divine is the only truth in life."¹

Once the Mother was asked, "What have You been expecting from us and from humanity in general for the accomplishment of Your Work upon earth?" The Mother answered, "Nothing."² But this does not mean that we have to do nothing in accomplishing and collaborating in her Divine Work, though in the final analysis her work is self-fulfilling as it carries with it directly the sanction of the Supreme. If we claim to be her true children, it is our highest duty to collaborate in her supreme work in creating a New World of tomorrow.

Friends, I conclude my speech with these enlightening words of the Mother, "... if your will is to become men of the new race realising Sri Aurobindo's supramental ideal, living a new and higher life upon a new earth, you will find here all the necessary help to achieve your purpose; you will profit fully by your stay in the Ashram and eventually become living examples for the world."³

¹ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 24), p 1639

² *The New Age* (1977), edited by Kishor Gandhi, p 301

³ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 12, p 117