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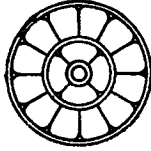
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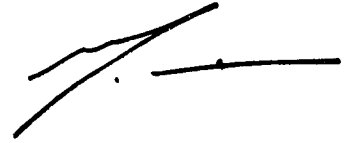
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled



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MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XLVII

No. 4

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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THE MOTHER ON HER ROLE AS GUIDE

If you are quite sincere, you will agree with me that you are complaining of my being not too Divine but not Divine enough. For if in my physical body I had assumed, for instance, the appearance cherished by the ancient Indian tradition, how convenient it would be! Imagine, if having several heads and a great number of arms, possessing the power of ubiquity, when X comes to manicure my hands and so unceremoniously knocks at the door to inform me that she is there, (I cannot tell her not to knock because she is very busy) I could send her a pair of hands for her work and still be in my small room to answer to Y who is sitting with me there, how nice it would be!...

So, you see, I fear I have accepted to become too human, too much bound by the human laws of time and space, and thus not capable of doing half a dozen things at the same time!

12 January 1932

*

Lord, I lament my limitations... but it is through them, by virtue of them, that men can approach Thee. Without them, Thou wouldst be as remote, as inaccessible to men as if Thou hadst not put on a body of flesh.

This is why each progress they make represents a true liberation for me, for each step they take towards Thee gives me the right to cast away one of these limitations and to manifest Thee more truly, more perfectly.

And yet these limitations could have been dispensed with. But then it would have been necessary to keep near us only those who have experienced the Divine, who have identified themselves with Thee, Lord, even if only once, either within themselves or in the universe. For this identification is the indispensable basis of our Yoga; it is its starting-point.

17 July 1932

*

It is their own mental and vital formation of me that they love, not myself. More and more I am confronted with this fact. Each one has made his own image of me for himself in conformity with his needs and desires, and it is with this image that he is in relation, through that he receives the little amount of universal forces and the still smaller amount of supramental forces that manage to filter through all these formations. Unfortunately, they cling to my physical presence, otherwise I could withdraw into my inner solitude and do my work quietly and freely from there; but this physical presence is a symbol for them and that is why they cling to it, for in fact they have very little real contact with what my body truly is or with

the tremendous accumulation of conscious energy that it represents.

And now, O Higher Force, that You are descending into me and penetrating more and more totally all the atoms of my body, the distance between myself and everything around me seems to be increasing more and more, and more and more I feel myself floating in an atmosphere of radiant consciousness that is totally beyond their understanding

11 June 1954

*

Since I love only You, O Lord, it is You alone whom I love in all and in each one, and by dint of loving You in them, I shall end up by making them a little conscious of You

For them, the real thing is to know how to let themselves be loved without any preference and obstruction. But, not only do they not want to be loved except in their own way, they do not want even to open themselves to love unless it comes to them through the intermediary of their choice .. and what could be done in a few hours, a few months or a few years takes centuries to be accomplished.

*

After establishing a conscious contact with each person present, I merge with the Supreme Lord and then my body is nothing but a channel through which He pours out upon all His Light, His Consciousness and His Joy, to each one according to his capacity

*

I take the greatest care to open the door within all of you, so that if you have just a small movement of concentration within you, you do not have to wait for long periods in front of a closed door that will not move, to which you have no key and which you do not know how to open.

The door is open, only you must look in that direction. You must not turn your back on it.

*

I am not eager to be the Guru of anyone. It is more spontaneously natural for me to feel the Mother of all and to carry them forward silently through the power of love.

19 September 1961

*

Is a physical contact with you indispensable?

No, this physical contact is not indispensable. Certainly for those who have the true attitude, the physical contact helps the body to follow the movement of transformation, but the body is rarely in a state to profit by it. Generally on birthdays it is more receptive.

September 1971

(Collected Works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp 82-85)

THE INTEGRAL YOGA

FROM A LETTER BY SRI AUROBINDO

... I BELIEVE you have rightly stated the two main elements of it—first, the acceptance of the world as a manifestation of the Divine Power, not its rejection as a mistake or an illusion, and, secondly, the character of this manifestation as a spiritual evolution with yoga as a means for the transformation of mind, life and body into instruments of a spiritual and supramental perfection. The universe is not only a material but a spiritual fact, life not only a play of forces or a mental experience, but a field for the evolution of the concealed spirit. Human life will receive its fulfilment and transformation into something beyond itself only when this truth is seized and made the motive force of our existence and the means of its effective realisation discovered. The means of realisation is to be found in an integral yoga, a union in all parts of our being with the Divine and a consequent transmutation of all their now jarring elements into the harmony of a higher divine consciousness and existence.

(Letters on Yoga, Cent ed , Vol 23, pp 504-505)

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

THE Gods and Goddesses are emanations of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. So their connections in some way or other with the work of our Gurus, according to the choice of our Gurus, are natural. But the question is whether the disciples are encouraged to have connections with the Gods and Goddesses. Here, as elsewhere in the Integral Yoga, there are no hard-and-fast rules and several things are not objected to if they serve as temperamental aids. Yet the general stand is clear. Has not the Mother emphatically said that those who want to worship Gods and Goddesses may do so but such worship has nothing to do with the Supramental Yoga of Sri Aurobindo?

You make much of Sri Aurobindo's "sending his blessings on the occasion of 'Upanayanam' (Investiture of Sacred Thread as a symbol of spiritual initiation) and on one occasion blessing the person concerned as well as the whole world with his 'Gayatri Mantra'".

The fact that Sri Aurobindo has given a new Gayatri replacing the famous old one is quite meaningful in the context we are discussing. Its divergence from the latter shows the novel dynamic world-transforming drive of the Aurobindonian Yoga as distinguished from the R̥gvedic drive which had as its goal—its very grand goal, no doubt—the impelling of our thoughts by the light of the Divine Sun of Truth, the deity Surya-Savitri. Surely the Vedic revelation is not rejected, its Gods and Goddesses can serve Sri Aurobindo's ends but we are not encouraged to move directly in their great ranges. "We do not belong to the dawns of the past but to the noons of the future." Surya-Savitri as representing the godhead of what Sri Aurobindo has termed Supermind, Truth-Consciousness, Gnosis, Vijnana is indeed the presiding Power and Presence of the Yoga whose guides are Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but with an orientation beyond the vision, far-flung though it was, of Vishwamitra, the seer of the old Gayatri.

The moment we see the new core of spirituality in the message of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother we shall gain the right perspective of all their gestures. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did not refuse to bless various functions in the lives of their disciples, especially those living outside the Ashram. I say "especially" because even within the Ashram they have blessed a few marriages. In the instance of my niece, an Ashramite, the Mother not only blessed her marriage with an Ashram boy in the sense of companionship but also at one stage wrote wanting the boy, in view of the girl's psychological need, to give her a child: the sole proviso made was that the child should be conceived and given birth elsewhere than in the Ashram. All this does not signify that investitures of the sacred thread among non-Ashramites or even an Ashram-marriage like the one to which I have alluded can be made a rule of the spiritual life according to

the Integral Yoga The Aurobindonian spirituality, in the Ashram version, goes fundamentally beyond sacred threads and procreative marriages and indeed looks upon such things as what I have dubbed “old-world foibles”.

As for your allegation of my partiality for the Parsis, the relevant point is whether I am a practitioner of the Parsi religion or linked with it by any representative sign. I am sure you know that the Parsis too have a sacred thread (kusti): it is worn around the waist over a sacred shirt (sudra). Even before I joined the Ashram I had given up wearing the sacred thread no less than the sacred shirt of the Parsis. Both these characteristics are more a sign of the Zoroastrian religion as distinct from the Aurobindonian path than the Hindu sacred thread which Champaklal kept wearing. For the latter is exclusive to the Brahmins among the Hindus and does not have the universal sweep of the pre-Aurobindonian as does my long-discarded Parsi symbols of religious commitment. As for the Parsi religion, I gave it up long ago and the pursuit of Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga has rendered any return to it impossible.

My so-called partiality for the Parsis can only be considered “communal” in an innocuous sense and no more de-Indianises me than any resident of India who would find it pertinent or piquant to describe himself as a Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Punjabi, Kashmiri, Tamil or Telegu with no desire to be regarded as provincial rather than national. We must not make all-obscuring mountains out of mole-hills meant for specific harmless purposes. (12.6 1993)

*

Thanks for wanting to send whatever I may like to have. But surely you will be here in person soon enough? At that time you may bring whatever occurs to you as necessary to my rather unusual mode of life—confined to a wheelchair, facing a chaos of papers on my writing table, with bookcases around packed with information on a variety of subjects “from cabbages to kings” and challenging the mind on the one hand with expositions of the world’s teeming manifold quest across the labyrinths of time and on the other hand with

Those thoughts that wander through Eternity.

Sitting in the midst of profuse reading-matter and absorbed in the craft of endless writing and turned as much as his numerous human weaknesses allow towards the all-healing and all-fulfilling infinity of that dual divine presence: Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—such is Amal Kiran to whom you are stretching friendly hands which he is willing to clasp. What gifts these hands should bring is quite a problem. But I may add that there is a more approachable side to this fellow. He can smile and laugh and respond to warm touches and has an appreciative eye for exquisite or piquant faces and gracefully moving or

strikingly stepping bodies For, within the scholar, the scribbler and the sadhak, there is the poet and there is the artist and perhaps there lingers also the ghost of the lover

It is not always easy to know my attitude towards things. Thus I feel misrepresented when you write: “X tells me that you do not like people who are undecisive and sit on the fence.” First of all, there is a difference between not liking the act of sitting on the fence and not liking the people who do the fence-sitting Up to now, you, according to yourself, have been a sitter on the fence. Can you tell me that I haven’t liked you? I am sure my liking you has been splashed all over my letters. If I have wished you to get off the fence, it is not in order to make you more likable: it is simply in order to make you more happy—to save you from useless prolonged hurt to your beautiful bottom—I mean the bottom of your heart from which you have loved X.

Even if you continued in that uncomfortable posture you would not cease to be congenial and delectable to me. I have no partiality for “strong silent” people of radical decisions as against frail ones asking themselves, “Shall I or shall I not?” In most if not all matters I have a free mind. Like the Roman poet Terence I can say: “Humanus sum et nihil humani a me alienum puto”—“I am human and nothing human do I consider alien to me.” Not only is there in me a link of common humanity in general, I have also gone through a large variety of human experiences. All the follies and failings, miseries and sufferings of the race have been part of my life, just as, on the other hand, all the powers and splendours and felicities have been. I have known exultation and heartbreak equally.

In the ordinary round of life I have as close friends those who are eminent in intelligence and those who are quite simple-minded, men and women with shining eyes along with men who are dull and women who are drab. No doubt some people are dearer to me than others, but I shut out none as despicable, or perhaps I should make a small exception: I have a special admiration for and affinity with living vessels of courage and generosity. Broadly speaking, what appeals to me is not this or that characteristic but the basic substance of which a person is constituted. I remember the Mother saying something like: “I don’t care for a person’s ideas and opinions, intellectual convictions or conventional beliefs. Even if someone was an atheist and a materialist in his mental outlook but was made of really fine stuff, capable of disinterested action and sensitive to life’s beautiful movements, I would find him akin to my work and I could do something with him ” On a much inferior scale, my natural turn is like the Mother’s

(6 10 1993)

*

You want to know what exactly is meant by “fine stuff” and how you could be a person possessing it. I have given two examples of the proof of such stuff:

disinterested action and sensitiveness to life's beautiful movements. You want me to clarify what is meant by these two characteristics, so that you may bring yourself nearer to what the Mother can work upon. Not to be locked up in one's own interests and satisfactions but to be able to give oneself to activities that are undertaken without the desire for fame or power and people's admiration—at the same time to keep away from being caught too much in outward occupation and develop the capacity of being alone with one's own depths and with the widenesses of the universe, so to speak, as well as with the heights of literature and art and far-ranging thought and still not grow too serious and solemn but have the appetite for laughter and fun and perhaps even a bit of frivolity, remembering that

A little nonsense now and then
Is relished by the wisest men.

—such in general and in a broad connotation I would picture the “fine stuff” come alive. This stuff can be met with on a less comprehensive scale too. A person essentially good-natured and generous and forbearing—with a courageous outlook and a humble inlook—can be designated as being fine in stuff

(3 11 1993)

*

Q.—How far have you gone on the Inner Path? Krishna Prem (Ronald Nixon) has written. “For the Great Ones no obstruction can exist. Christ appeared suddenly in the midst of closed doors. Apollonius of Tyana removed his limbs from chains to show a doubting disciple that it was but his own will that kept him in Domitian’s prison, and similar events have been recorded even in recent times,—e.g., Trailanga Swami of Benares within living memory. Those who have gone far enough on the Inner Path know with a certainty beyond all cavil that this ‘too too solid earth’ can and does ‘thaw and resolve itself into a dew’ and that nothing in it can obstruct even for an instant the passage of the free soul.”

I am travelling on this Inner Path myself. Hence the query. “How far have you, my dear friend, gone on it?” Sri Aurobindo also has written.

“These things are impossible without an inward living. . .”

“This movement of going inward is a difficult task to lay upon the normal consciousness of the human being, yet there is no other way of self-finding.”

I have great respect for Krishnaprem's spirituality and intuitive insight, but here is not one of his most felicitous moments. First of all, his eloquent passage is based on plausible legends, not unmistakable history. Don't you know that the “resurrection” of Jesus is still a controversial topic among biblical scholars? We

need not dispute what are called his “appearances” after death, but St. Paul, the earliest writer in the New Testament and the only writer affirming first-hand experience of the “raised” or “risen” Jesus, has drawn so sharp a contrast between what he terms the “physical body” and the “spiritual body” of the “resurrection”, that a critical student may well ask: “Can the sudden appearance of Jesus in the midst of closed doors which two out of the four later-written Gospels report on hearsay be attributed, as these Gospels claim, to his physical body?” An occult phenomenon may strike one as the most likely event, a powerful materialisation of a non-physical form after death for a short time. What is said about Apollonius of Tyana dates to over a hundred years after his death, even a longer period than that between the crucifixion of Jesus and the composition of the Gospels ascribed to Luke and John, and thus has no historical force. I don’t know what to say about Trailanga Swami, but the report about him could be on a par with several reports current about Sri Aurobindo during his very life-time—for example, that he used to go out bodily through the ceiling of his room every night to visit various places. The Mother has referred to them and laughed, saying that Sri Aurobindo himself told her of the ceiling-report and informed her of its having been actually put in writing by someone. (By the way, Krishnaprem’s quotation from *Hamlet* is slightly off the mark: Shakespeare uses the word “flesh” and not “earth” in the first part of it.)

Secondly, the phrase Krishnaprem employs and you endorse—“Those who have gone far enough on the Inner Path”—mixes up with the true spiritual progress certain abnormal phenomena which, even if authentic, have essentially nothing to do with spirituality. What he recounts are, if historical, feats of “siddhis”, operations of special miraculous powers. The Mother, when referring to the ceiling-story, was speaking in the context of similar tales of miracles, including the one about the South-Indian saint Ramalingam’s bodily disappearance from the earth. Here two observations by the Mother are to be noted.

One is that, though these phenomena are not impossible, she personally was not inclined to believe the stories in question to be true: all sorts of legends grow up around prominent spiritual figures. The other is that merely miraculous acts are no indications of a spiritual state. She cites a phenomenon said by her to have been attested under strict conditions—a phenomenon, I may say, more wonderful than anything related about past or present masters of spirituality—namely, the feat of dematerialisation and rematerialisation by “mediums” in our own day. Her comment is to the effect that the “mediums” concerned had nothing spiritual about them—in fact, they were people of a fairly undeveloped character.

Please disabuse your mind of the delusion that “the Inner Path” consists of or is proved by such spectacular and sensational achievements. As I have no comparable feats to my credit I should be, by the suggested criterion, outside this Path altogether and I may add that even if I perform them in the future I may still

be as little spiritual as those “mediums”. Of course, these feats can go along with spiritual development too, but they are not necessarily spirituality.

Sri Aurobindo never meant such wonders to be our objective when he wrote of “an inward living” or of “going inward”. As your second quotation from him shows, he was pointing to “self-finding”.

Let us devote our time to the quiet business of living in the sweetness and light and strength of the inmost psychic being, to the secret task of experiencing the peace and wideness and force of the one universal Self of selves, to the absorbed labour of invoking the nature-transformative power of the transcendent Divine which Sri Aurobindo calls “Supermind” or “Truth-Consciousness”

(1992)

AMAL KIRAN
(K.D. SETHNA)

THREE ANCIENT HYMNS

HYMN TO SINDHU: THE MOTHER OF RIVERS

(*Rigveda: X.75*)

NOTE

These Rivers, named after the well-known ancient rivers of the Punjab, are here symbolic of the streamings, the forces of consciousness. They are, as it is said, solar powers, the radiant energies of the Sun—the Supreme Light, their seat and source. They are encompassing and flooding the whole universe including the three domains, the Earth, the Heaven and the Mid-region. The foremost among them is the Sindhu; all the others are its branches and tributaries. Indeed, they represent the Supreme Power (Parashakti) and Her emanations and manifestations and personalities

1. O Waters, the Poet-Creator proclaims your supreme greatness in the House of the Sun.

The Waters move out in seven streams in each of three channels. Sindhu surpasses all hastening streams in her stupendous urge.

2 God Varuna dug out the path for your going when, O Sindhu, you rushed to meet the Plenitudes.

You surge over the fields and up along the plateaus when you move in front of these moving streams as their Master and Ruler.

3. To the Heaven the echo perseveres. And on the Earth the Sindhu by her lustre impels upward the sweep of Infinity.

It is as though from the clouds pour out floods of rain. Indeed as she flows down, the Sindhu comes roaring like a mighty bull.

4. Towards you, O Sindhu, as towards their child the Mothers bellowing rush forth, heavy with milk they are.

Like a warrior king you take lead in the outpouring when you drive forward all these streamings.

5. O Ganga and Yamuna and Saraswati! O Shutudri with thy companion Parushni! Cling to this hymn.

O Marutvridha with thy companion Asikni, O Arjikiya with thy companions Vitasta and Sushoma, lend your ears to me.

6. The first on your way you joined with is Trishtama and then with Susartu and Rasa and Shwetya.

O Sindhu, with Kubha you joined Gomati, and Krumu with Mehatnu: with all of them you move forward in one single movement.

7. Driving straight, bright and gleaming in her greatness, she overflows the wide spaces of speeding realms.

Sindhu, inviolate, the greatest worker among workers, she is like a marvellous-hued steed, beautiful like the body of a woman.

8. Sindhu rides the perfect steed, drives a perfect chariot, wonderfully robed, golden-hued, great deeds she does, full of the plenitudes is she

Youthful she is, rich in fine fleece, rich in fibrous reeds, she glides over honey-bearing growths, she brings perfect enjoyment

9. Sindhu has yoked horses to her happy-going chariot. With that help she wins the plenitude in this sacrifice.

Great is its greatness that is at work. It is inviolate, shines in its own glory, exuberant in its strength.

HYMN TO EARTH

(Atharvaveda: XII.1)

1. The vast Truth, the Mighty Law, the Consecration, the austere Will, the Word, the Sacrifice—these uphold the Earth. She is the guardian of our past and of our future. May she create for us the wide Realm.

2. Man offers no barrier; many are the hills and dales and plains there; of multiple varieties are the plants she nourishes. May the Earth spread wide for us; on us may she bestow the plenitudes.

3. In her are the oceans and rivers and all the waters—in her, aliments have grown and the people as well; in her all this lives, breathes and moves; may the wide Earth give us her very first yield to drink

4. Fourfold are the expanses to which this Earth turns; in her have grown the food and the human workers. she nourishes in various ways, she breathes, she moves. May the wide Earth establish us in Light and in Matter.

5. Here in ancient days our ancient fathers did their deeds. Here the Gods routed the Asuras. This is the home of kine and horses and birds. May the Earth bestow upon us enjoyments and splendours.

6. She contains all things. She holds the very Substance. She is the Foundation. Gold-breasted, she harbours the whole world. The vast Earth carries in her Agni, the all-power. May she under the protection of Indra establish us in his riches.

7. Her the unsleeping Gods give protection eternally; the vast Earth, the unfailling giver of all things, may she pour out for us the milk, the sweet delights, the honey, and sprinkle us with the lustre.

8. In the beginning she was as water on the bosom of the ocean; men of intelligence with their creative formations followed her in her wake. The heart of Earth lay immortal, robed with Truth, in the highest spaces; may the wide Earth establish for us strength and a flaming energy in the supreme kingdom.

9. There the waters move all around equally night and day and flow unerringly.

That wide material earth opulent in her streams yields water like milk, may she pour upon us a shower of lustres.

10. The twin Ashwins have measured her out; upon her Vishnu strode wide. Indra, the Lord of the Lights, for his own sake, has freed her of enemies.

That wide material earth of ours as a mother to her son pours out her sweet drink for us.

11. May the hills, the snowy ranges, the forests bring happiness to thee, O Earth.

Brown or black or red, in all forms upon this wide secure Earth that is protected by Indra, I stand firm and conquer, unslain, unhurt.

12. O Earth, that which is thy middle, that which is thy navel, and those lofty formations of thine, establish them in us. Flow towards us, O Mother Earth; I am the son of the Earth, the God Rain (Parjanya) is my father, may he bring fulfilment to us.

13. There on a high ground the universal workers stand encircling the altar, there they conduct the sacrifice; there the stakes are planted straight and luminous before the offering is made; may the wide Earth herself grow and make us grow.

14. They that hate us, O Earth, they that war with us, they that obstruct us by their thought or by their missile, may our land forestall them and subdue them.

15 Born of thee, the mortals move in thee. Thou nourishest the twin seats and the fourfold seats. Thine are these five human races for whose sake, for these mortals, the sun rises and spreads with his rays the immortal Light.

16. May this whole world of creatures give us their yield, O Earth, establish in me the sweetness of speech.

17. She begets all things, the Mother of healing plants, the firm, the wide

Earth, upheld by the Divine Law, full of bliss, full of happiness: upon this earth may we live and move ever and ever.

18. A mighty abode, thou hast become mightiness itself: a great speed and vibration and energy are thine. The great Indra protects thee unfailingly, O wideness, illumine us with that perfect sight as of gold. May none bring hurt to us.

19. Upon the earth they offered to the Gods the sacrifice and the oblation perfectly prepared. Upon earth men, mortals, live by their own inner nature and outer need. May that wide earth establish in us the vital force and a long span of life. May Earth grace me with a ripe old age.

20. The aroma, O Earth, that rises out of thee, that which the healing plants and that which the waters carry, that which delights the heavenly beings and the celestial nymphs, with that make me sweet-scented, O earth, may none bring harm to us.

21. That expanse which is to thy east and that which is to thy north and that, O wide Earth, which is below and that too which is behind, may all bring bliss to me who am moving here, may there be no stumbling for me, a dweller upon this wide Earth.

22. O Earth, that which I am digging out of thee, may it grow forthwith; O Purifier, let me not disturb thy heart nor thy soul.

23. The Earth carries multiple riches in her cavern, may she yield to me jewel and gold. Giver of wealth, may the Goddess bestow upon us wealth; in her delight, in a happy mind may she establish them in us.

24. Whatever villages and forests are there, whatever gatherings and meetings, to all, for your sake, may we speak beautiful words.

25. O vast Mother, firmly established I am, implant in me the supreme good; O seer, in conscious union with the heaven, establish upon the wide Earth the supreme beauty.

HYMN TO BHAVANI
(*Bhavānyaṣṭakam* by Shankaracharya)

Nor father nor mother, nor friend nor brother,
Nor son nor daughter, nor servant, nor master,
Nor bride nor learning nor profession have I:
Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

In this world, this shoreless ocean brimming with its dread suffering,
 I lie prostrate, full of desire, full of greed, full of delusion;
 For ever entangled am I in the meshes of wrong movements:
 Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

I know neither benefaction nor meditation nor yoga,
 Nor do I know secret practices nor charms nor chants occult;
 I know not rites of worship, nor the process of renouncing:
 Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

I know not virtue, I know not pilgrimage,
 I know not liberation nor any annihilation either,
 I know not devotion nor even ascetic discipline, O Mother;
 Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

I am a wrong-doer, wrong company, wrong-witted, wrong servant,
 I have abandoned all customs of ancestors and I have embraced all wrong
 customs;

To see wrong, to speak wrong I am always prone:
 Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

Lord of the People, Lord of the Divine Mother, the great Lord Himself,
 the Lord of the Gods,

Lord of the day, Lord of the night,
 I know none else among the Gods for everlasting shelter:
 Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

In strife and gloom, in error, in other lands,
 In water and fire, in the mountains and among enemies,
 In forest-ranges I seek my shelter, protect me always:
 Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

I have no protector, I am destitute, I am stricken with age and ailings,
 Wholly dispossessed, lowliest, ever reduced to an inert figure;
 I have entered into calamity, thoroughly undone:
 Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

THE IMAGE OF THE CHILD AND AMERICAN LITERARY SENSIBILITY

(Continued from the issue of March 1994)

THOUGH twentieth century American poets like Sylvia Plath and John Berryman have written poems on childhood, Theodore Roethke (1908-1963) has the distinction of having given the theme an exclusive treatment. Like Dylan Thomas he too suffered from alcoholism, and had several mental crises.

Roethke's poetry, which is intensely personal, is often found fault with for its highly restrictive range. His choice of the theme of childhood, his eagerness to return to that state, is inevitably associated with the enigmas in his personal life, and a resultant distrust of the adult world. His nature poems which make up the largest part of his early work are a kind of "schooling" of the spirit by revisiting the landscape of his childhood. These nature poems also carry with them the burden of his anxieties since childhood. They read like a sort of spiritual autobiography.

Roethke responded to all his crucial experiences in terms of the vegetable kingdom. The green house, an enclosed area in which things grew, is obviously the symbol of the womb, of everything fertile, maternal and protective. His poems also contain frequent allusions to his father, the master of the green house. His relationship with his father tempered by fear and hatred and his burden of guilt have evidently a bearing upon his choice of the theme of childhood.

Roethke hopes to find a unity of being through a system of correspondence between inner and outer worlds. He also feels like Emerson and Thoreau that the tools of analysis are helpless before the total complexity of experience, which must be felt and not formulated.

Roethke's attempt to enter the world of the child is not original in the sense that he does not reproduce the infant's mind. He only tries to approximate his perceptual system. The perceptual reality of the child is closely related to the spiritual reality of the adult. He regenerates himself by exploring pre-rational speech and children's riddles in an attempt to recapture a non-logical state of being, as in the passages in *Praise to the End* (1951). Each passage begins with a request for a "sleep-song" or story, though what follows is filtered through the child's consciousness rather than objectively reported. The collection has a movement from darkness to light. The night-journey under the sea and the child-hero conquering darkness are the dominant archetypes representing spiritual rebirth and man's coming to consciousness as a race and as an individual.²⁷ In the end the child brings forth light.

The imagery of Roethke's poems is predominantly drawn from the bird and animal world, as much as from the world of vegetation. It is also rich in mountain

imagery (e.g. "The Far Field") suggesting the yearning for paradise as the motivating principle of his poetry

Randal Jarrell (1914-1965), a Southerner and Vanderbilt scholar, goes back in many of his poems to the lost world of childhood, a world which no longer exists in its former glories. For instance, "The Lost World" presents a remembered child at twelve who is Jarrell himself. The poem focusses on the child's profound love for his grandfather who cares more for the child than the child's own father. In a sense, the poem reveals a critical phase in the life of the poet, when he is brought to the edge of a high decision: to seek out once again the state of a child and to embrace it as "the ideal state of the artist." Jarrell's poems also highlight the initiatory experiences of the growing child. Poems like "A Street off Sunset" express the child's confrontation with man's murderous potential as violator. The bewildering experience of a young boy watching his darling Mamma wringing a chicken's neck has few parallels in American poetry.

III

While examining the American literary tradition, it was found that its preoccupation with the image of the child begins with the myth of the American West promising spiritual salvation for the man who settled upon it. It is a backward movement in search of a new baptismal innocence, well represented, for example, in the novels of Cooper

The idea of childhood has become a part of the American tradition. Its origins lie in the nineteenth century American Transcendentalism which was responsible for reversing the puritan order of things. Naturally, the American, nurtured by Freud and Gessell, thinks of childhood as the most significant part of his life.

While elucidating the central concerns which surround the theme of childhood, it was also noted that the uniqueness of American experience necessitated a new angle of vision characterized by the need to scrap the accumulated grime on reality. The strategy of the child's perspective fulfils this, which regards reality with minimum reference to familiarity: an effort to overcome the crippling quality of thought itself. So the American writer finds it convenient to use the child as a positive image against the claims of tradition.

The American concern for the image of the child and childhood finds its first serious expression in the writings of Emerson. He considered the child the right image for his best intentions. His pre-occupation with the "everlasting Now" is later matched by Thoreau's idea of the "seeing" divorced from knowledge and understanding. Whitman too endorses the view that the child is blessed with the faculty of uncritical assimilation of the world.

With Mark Twain, the image of the child finds a more complicated

expression; an expression of the repressed and undrained emotion of filial revolt, coloured by nostalgia. However, as an artist he subdues his personal nostalgia in service of the greater demands of his art. Henry James, on the other hand, handles the child image with the objectivity and detachment of a scientist, observing the child and its innocence, in terms of its task in appropriating the world.

Gertrude Stein, like Thoreau and Emerson for example, saw that the reality has to be approached not through the burden of memory, but as it is. She discusses the idea threadbare, and her theorizing, more than her creative writing, has considerably clarified the nature of the naive sensibility and its relevance to artistic needs. She goes as far as saying that memory is a hindrance to creation. Sherwood Anderson seems very much in agreement with the ideas expressed by Stein, as demonstrated in his own biography. William Faulkner concerns himself with the child image, in his novels and short stories, making it at once strategy and subject. Vladimir Nabokov too is evidently associated with the child image, as revealed in his autobiography *Speak, Memory*, as a human response to the problem of time

In twentieth century American poetry, the names of John Berryman and Sylvia Plath may be mentioned whose treatment of childhood in their isolated poems suggests that they more or less conform to the patterns already traced. However, the credit of having given the theme a major treatment goes to Theodore Roethke and Randall Jarrell. For them, their choice of the theme is inextricably linked with the enigmas and dead alleys in their personal lives.

To conclude, the American literary sensibility approached the image of the child, through the theorizings of Emerson, Thoreau and Stein, through the fiction of Twain, James, Faulkner and a host of other writers, and through the poetry of writers like Whitman, Roethke, Berryman and Jarrell.

(Concluded)

P.M. SANKARAN KUTTY

Reference

²⁷ Karl Malkoff, Crowell's *Handbook of Contemporary American Poetry* (New York Crowell, 1973), p 265

THE BOOK OF JOB

A NEW COMMENTARY

(Continued from the issue of March 1994)

Chapters 3 to 37. The Debate.

Chapters 3 to 37 comprise the debate between Job and the three friends who had come to console him and a discourse by a stranger named Elihu. Since the discourse was his contribution to the debate it could be considered as a part of the debate. As noted more than once the debate prepared Job's consciousness for the theophany that followed and the restoration of all that he had lost to enable him to lead a more perfect life than he had ever lived before.

The thirty-five chapters are of absorbing interest not so much for the problems they raise or seem to solve but for what the Mother²¹ calls "the complications of the so-called human wisdom". The theophany that followed may be said to demonstrate the luminous simplicity of the Divine's Grace bringing out the futility of the wisdom of the debaters.

Chapter 3.

What triggered off the discussion was the lament of Job that broke the silence of seven days and nights during which his friends sat with him on the ground. A brief reference to the lament and a short comment on it have been made while discussing verses 11 and 12 of Chapter 1. Trying to answer the question as to why Job, who had kept his integrity on both the occasions he sustained his loss and suffering, should lose his poise and cry out in despair, Terrien²² tells us that the Job of the Prologue is different from the Job of the soliloquy as he calls the words of lamentation. (One would like to make sure whether it is a soliloquy or a monologue: without entering into a discussion on the question one could say it is a soliloquy if Job did not show an awareness of the presence of his friends, a monologue if he did show an awareness: the Exegete as well as the Exposition seem to believe that Job was not unaware of their presence):

The Job of the prologue is a hero of a legend, the Job of the soliloquy is still alive. One is a man as he should be, the other is merely a man of our flesh and age.

The Expositor, Paul Scherer,²³ does not see the dichotomy:

In the release that so often comes when a sufferer finds himself among those who, he thinks, will assuredly understand, and not take anything he says amiss, Job lets loose his pent-up feeling of anguish.

Scherer is right in not making the unnecessary distinction that Terrien makes and in trying to offer a psychological explanation for the behaviour of the protagonist. But even he does not see what exactly happened to Job owing to his approach to the whole Book, in which he is in general agreement with the Exegete.

As hinted already, the lamentation was a bursting forth of all that had been suppressed by the conscious mind from the moment of the first loss. As Scherer says, though not with our focus,

he lets loose the pent-up torrent of his anguish.

On both the occasions on which he had his loss, he *refused* to sin. “He *eschewed* evil” deliberately to be the perfect man of his mental ideal of a God-fearing personality. The intensity of suffering, the deterioration of his health with the lapse of time during which the friends in different places had to communicate with one another and fix the rendezvous and make the visit, not to speak of the seven days they sat with him without a word, this intensity and this deterioration made it impossible for his mind to have its control any longer. The friends, when they saw him for the first time could see his grief was very great, implying thereby he had lost the balance with which he had told his wife that one had to receive both good and evil from God with the same sense of gratitude. It was because God had noted that Job’s perfection and uprightness were a matter of the mental conception and will which could not stand a test, and not a deeper awareness of the soul that enables a man to face everything unperturbed, that God had to take the extreme method of asking Satan to put forth his hand and smite him as he willed, without of course taking his life.

It was said earlier that suffering takes a man to his depths. Job had to sink into his *tāmasic* subconscious before his consciousness was churned and led to his soul.

It may be noted that Scherer²⁴ also uses the word soul when he speaks of Job’s friends sitting with him:

It was like rain to the parched ground of Job’s lonely soul.

To the Western mind soul is just different from the body—it includes the mind, the emotional being, the desire-self and all else. Hence the confusion of religious and moral life with the spiritual. A close study of the Book of Job makes it obvious that God wanted to awaken a deeper level in Job to reveal His infinity not as an idea or a concept but as an inner experience.

Verses 1 and 2. Job breaks his silence.

Two verses, though short ones, are devoted to tell us that Job broke the horrible silence that he had kept for many days.

Verse 1. After this...

After seven days and nights his friends sat with him seeing that his grief was great, Job at last opened his mouth. Perhaps after answering his wife who asked him to curse God and die he never opened his mouth. With his great grief he must have been brooding over what had happened to him in spite of all his perfection and uprightness till he totally sank from his *sāttvik* state to one of total *tamas*, darkness and inertia. No wonder he opened his mouth only to curse his day, the day of his birth. In that state when he had lost all meaning and significance of life, what else could he do?

Verse 2.

After saying in the previous verse that Job opened his mouth, why repeat, *And Job spake, and said...*? The effect of his sudden breaking of the silence after the great length of time with the friends not knowing what to say or do could not have been brought before us better. In the first verse it is said in a general way that he cursed his day. Here we are given the different stages of the act: he who opened his mouth spoke (uttered words) and said what follows in verse 3.

Verses 3 to 10. Job's Curse.

The Curse is no more than a powerful expression of Job's feeling of the meaninglessness of life, as hinted above. Life has a meaning and a significance only for a man whose mind has a purpose, goal or aim.

An aimless life is always a miserable life.²⁵

With the loss of his prosperity and children and even a simple healthy life and with a continued unbearable physical torture, what aim could one have? To have an aim even in such a state, one must live in one's depths and be turned to one's Maker. When the Lord asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, he was ready; he would have been ready to suffer anything. We saw at the very start that Job was no Abraham.

If Job was no Abraham he was something of a Jeremiah; Job's Curse with which his lamentation begins is very close to that of the Prophet. It may be recalled that the Lord had asked Jeremiah to prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah

because "they (the people there) have hardened their necks, and they might not hear my words."

The priest of the Lord's house where Jeremiah uttered the prophecy—he was also chief governor in the house of the Lord—put him in the stocks. When the next morning he was brought out of the stocks he told the priest and

governor the kind of end he would meet with and then regretted the persecution he suffered at the priest's hands. It was in the course of the expression of his regret that he uttered the curse that anticipated Job's curse.

There are two points to be noted here that the Commentators who point out the parallels miss. Before his utterance of the curse Jeremiah said,

But, O Lord of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them:..

Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord....

At the same time Jeremiah had far less reason than Job to utter the curse and lament. Jeremiah's suffering was in no wise comparable to Job's. The verbal parallel does not in any way indicate any comparison between the prophet and the hero with whom we are concerned.

Here is how Jeremiah uttered his curse: (*Jeremiah*, 20: 14-18).

14. Cursed be the day wherein I was born; let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed.
15. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father saying, A man child is born unto thee, making him very glad.
16. And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew, and repented not...
- 17 Because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me.
18. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame.

To understand the first curse of Jeremiah and the curses of Job that we are to consider now, we will have to bear in mind that the Jews believed each individual day and night to have an independent and autonomous existence continuously for all time.

Verse 3.

Job cursed the day he was born and the night he was conceived to perish.

Verses 4 and 5.

In these verses we see him cursing the day separately; he curses the night he was conceived in the verses that follow.

He wanted the day to be steeped in darkness without the light of God shining upon it; he wanted the darkness and shadow of death to stain it; further he wanted its own blackness to fill it with a sense of terror.

Verses 6 and 7.

He not only cursed the night to be seized upon by darkness (and thus deprived of the glow of starlight, moonlight, etc.) but to be isolated from the days of the year; it should be left out of count from the days and nights that form months. He wanted the night to suffer loneliness without any voice of joy coming from it.

Verse 8.

Apart from his cursing it, he wanted others to do it. The rendering of this verse in the Authorised Version seems to be inexact. The Exegete of the Interpreter's Bible ignores the version in his Comment preferring the text of the Revised Standard Version.

The Authorised Version:

Let them curse it that curse the day, who are ready to raise up their mourning.

The Revised Standard Version:

Let those curse it who curse the day who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan.

If we accept the Authorised Version the meaning is:

Those who cursed the day of his birth and were ready to lament his birth—he wanted them to curse the night of his conception. To understand the other Version we must remember that Leviathan was considered as a sea-monster who belonged to the world of Chaos. God had to subdue it to make creation possible and to allow it to continue. Job wanted those who cursed the day of his birth to be those who had the ability to rouse the monster of Chaos to curse the night of his conception. His point was that if Chaos had been roused his conception and therefore his birth would have been prevented and he need not have suffered all the torture.

Verses 9 and 10.

Continuing his curse on the night of his conception Job said that the stars of the twilight that follows it—he must be particularly thinking of the morning star—should be dark, it should look for light but have none. There should not be any morning to follow it. The reason he gave for the curse was that it did not prevent the conception and therefore all his sorrow.

Verses 11 to 26. The cry of Agony.

Curiously Terrien²⁶ splits the section into two parts and gives the title "The Query" to the first part (verses 11-19) and "The Cry" to the second (20-26). Each of the parts which he divides into two sections has a query and both the

parts together form an agonising cry. The two queries are complementary. The first is: Why did I not die? The second is: Why am I alive?

Terrien also contrasts Job's attitude to death with the typical Hebrew one. The Hebrews thought death to be evil, therefore not to be welcomed. Job, thinking death to be a state of tranquillity and peace, welcomed it. Terrien sees in Job's attitude an affinity with that of Egyptians and Babylonians. Perhaps when one sees life as a tragic situation divorced from God death appears as a state to be preferred to life. Job himself when he was governed by his *sāttvik* mind spoke of accepting both evil and good with the same spirit. To bring in Babylonian or Egyptian attitudes here seems to be unnecessary and uncalled for.

Verse 11.

Job asked why he did not die even before he came out of his mother's womb or at least when he came out of it.

Verse 12.

Perhaps the Authorised Version, "Why did the knees prevent me? Or why the breasts that I should suck?" does not bring out the sense of the original correctly. Not only is the modern sense of the word *prevent* wholly inappropriate but also the archaic sense of the term, *meet* or *deal with* makes no sense. Even the literal sense *go before* does not apply here. The Revised Standard Version *why did the knees receive me? or, the breasts that I should suck?* is satisfactory.

Verses 13 to 15.

Job says that if only he had died before coming out of his mother's womb or immediately on coming out of it, he would have lain still and would have rested in the company of the former kings and counsellors and the rich of the earth in the other world.

In verse 13 for *now* of the Authorised Version the Revised Standard Version reads *then*, certainly more appropriate in the context. But *now* also can be interpreted as *then*. We need prefer another reading than AV's only when the other version makes better sense.

Verse 16.

Job returns to the earlier idea of his not having been born; in this verse Job wished he had died in the womb long before he was to be born. Terrien²⁷ dismisses the suggestion of Duhm (a German theologian) and others that the verse must have followed verse 11 on the ground that it could be an afterthought of Job's used as a stylistic device. For aught one knows it could be a copyist's error as Duhm and others believe; Terrien does not rule out the possibility of such errors.

Verses 17 to 19.

The verses continue the line of thought of the verses 13-15. The world after death would be a place of peace and repose. There the wicked would not trouble one any longer; the tired would be at rest. The prisoners would be at peace without the need to hear the voice of the oppressor. Death, the Leveller, would see the small and great together, the servant totally free from the control of the master.

Verses 20 to 26.

After the question why he did not die immediately after birth if not before, Job asks why he should live in misery.

Verses 20 to 22.

In the three verses Job spoke, though in general terms, of his state when light and life had no meaning. He used the plural form to indicate not particularly himself but people like him.

First he asked why light should be given to him in misery and life given to him who is bitter in soul. When in the next verse he said "Which long for death" he meant the miserable persons to whom light was given and the bitter in soul to whom life was given. Why should light and life be given to them who actually long for death. He added that though they longed for death it did not come. They dug for death more than for hidden treasure. The verb *dig* used aptly with reference to hidden treasure suggests with reference to death (apart from the sense of digging to find death as something precious) digging one's grave. That is made obvious in verse 23,

Which (who) rejoice exceedingly, and are glad when they can find the grave?

This verse concludes the question begun in verse 20, Why is light given...?

Verse 23.

From a generalisation Job returned to his own personal suffering. Why was light given to a man (that was himself), whose way was hidden, that is one who did not know where to turn to for relief, one whom God "had hedged in" or confined?

In those words of Job we have an excellent example of tragic irony. In Chapter 1, verse 10, Satan had challenged God; it was not for nothing that Job feared God: had not God

made a hedge about him, and about his house, and all that he hath on every side?

Satan had spoken of the protective hedge or fence (used figuratively). To Job (unconscious of the Adversary, his challenge, God's plan) what makes the whole debate that follows in a way amusing is the total ignorance of all the speakers, Job's friends as well as Job himself being unaware of the holder of the Strings (*sūtradhara*) of the whole Drama and His instrument—it appeared as though God had isolated him by throwing a fence around him, confining him, in a situation from which there was no way of escape.

Verses 24 to 26.

Explaining how his way was hidden and why he felt he was confined by God Job said how he began to sigh before he ate and poured forth roarings like waters (waterfalls). What he had feared greatly had come upon him. He was not in safety nor was he in rest; what he had feared had come upon him.

In the intensity of pain (physical as well as psychological) Job did not remember his wealth, position, felicity and comfort before his losses.

Commentators differ whether the last verses present mental anguish or physical pain. Terrien²⁸ referring to verse 25 where Job referred to what he feared had come upon him says he might be thinking of the frenzy he might have created in his friends by his words. While discussing earlier whether Job's lamentation in the Chapter could be called soliloquy or monologue it was noted that Terrien himself sees the possibility of Job's awareness of the presence of friends. That would make it a monologue and not a soliloquy as mentioned by the Exegete. It would be more correct to say that it is part soliloquy, part monologue. Terrien, however, sees in verse 24 (Job's referring to his sighs before eating) a clear insistence on physical pain. He²⁹ comments,

... almost every discourse of Job... ends, in traditional Oriental fashion, with a lament over the bodily ailments

The Westerner's pejorative use of "Oriental" reveals his blindness to the fact that the religion he professes is Oriental in its origin and the Sun of Wisdom has always risen in the East. It was perhaps Shaw, a Western thinker, who said that a man who suffers from cancer can think of nothing else. Except to those few who live in their depths, bodily ailments are unbearable irrespective of their being Oriental or Occidental.

Chapters 4 to 14: The First of the "Cycles" of the Debate.

As noted at the commencement of the discussion of Job's lament in the last chapter, the lament may be considered as a part of the debate in so far as it provoked Eliphaz to answer him. But Job, unmindful of what was to follow, was only giving vent to his pent-up emotions. Though aware of the presence of his friends and taking cognisance of it more than once—making his speech more a monologue than a soliloquy—he was by and large speaking aloud his thoughts

and feelings which sprang from the deep sense of agony and despair. Despair was the natural consequence of his separating himself from his Maker in the *tāmasic* state into which he was pushed down by intense grief and pain. It is possible the conscious part of Job in that state expected words of solace and comfort from his friends as is suggested by his replies to them. But what we see is the seniormost friend soon after the cessation of his lament administering a stern rebuke. Job could not stand it and gave a spirited reply. Bildad thereupon chose to “correct” him and Job had to answer him too. The third friend Zopher could not be silent nor could Job help answering him as well. That is how the first “cycle” of the debate developed.

With the second discourse of Eliphaz started the second “cycle” which followed the same pattern as the first. It is in the third “cycle” Commentators see a confusion in the distribution of speeches. They also see “A Hymn to Wisdom” in between without any bearing on the debate proper.

The debate did not actually stop with the three cycles. As noted before, a young man called Elihu had been present there. He took upon himself to correct not only Job but his seniors who could not put Job aright.

Another spoke too, perhaps, after a brief interval of time. But He spoke out of the whirlwind. It is not normally noticed that the theophany is the supreme culmination of the debate though proving the futility of all debate. For the Lord’s words, as the Commentators note, do not answer anybody. They only answer the inmost needs of Job. There is no “logic” in his words though there is a magic in them to convert Job’s tragic situation to a magnificent “Divine Comedy”.

The primary result of the debate was to help Job to rise from the *tamas* into which he had sunk to *rajas*, a state of kinesis. From *rajas* we see him rise to moments of the old *sāttvik* state even during the debate. During Elihu’s speech it appears that he not only arrives at *sattva* but is ready to transcend even that state. The Voice out of the whirlwind does the trick and takes him to a state of *gunātīta* to achieve which the Lord had to enact the whole drama.

Chapters 4 and 5. The first discourse of Eliphaz.

Paul Scherer³⁰ brilliantly sums up Eliphaz’s first discourse with

that singularly happy metathesis attributed to W.A. Spooner, once Warden of the New College, Oxford, “the tearful tidings of the gospel”.

Only, in this context, the word “gospel” must be understood not in the sense of “The New Testament” but the traditional religion of the time.

Scherer rightly adds,

What few tears—if any—are there in his voice are for the unseemliness of the impassioned burst (of Job’s lament).

Scherer emphasises the utter absence of human consideration for Job's condition not only in the discourses of Eliphaz but in those of the other friends as well.

(To be continued)

K.B. SITARAMAYYA

Notes

21 The Mother's Message on 21-2-1965 *Collected Works*, Vol 15, p 199.

Above all the complications of the so-called human wisdom stands the luminous simplicity of the Divine's Grace, ready to act, if we allow It to do so

22 P 931

23 P 925

24 See Scherer's remarks that follow immediately and Terrien's comment on verses 25-26

25 The Mother, *Collected Works*, Vol 12, p 3

26 Pp 927-8

27 P 927

28 P 929

29 P 931

30 P 932

THE GOLDEN SHIP

FROM still haven to silent quay
 A luminous ship of mystery!
 Ether its substance, ethereal its form—
 No splash of oar, no breath of storm
 Breaks the trance of its trackless sweep,
 Where serene silence converses with musing sleep
 And argent shadows with shapes of secrecy sway.
 Dimensions are absent in its play,
 Yet its realities outrun Time's rush
 And last beyond our earth's abodes.
 O golden ship, home of calm gods,
 Harbour in my soul's profound hush.

SHYAM KUMARI

A REMARKABLE DREAM

AN ENTRY IN A SADHAK'S DIARY

20.6.1968

After a long time I had contact with the Lord and the contact was most close and intimate. His touch was so tender—his skin so delicate and resplendent! His talk and his gestures and look were emitting love and sweetness. The dream was more vivid than physical reality and it will leave its imprint on my memory for all time to come.

I was his close associate. I was giving him a bath. His body was bare but for a small towel round his waist. His complexion was that of the champak flower—as one would express it in English, “cream-coloured”—eye-soothing and lustrous.

I was washing his body with water. He had surrendered it, as it were, to me—as does a child. After the bath was over, I was wiping his body with a towel. And those beautiful “lotus” feet—there were drops between their toes. While drying him with the towel, I mused, “This towel and his bodily divine touch I will treasure in my memory always.” I had a surprise, seeing that some drops of water—like little pearls—were dripping from under his feet. I collected and preserved these pearls with great care and devotion.

Many scenes passed. I found myself preparing a meal for him and looking for a glass-tumbler to serve drinking water. Then we were both walking side by side. I was very close to him, almost embracing him. He placed his arm on my shoulder and leaned on me. His touch was so loving and delightful that it surcharged even my gross body. While walking I noticed that he was much taller than I—taller than what he appears in his photograph.

Then I had some talk with him during the walk. I distinctly remember two exchanges. 1) “After 24 November 1926, is it for the first time that you have come out?” He said, “Yes, this is for the first time.” 2) “Here in the Ashram, many have taken refuge at the divine feet. Some are more fit for Yoga, some less. Is it proper for them to go out of the Ashram, who have been accepted by the Divine?” He answered, “They should never go out.”

Gradually the dream vanished, but oh that vibrating and delightful experience, be it in sleep, in dream, half-sleep or half-waking!

And now that soaring aspiration:

Śri Aurobindo śaranam mama.

Sri Aurobindo is my refuge.

*

I add from the Vishnu Staba:

...dehi padam.

Grace me with Thy feet.

Nolini-da read my account and liked it. He remarked, "But this is not a dream. This is an experience!"

ANON

YOUR MOON-BRIGHT FEET...

O SWEET MOTHER,
 When will my little hut be blessed
 By the touch of Your moon-bright feet?
 When will the muddy pond of my life
 Smile with the lotus of Your Delight?
 I am a small mortal flower
 That blooms in the morn
 And before the set of Sun
 Droops lifeless down.
 May I see Your heavenly beauty
 If You come secretly in the night?
 When will Your loving touch
 Like sandalwood paste
 Soothe my trouble-burnt heart?
 When will my consciousness
 Dance with the stream of Your ecstasy
 And the rain of Your Grace descend
 On my lone desert soul?

JYOTSNA MOHANTY

BHARAT SHAKTI AND INDIAN CULTURE

(Continued from the issue of March 1994)

The Next Class

Dr. Sharma: Today we are very happy to see that a few of our friends from California are here in this class. They were specially invited to attend this class of questions and answers. It is Krishnamurty who is to deal with today's discussion. Let us listen to him.

Krishnamurty: It is very interesting, sir, that our friend who put the question also hinted at something from which the probable answer might be traced. He was astonished to see that India, a very ancient land of the East, is still surviving with full vigour. He believed that there must be somewhere a perennial source of her strength. But where is it? This he intends to know. In the last class our friend Nirmal indicated that the source of India's strength was there latent in the very foundation of her culture. And Vijay tried to elucidate some aspects of her culture, by comparing them with those of the West. Since our friends from California are also here I think it will be very meaningful to explain where lies the uniqueness of India's Art, India's Literature, India's Polity on the one hand and on the other her conception of life—that is to say, the foundation of her culture.

Dr. Sharma: Yes, you are right. I think everyone of us appreciates his approach. So, Krishnamurty, please go on; or do you wish that someone else should initiate the discussion?

Krishnamurty: Yes, sir, I would like to request Nirmal to start.

Nirmal: Thank you, Krishnamurty. I feel very happy that my views regarding the perennial source of strength which may be termed *Bharat-Shakti* have been accepted. I remarked that the source of *Bharat-Shakti* is there latent in the very foundation of India's culture. Now, first of all, we are to determine the right concept of culture: the culture of any country or nation may be defined as the consciousness of the life of its people as expressed in their thoughts, ideals and aspirations, and secondly in their literature, art, music, sculpture and other creative efforts and thirdly in their institutions—social, religious, political, economic.

Dr. Sharma: Yes, Nirmal, your definition of culture is not only correct but very appreciable because it is both precise and complete. So, carry on.

Nirmal: Now let us examine what is life to an Indian or, in other words, the Indian concept of life.

By 'life' an Indian does not mean the period of time that exists between birth and death. On the contrary his conception of life starts from a deeper centre and moves on to a very different objective. And therefore an Indian

recognises his life as a means to achieve that objective. The peculiarity of his will in life is that which has so nicely been affirmed by Maitrayee—a wife of Yajnavalkya, the great sage of the Upanishadic age. She said to her husband that she had no need of those earthly things which could not help her attain immortality. From her statement it is not very difficult to understand that life to an Indian remains unfulfilled and imperfect if it is not lived in the truth of the spirit.

Now let us examine what is being expressed in the thoughts of the people of India. What is their ideal and what do they aspire for?

An Indian thinks that the significance of life and human existence is to grow progressively into a higher, wider and deeper consciousness by the development of his ordinary ignorant natural being into an illumined divine nature. Since the Indians believe that they are no ordinary race but a people of olden times, they recognise the Spirit as the truth of their being and their life as a growth and evolution of Spirit. Since their idea is that at the basis of creation there is Spirit, so it is not difficult for them to realise 'Unity' in 'Diversity'. And therefore their ideal is Unity for the human race by an inner oneness and they have been striving from time immemorial to materialise this ideal.

How this ideal is expressed in our Literature, Art, Music, etc may be explained by my friend Krishnamurty.

Krishnamurty: Before I start, I would like to indicate the greatness and uniqueness of our culture so that we may realise its principle and essential intention. There is no gainsaying the fact that Indian culture was extraordinarily high, ambitious and noble, the highest indeed that the human spirit can conceive, because its idea of life, as has already been discussed, is to make it a development of Spirit in man: because it conceives of life as a movement of the Eternal in time, of the Universal in the individual, of the Infinite in the finite and of the Divine in man; and because it holds that man can become not only conscious of the Eternal and the Infinite but also live in Its power and universalise, spiritualise and divinise himself by self-knowledge. What greater aims can there be for the life of man than to grow by an inner and outer experience, till he can live in God, realise his spirit, become Godlike in knowledge, in will and in the joy of his highest existence?

Ronald: Excuse me, sir, I know our friend Krishnamurty has got many other points to elucidate and discuss for vindicating the uniqueness and greatness of Indian Culture; but as for ourselves we are well convinced and we need no further explanation and elucidation of this aspect of Indian Culture. What we need is something else. It is a fact that India is a spiritually developed but materially backward country. The reason for her backwardness, we believe, may be traced to the mode of living of her people who have been neglecting the material aspect of existence from time immemorial to follow the teachings of ascetics and some religious doctrines. If that be so, we think that this lapse on the

part of the people of India has hindered her material progress. We shall be very happy to have some light on this aspect of Indian Culture.

Dr. Sharma: Thank you, Ronald! You have raised a very important and interesting point for discussion. I think this issue may be taken up after Krishnamurty completes his observations. Let us listen to him.

Krishnamurty: It is indeed very encouraging that our Californian friends have taken so much interest in studying Indology with a very deep insight. We know that the material aspect of existence, with its vice and virtue, cannot be brushed aside when we discuss our culture. Our Art, Literature, Sculpture, Music and Drama have not been created denying this aspect of existence; yet we are confident that this aspect is not the alpha and omega of our life. We have the capability of realising the deeper truth of our existence the glimpses of which are reflected in our culture. I think Nirmal may be able to explain it more convincingly.

Nirmal: Thank you, Krishnamurty, let me try. My friend has explained that our ideal is to realise the truth of our being. He has also stated that some facets of that truth are reflected in various fields of our culture. By this, our Californian friends must not understand that all Indian work realises this ideal: there is plenty, no doubt, that falls short, is lowered, ineffective or even debased, but it is the best and the most characteristic influence and execution which gives its tone to a painting, a sculpture, an architecture by which we must judge. We must not forget that to enter into the whole meaning of Indian artistic creation an aesthetic instinct as well as a spiritual insight is necessary, or else we get only at the surface of external things. Ours is an intuitive and spiritual art and must be seen with an intuitive and spiritual eye. This principle of appreciating Indian art is, in general, applicable to seeing and realising the meaning of Indian sacred architecture,—which belongs to the past as also her ancient sculptural work because they spring from spiritual realisation. That is to say we must have a different mind, a different perspective or capacity of vision because we need to go deeper into ourselves to see Indian art than the more outwardly imaginative art of Europe.

Dr. Sharma: Perhaps all of you remember that in the preceding class Nirmal stated that he would be able to finish the discussion on the points raised by Ronald. So, let us listen to what Nirmal has got to say in this regard. We are happy that Ronald and a few of his friends are present. Now Nirmal, you may start.

Nirmal: Though there is no denying the fact that the root cause that hindered India's material progress may be traced in her people's trend to asceticism, yet it must be admitted that in human perfection the ascetic spirit is an indispensable element. It is not only through the material upgradation of life that humanity progresses, the passionate aspiration of man upward to the Divine is also a necessity. However, if we judge the issue from wider viewpoints we may

find that to test the extreme assertion each of the two great opposites—the materialist's this-worldliness and the ascetic's other-worldliness—is necessary and helpful for the progress of mankind. We see that for centuries together the West has been experimenting in the material aspect of life by insisting on Matter as the reality and looking on the Beyond as a dream of the mind, while the East has been experimenting in the spiritual aspect of life by insisting on pure Spirit as the sole reality and the material world of body, life and mind as *Maya*—non-existent. Perhaps the time has now come when the ancient quarrel can be resolved, because the West has begun to welcome the ideals of the East and the East has begun to realise the truth of material science and its real utility in the final harmony. Then, I think Ronald, Philip, Krishnamurty, Vijay and all other friends have realised that the need of the hour is to have a synthesis of the two extremes of the progress of humanity. Now, let us come to our original topic—'*Bharat-Shakti*'.

Dr. Sharma: Well said, Nirmal, your analysis is no doubt commendable. Now, Vijay, will you please throw some light on the query—where does the perennial source of Shakti lie?

Vijay: We have already tried to pinpoint the characteristics of Indian culture and indicated that since the Indian mind recognises the spirit as the truth of our being, our culture is naturally the expression of that truth. To be more explicit—it is from the teachings of the Vedas and the Upanishads and later from the Bhagavad Gita that the Indian mind learnt to see that Truth in all and live that Truth. This cognition and pursuit of something or someone Supreme behind all forms is the one universal credo of Indian religion which has been finding expression in her art, music and literature from antiquity. I presume when the question was put by Ronald he was perhaps comparing India to other ancient glorious countries which had decayed long ago while India still survives. And that was why Ronald was eager to know the reason for India's survival. History says that of all the proud nations of the West there is an end determined. When their limited special work for mankind is done they must decay and disappear. But the function of India is to supply the world with a perennial source of light and renovation: and that function is perpetual and so India survives. Through our previous discussion it has been determined that this perennial source of light is otherwise known as '*Bharat Shakti*'.

As you all know, each nation is a Shakti or power of the evolving spirit in humanity and lives by the principle which it embodies. India is the *Bharat Shakti*, the living energy of a great spiritual Knowledge and Force, and fidelity to it is the very principle of her existence. Every nation has its part to play in the earth's destiny. India has her mission—the work she has to do. Her part in the earth's destiny is written there in the various fields of her culture. A deep and intensive study of her cultural history reveals that among all the divisions of mankind it is to India that is reserved the highest and the most splendid destiny, the most

essential to the future of the human race. So, unlike other ancient nations, India is still young and alive. It is she who must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal Religion which is to harmonise all religions, sciences and philosophies and make mankind one soul. Hence the future structure of the world depends on India.

Ronald: Now I understand, still I want to know what is India's message to the world at this critical period of human history?

Dr. Sharma: Very good. Nirmal, will you please deal with the question?

Nirmal: Yes, sir! The source of India's Shakti is latent in her capability of accepting and assimilating from the culture of the West its knowledge, ideas and powers which are compatible with her spirit, reconcilable with her ideals. It is also there in her ideal of 'Unity in Diversity'. And therefore, her message to the world at this critical period of human history is:

“Leaders of the nations must realise that all countries are equal and essentially one. Each of them represents an aspect of the one Supreme. In the terrestrial manifestation they all have the same right to a free expression of themselves. From the spiritual point of view, the importance of a country does not depend on its size or its power or its authority over other countries, but on its response to Truth and on the degree of Truth it is capable of manifesting.”

Ronald: Many thanks, Nirmal. We are indeed very happy to have come into contact with you during our short stay in India. We feel that to maintain happy and cordial relations with India is a necessity, for all the nations to ensure the future progress of humanity. On behalf of our country we once again convey our sincere thanks to you all.

(Concluded)

SAMAR BASU

THE DATE OF THE RIG VEDA AS 12,000-4,000 B.C.

ASTRONOMICAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

It is now almost a foregone conclusion among western historians and archaeologists that the Rig Veda, the oldest scripture of the Hindus, dates at most from around 1500 B.C. and that it is predated by a more advanced non-Vedic Dravidian culture to which should really go most of the credit for the Indian religious culture and from which Vedic India was mainly a regression. The Vedic Aryans are regarded as nomadic barbarians who brutally overran this more advanced culture but were fortunately ultimately assimilated by it. Somehow they managed to impress their language and the sanctity of their religious tradition on most of India during this process but other than that contributed little to the real development of Indian civilization and religion. The real mystery of the Vedas to these scholars is that people could be deceived so long into thinking that these primitive chants of a war-like tribe could be really sacred or represent the real basis of the more religious and peaceful Hindu culture. Though this view has the sanctity of authority and goes largely unquestioned it has no real firm basis. The Vedic age is fitted into what is otherwise a blank period of Indian history and no firm evidence of a Vedic culture during this period (1500-1000 B.C.) has ever been found. The Vedic age is just identified by a decline in the quality of pottery found for this period. Similarly little is conclusively known about this so-called pre-Vedic culture, its artifacts being scanty and its language as yet undeciphered, so that one wonders how there can be any certainty that it is even a non-Vedic culture. Basically the scholars have identified the Indian Vedic Aryans with the cultural type of the German Aryan, even adding similar overtones of brutality, racism and barbarism to their culture. Somehow they have managed to project the most negative traits of their own culture into that of ancient India, normally renowned for a spiritual and peaceful culture, almost as if they were projecting their own negative image into the vacuum of Indian history.

There has also been another view of the date of the Vedas, which even a few western scholars have subscribed to, that places the Rig Veda much earlier, from 6000-2500 B.C. Those who subscribe to this view rely upon what are to them astronomical indications of earlier dates in Vedic literature, as well as Puranic historical records which have long lists of Vedic-Hindu dynasties that, if truly historical, must go very far back into the early ancient period. They also differ considerably from the proponents of a late age for the Veda in their estimation of the state of Vedic civilization (which they find more advanced) and in their translation and interpretation of the hymns of the Rig Veda. They find that the accepted western view of Vedic culture has little to do with the actual meaning of the hymns of the Rig Veda, which are very symbolic and which western

interpreters often can make little sense of at all. Some of them now claim to have deciphered the so-called pre-Vedic inscriptions in terms of a Sanskrit-based tongue and have found that it reveals Puranic names of Indian gods, thus proving the Vedic nature of the culture. However, such a decipherment is still rejected on principle, as it contradicts the accepted late date for the Veda (though some western linguists have suggested an Indo-European basis for that language also)

In this article we are going to examine both the historical and astronomical implications of the Rig Veda and attempt to extend back even further the time period for it. I have uncovered astronomical references in various hymns in the course of my study of the Rig Veda that suggest the date of 6000 B.C. for the major compilation of its hymns, which were composed at even earlier periods. To this is added another view of ancient history, interpreting the Rig Veda in a different light along with examining the similarities between ancient Egyptian and Vedic religion. From this we propose that the Vedic culture may be the original culture for most of the human race, including not only Indo-European peoples but also the Semitic and others. We will start with what is perhaps the most clear astronomical reference in the text and places the beginning of its last and tenth book at around 6000 B.C. as also the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures.

Seer—*Mathito yamayanah* or *Bhrgurvārunir* or *Bhargavaścyavano*
Deity—Waters or Cows (Rig Veda, Mandala X. Sukta 19)

This is the last hymn of the Yama cycle of hymns. Next to Manu, Yama is the most famous of the Vedic sages and like Manu is identified with the original man. Yama as the original man is generally regarded as a later addition to Vedic mythology whose first original man is Manu. Yama is a resurrection figure, the man who sacrifices himself to death that he might create through death a path to immortal life for mankind. He appears also in Persian literature as King Yima, the original man, and has much in common with the great Egyptian god Osiris, also a resurrection figure and king of the dead. This hymn therefore may mark the real time of Yama. It is attributed to several different seers, one a son of Yama, its exact seership being questionable. Its attribution to the Bhrigus, very famous old mystic seers, suggests that it bears some special secret. Its deity is similarly questionable. It is said first to be the waters, *apas*, but it is quite unlike the other hymns and references to the waters. It is said alternatively to be the cows, *gavah*, but the fact is that its real meaning and significance seems unknown and it is quite different from the normal Vedic hymns to the various gods. It is an obscure hymn of a unique order for Vedic hymns.

It is normally regarded as no more than a prayer for the return of stray cattle, a typical superficial interpretation of a Vedic hymn we get so frequently

not only from western scholars but also from Sayana. This hymn is indeed related to the return of the cows and the waters, which however are only symbols in the Veda, in their inner truth far removed from mundane considerations as to cows and waters. An astronomical interpretation of these symbols is proposed here. Cow, *go*, means also ray of light, as is well known from many passages in the Veda and accepted even by the most mundane interpreters of the text on occasion. The cow is a ray of light of the sun. The return of the cows can therefore mean the return of the solar rays as at the winter solstice. The waters are also associated with the sun, as in Vedic symbolism the sun is the abode of the waters. This is because in the Indian climate the rains come at the time of the summer solstice, the days of longest daylight. The language of this hymn, in the Vedic style, is symbolical rather than scientific but it is quite plausible that it has an astronomical meaning if we consider the wide scope of Vedic symbols in general. I will endeavour in this article to make its astronomical meaning clear, which as far as I know has not been suspected by other interpreters, though the names of two lunar constellations are mentioned within it.

1. "Return (*nivartadhvam*), do not go further on, stay with us Revati. Agni-Soma, Punarvasu, found in us felicity (*rayīm*)."

Revati has two meanings in Indian astronomy. It is the name of a lunar constellation, one of the twenty-seven which divide up the Indian zodiac, and marks what is to us the constellation Pisces from 16 degrees 40 minutes to the first point of Aries (each lunar constellation marking off 13 degrees 20 minutes of the zodiac). It is also the name of a particular star which marks the first degree of Aries, which is also the first degree of the zodiac. In this verse all the cows, that is all the constellations are called Revatis. Revati is also associated with the return (*nivartana*) of the cows or the sunlight. As such, as the name of the star or constellation marking the winter solstice it could apply its name to all the constellations.

Is there any evidence that return, *nivartana*, has any reference in Vedic literature to the solstice? The supplement, *pariśiṣṭa*, of the Rig Veda 29. 28. has the following statement, 'Turn, (*āvartadhvam*), return (*nivartadhvam*), seasons of the year (*rtavah parivatsarah*).' The turn, *āvartana*, can be identified with the summer solstice and is also mentioned later in this hymn we are studying. We therefore have clear confirmation in the Veda for relating these terms to the seasons and the solstices.

Punarvasu is also the name of a lunar constellation. It marks the last ten degrees of Gemini and the first three degrees and twenty minutes of Cancer. As such it is about ninety degrees away from the constellation Revati. When Revati marks the winter solstice Punarvasu would mark the spring equinox. Agni and Soma have several astronomical meanings. They are the sun and the moon. Agni

further is the deity of the northern course of the sun, when the light returns and the days get longer from the time of the winter to the time of the summer solstice Soma conversely is the deity of the southern course of the sun, when the light departs and the days get shorter from the time of the summer to the time of the winter solstice. As such Agni is the deity of the return, *nivartana*, of the cows or the light and Soma is the deity of the turn or departure, *āvartana*. Most importantly however Agni is the deity of the eastern direction and the spring equinox which are correlative. The correlation of Agni and Punarvasu would also indicate the placement of that constellation at the eastern point of the zodiac which marks the spring equinox. Punarvasu in this verse is used in the dual case as qualifying Agni-Soma. Sometimes the constellations are given in the dual case indicating also the constellation opposite them in the zodiac (which in this case would be Uttarasadha marking late Sagittarius and early Capricorn or the autumn equinox if our interpretation of this hymn is correct). As such the statement Agni-Soma Punarvasu would serve to mark the east-west orientation, the equinoctial orientation of the zodiac at that time, as Revati would serve to mark the north-south or solstitial orientation.

We see therefore in this verse a definite indication of the winter solstice in Revati and the spring equinox in Punarvasu. For both of these to occur the winter solstice would have to be in the last ten degrees of Pisces. Indian astronomy would place the spring equinox in Aries, in its first degree, around 400 A.D. The calculated time of the precession of the zodiac accepted by modern astronomers is about 25,800 years. (This is quite close to the mystical number of the ancients 25,920 which marks the total number of seconds in the zodiac times two.) One quarter of this cycle, the amount of time it would take for this change of solar positions, would be about 6400 years. This added to 400 A.D. would give us the time of 6000 B.C., as the beginning of the time period indicated in this hymn. The sun's reaching the twentieth degree of Pisces, the latest time which fulfills the astronomical requirements of this hymn would be about 5200 B.C. This totally contradicts the modern western view of the late date for the Rig Veda at 1500 B.C. and suggests an even earlier date for the text than even most of those who favored an earlier date for it.

Certainly the winter solstice occurring at the star Revati, 0° Aries, the first point of the zodiac, would have been a major event well noticed by the ancient astronomers. The spring equinox at the first point of Aries marked what would be the central point of the dark age, Kali Yuga, in this precessional cycle, around 400 A.D. The autumn equinox at the first point of Aries conversely marked the central point of the golden age, Satya Yuga, the beginning of this precessional cycle and world-age (the Aryan as opposed to the earlier Atlantean world-age), around 12,500 B.C. The winter solstice at Revati would be half-way between the points of the golden age and the dark age. The hymns of the Rig Veda have been traditionally regarded as records of the ages of light. As such they may well have

been gathered about this time when the astronomical cycle shifted to the dark. Before we consider the further implications of this hymn let us take the rest of it.

2. "Make these return again (*punarena nivartaya*), make these near again. May Indra keep these back. May Agni drive these towards us "

Indra, the lord of the sun, the cows and the waters is also the god of the summer solstice and is prayed to to hold the solar light. Agni, the god of the spring equinox, is prayed to to drive forth and extend the light (the cows) which occurs during his season.

3. "Let them return (*nivartantam*) again. Let them flourish in this lord of light (*gopati*, herdsman). Oh Agni, cause them to be established (*nidhāraya*) here. Let the wealth (*rayih*) remain."

The lord of light or herdsman, *gopati*, is the sun in whom the solar ray-cows flourish. Agni, the god of the northern course of the sun wherein the light grows, is invoked further to extend the light and may be identified with the sun. The wealth, treasure or felicity (*rayī*) prayed for is the wealth of light that comes with the extending of the days. It should be noted also that to the ancients the spiritual power of the mind of man decreases as the sun moves away from the central point of the Golden Age, the autumnal equinox at 0° Aries, at which time spiritual realization is common. When it reached the opposite point, the vernal equinox in Aries, which it did around 400 A.D., the spiritual power of the mind of man was so low that spiritual realization was quite rare. Since that point it has been gradually increasing towards its fullness at the central point of the next Golden Age, which will be around 13,000 A.D. (we have made some advance in the light but there is still a long way to go!). Thus *rayī* also means this wealth of spiritual power and light. Seeing the increasing darkness of the astronomical cycle, the ancients prayed to keep what spiritual light they had from declining with the declining age. This is the inner truth of the term '*rayī*' in this hymn.

4 "He who is their guardian (*gopa*) also I call, who knows their way back (*niyana*) and course back (*ni-ayana*) and their course away (*para-ayana*), their turn away (*āvartana*) and return (*nivartana*)."

'Ayana' is even today in Indian astronomy the technical term, particularly at solstice points, for the course of the sun. *Ayanamśa*, the portion of the course, refers to the precessional difference between the current place of the sun in the zodiac at the spring equinox and its original place when that equinox occurred when it was at 0 degree Aries (400 A.D.). In later Vedic literature the northern course of the sun is called *uttara-ayana* or *deva-yāna*, the path of the gods, while

the southern course is called *dakṣiṇa-ayana* or *pitryāna*, the path of the fathers. Here the northern course of the sun is called *ni-ayana*, using the same base term but a different prefix, just as the southern course is called *para-ayana*. The term *ni-ayana* must also refer to the northern course, having similarly the same base 'yana' but a different prefix than *deva-yāna* or *pitryāna*. It may be possible to explain one or two such similarities of terms in this hymn with such later astronomical references as mere coincidence but not all of them. These terms must have been technical astronomical terms of that time.

The guardian or guardian of the light or the rays (*gopa*) is again the sun, probably in the form of Pushan, of whom more will be said later in this article. He is the guide and preceder along the solar path and is the guardian and protector of cattle and wealth. Astrologically he is the lord of the constellation of Revati, which is also called Paushna, of Pushan. This again is a clear indication of the astronomical meaning of this hymn and the accuracy of the astronomical reference points we have traced through it and can hardly be just another coincidence. Pushan himself, as the hidden form of the sun, can be identified with the sun at the winter solstice. The attribution of his rulership to the constellation Revati points back itself to a time when the winter solstice occurred in this constellation.

5. "Let the guardian also return (*ni-vartatam*), who attains their expanding course (*vi-ayana*), who attains their course away (*para-ayana*), their turn away (*ā-vartana*) and return (*ni-vartana*) "

The guardian of the rays, *gopa*, is the sun, in the form of Pushan particularly, who also goes through the same changes as the cows, the solar rays. The sun as Pushan is also invoked to return, the return of the light at the winter solstice being also the return of the sun. The sun marks the courses, seasons, solstices and equinoxes by its movement. The return course, *ni-ayana*, is here called also the expanding course, *vi-ayana*, as during its period the light grows.

6 "Turn and return (*a-nivarta*), cause to return (*ni-vartaya*), Indra again give the rays (*go*, the cows or the light), that we may rejoice with life (*jīvabhīr*) "

Indra (as all the Vedic gods) can also stand for the sun. He is sometimes made a dual deity with Pushan. As the god of the summer solstice he is the lord of the zodiac, the circle of light, *bha-cakra*, which was probably originally called in Vedic times *go-cakra* (cows or the solar rays). Life, *jīva*, means true life, life in harmony with the Divine Will and is to be equated with *rayī*, true wealth or felicity born of such a life. These are possessed by the masses of men only in the ages of light, the bright portion of the precessional cycle. Thus this prayer is to

retain this spiritual light and life in the face of a declining precessional age.

7. "I establish you on every side with vigor, clarity and sap, that all these most holy gods may unite us with felicity (*rayī*)."

The sun or the light is consecrated with all good wishes that through his power the spiritual virtue of man (*rayī*) may hold its power in the world. The ancient Vedic Aryans strove to keep this light in the world through occult-rituals and by maintaining a tradition that preserved its continuity with the Golden Age.

8. "Return (*nivartana*) as you are made to turn away (*ā-vartaya*). Return (*nivartana*) as you are made to return (*ni-vartaya*). Four are the directions of the world. From all these make these ray-cows return (*nivartaya*)."

The prayer is that both the turning away, *ā-vartana*, and the return, *nivartana*, be returns; that is, may our inner light ever return through both the waxing and the waning of the outer light, may we have the inner power to go beyond these very powerful outer temporal influences, like the cycle of world-ages. For though the masses of men are bound by these time cycles individuals can go beyond them by the power of Self-realization, which is the purpose of the Vedas to instil in us. The four directions of the world, *bhūmyāścatasrah pradīśas*, are the four seasonal points, the solstices and the equinoxes which mark the comings and the goings of the ray-cows. The prayer is that these, our lights, may return with every seasonal change, that our inner light may not be diminished by the fluctuations of the outer light, that all things may be for us an eternal return of the light. Such a prayer becomes particularly necessary at this transition point between the light and dark half of the precessional cycle (6000 B.C.) when men could no longer rely upon the outer light of a favorable world-age for their spiritual light but had to learn to maintain an inner light even in the face of outer darkness.

We see therefore that there is much more in this hymn than a naive prayer for the return of stray cattle. The gap of understanding between that view of western scholars on this hymn and what has been presented here can similarly be found in all the Vedic hymns, which they have not only failed to understand but often grossly distorted. It well points out how little we have understood the Veda or the subtlety and intricacy of its seemingly simplistic pastoral symbolism.

DAVID FRAWLEY

(From *The Advent*, April 1982)

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of March 1994)

AFTER his relationship with Lele terminated, Sri Aurobindo was not in complete rapport with his brother Barin who was going to start bombmaking and other terrorist activities at the Manicktola garden as a means to fight for India's freedom. Nor could he quite go along with his wife Mrinalini who could not reconcile herself to the steep and narrow path of austerity and sustained sacrifice that her husband had chosen for himself. After returning to Calcutta from Western India, Sri Aurobindo took a room at 23 Scotts Lane.

His letter dated 17 February 1908 to Mrinalini gave a glimpse of his life's vision and mission. It runs:

“Dear Mrinalini,

“I have not written to you for a long time. This is my eternal failing; if you do not pardon me out of your own goodness, what shall I do? What is ingrained in one does not go out in a day. Perhaps it will take me the whole of this life to correct this fault.

“I was to have come on the 8th January, but I could not. This did not happen of my own accord. I had to go where God took me. This time I did not go for my own work; it was on His work that I went. The state of my mind has undergone a change. But of this I shall not speak in this letter. Come here, and I shall tell you what is to be told. But there is only one thing which must be said now, and that is that from now on I no longer am the master of my own will. Like a puppet I must go wherever God takes me; like a puppet I must do whatever He makes me do. It will be difficult for you to grasp the meaning of these words just now. But it is necessary to inform you, otherwise my movements may cause you regret and sorrow. You may think that in my work I am neglecting you, but do not do so. Already, I have done you many wrongs and it is but natural that this should have displeased you. But I am no longer free. From now on you will have to understand that all I do depends not on my will but is done at the command (*ādeśa*) of God. When you come here, you will understand the meaning of my words. I hope that God will show you the Light he has shown me in his infinite Grace. But that depends upon His Will. If you wish to share my life and ideal you must strive to your utmost so that, on the strength of your ardent desire, He may in his Grace reveal the path to you also. Do not let anyone see this letter, for what I have said is extremely secret. I have not spoken about this to anyone but you; I am forbidden to do so. This much for today.”¹

A B. Purani's records give us an idea of Sri Aurobindo's vast potencies of strength in his writings for the editorials of *Bande Mataram*:

“A Reminiscence of the *Bande Mataram* days: Sri Aurobindo is sitting in his house at Scott's Lane. Shyam Sundar Chakravarty comes and asks for the

editorial. Sri Aurobindo draws out a piece of old packing paper from the pile of papers on his table and begins writing on one end of it. He finishes the article in fifteen minutes—not a scratch, not a change, not a moment's pause. Next day that article fans the fire of patriotism in the hearts of Nationalists all over India."²

Sri Aurobindo's series of articles appeared in *Bande Mataram* from January 18, 1908 to April 30th, 1908. In these articles his fiery pen wrote out what he lectured on at different places in Bombay and Bengal.

During the three months after the split of the Congress at Surat Sri Aurobindo made the utmost of the media at his command: platform-speech, leading article, expository essay and every week, every month witnessed a tremendous poise and marvellous self-sufficiency in political and revolutionary leadership.

A public meeting was held on Friday, the 10th of April, 1908 at the Pantis Math, Calcutta, with Dr. Sundari Mohan Das in the chair, to discuss the lines of action which the Congress had postponed *sine die* at Surat. Sri Aurobindo projected them in the following words: "We are ready to condone this irregularity if a united Congress is to be held on the basis of the Calcutta resolutions. If the other party does not accept, the responsibility of breaking-up of the Congress and having a party institution in its place will be on their shoulders. Our position is, let us work on our different party line through our own institutions, but at the same time let us have the united Congress of the whole people."³

Two days later, addressing a Swadeshi meeting at Baruipur (in the District of 24 Parganas), Sri Aurobindo said boldly:

"People say there is no unity among us. How to create unity? Only through the call of our Mother and the voice of all her sons.... The voice is yet weak but it is growing. The might of God is already revealed among us.... It is not our work but that of something mightier that compels us to go on until all bondage is swept away and India stands free before the world."⁴

The theme of the speech delivered by Sri Aurobindo was to awaken the national spirit among the slumbering common people of India. He visioned the practical organisations to improve the national, economical and practical life of every village. His powerful speech began with his pointing out that though through a foreign system of education developing foreign tastes and tendencies he had been de-nationalised like his country, he was now trying to again re-nationalise himself.

"Next he referred to the comparative want of the Swadeshi spirit in West Bengal to which Shyamsunder Babu made very polite reference, himself coming from East Bengal. But S. Ghose as he belonged to West Bengal had no hesitation in admitting the drawback. This superiority of East Bengal he attributed solely to its privilege of suffering of late from the regulation 'lathis' and imprisonment administered by the alien bureaucrat. He offered the same

explanation of the increase of the strength of Boycott in Calcutta after the disturbances at the Beadon Square of which the police were the sole authors. The speaker dilated on the great efficacy of suffering in rousing the spirit from slumber by a reference to the parable of two birds in the Upanishads, so often referred to by the late Swami Vivekananda. The parable relates that there was a big tree with many sweet and bitter fruits and two birds sat on the tree, one on the top of it and the other on a lower part. The latter bird looking upwards sees the other in all his glory and richness of plumage and is at times enamoured of him and feels that he is no other than his own highest self. But at other moments when he tastes the sweet fruits of the tree he is so much taken up with their sweetness that he quite forgets his dear and beloved companion. After a while there comes the turn of bitter fruits, the unpleasant taste of which breaks off the spell and he looks at his brilliant companion again. This is evidently a parable concerning the salvation of individual souls who, when they enjoy the sweets of the world, forget to look upwards to the Paramatma who is really none else than their own highest self, and when they forget themselves in this way through the Maya of this world, bitterness comes to dispel the Maya and revive the true self-consciousness. The parable is equally applicable to national *mukti*. We in India fell under the influence of the foreigners' Maya which completely possessed our souls."⁵

Sri Aurobindo affirmed that in his opinion the village should neither be weakened nor isolated from the stream of national life. He showed in another article a complete picture of the social and political structure of Swaraj. That article was entitled 'The Village and the Nation'. "Nothing should be allowed to distract us from the mighty ideal of Swaraj, National and Pan-Indian. This is no alien or exotic ideal, it is merely the conscious attempt to fulfil the great centripetal tendency which has pervaded the grandiose millenniums of her history, to complete the work which Sri Krishna began, which Chandragupta and Ashoka and the Gupta kings continued, which Akbar almost brought to realisation, for which Shivaji was born and Bajirao fought and planned.... The day of the independent village or a group of villages has gone and must not be revived; the nation demands its hour of fulfilment and seeks to gather the village life of its rural population into a mighty, single and compact democratic nationality."⁶

A lecture was delivered by Sri Aurobindo speaking on the Palli Samiti resolution at Kishoregunj in April, 1908: "The resolution on which I have been asked to speak is from one point of view the most important of all that this Conference has passed. As one of the speakers has already said, the village Samiti is the seed of Swaraj. What is Swaraj but the organisation of the independent life of the country into centres of strength which grow out of its conditions and answer to its needs, so as to make a single and organic whole? When a nation is in a natural condition, growing from within and existing from

within and in its own strength, then it develops its own centres and correlates them according to its own needs.... If we are to survive as a nation we must restore the centres of strength which are natural and necessary to our growth, and the first of these, the basis of all the rest, the old foundation of Indian life and secret of Indian vitality was the self-dependent and self-sufficient village organism. If we are to organise Swaraj we must base it on the village. But we must at the same time take care to avoid the mistake which did much in the past to retard our national growth.... Take another point of view. Swaraj is the organisation of national self-help, national self-dependence.... Another essential condition of Swaraj is that we should awaken the political sense of the masses. There may have been a time in history when it was enough that a few classes, the ruling classes, the learned classes, at most the trading classes should be awake. But the organisation of the modern nation depends on the awakening of the political sense in the mass. This is the age of the people, the millions, the democracy. If any nation wishes to survive in the modern struggle, if it wishes to recover or maintain Swaraj, it must awaken the people and bring them into the conscious life of the nation, so that every man may feel that in the nation he lives, with the prosperity of the nation he prospers, in the freedom of the nation he is free. This work again depends on the village Samiti. Unless we organise the united life of the village we cannot bridge over the gulf between the educated and the masses. It is here that their lives meet and that they can feel unity. The work of the village Samiti will be to make the masses feel Swaraj in the village, Swaraj in the group of villages, Swaraj in the district, Swaraj in the nation. They cannot immediately rise to the conception of Swaraj in the nation, they must be trained to it through the perception of Swaraj in the village. The political education of the masses is impossible unless you organise the village Samiti.”

Sri Aurobindo was considered as a leader of the Revolutionary Party when he returned to Calcutta from the west of India. He initiated Barin, Nolinikanta, Upendranath Bandopahdyaya and made them vow that they would “dedicate their life to the whole-hearted service of the Motherland”. Upendranath Bandopadhyaya had introduced an aspirant, Amarendranath Chatterji, to Sri Aurobindo. When Amarendranath saw Sri Aurobindo it was as though the mere sight or *Darshan* was itself a kind of initiation of *diksha*; as if some current of energy was passing from Sri Aurobindo to Amarendranath Chatterji. Afterwards he became a well-known revolutionary leader. There was a wonderful and powerful interview between Sri Aurobindo and Amarendranath Chatterji and it was recollected by Amarendra in 1950, as follows: “I was not merely enchanted by my first meeting with him,—I became powerful. I was given personal proof that Diksha (initiation) can be given merely by Darshan (sight) and does not require either touch or Mantra.”

A.B. Purani reports: “The two sat alone together. Sri Aurobindo began: ‘I suppose Upen has talked to you about the work that is to be done for the

THE GOLDEN JUBILEE OF THE ASHRAM SCHOOL

DECEMBER 2, 1993

THE Ashram School (Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education) completed its fifty years. In the scale of infinite time, this stretch of fifty years is probably insignificant. Perhaps our achievement or rather our self-becoming thus far is almost a trifle compared to what the Mother and Sri Aurobindo expect of us. Perhaps there is nothing epoch-making happening here in our midst as compared to the series of unthinkable astonishing events (such as the pulling down of the Berlin-wall followed by the unification of the East and West Germanys, the disintegration of the mighty U.S.S.R. ushering in the virtual eradication of utterly materialistic communism). Yet in this human life-cycle apparently chained by fractional time, these fifty years are not so insignificant. This golden jubilee could be a golden opportunity to look back for a while and reassess our life and work in the light of the great and lofty ideal placed before us by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which is meant to shape the future of humanity.

We have had a rush of exhibitions, programmes and performances throughout the year starting from 1st December, '92 and terminating in the grand finale of the 2nd December, '93. While seeing the exhibition titled "The Vision and the Boon" in the school many had the experience of reliving a good part of these fifty years in a flash—years showered and blazed with the Mother's intimate divine presence day in and day out. Many had the thrill of a discovery while recognising a present familiar elderly face in the semblance of a child's face in those photographs of early days—as if the closed doors of certain inner chambers of memory were flung open by a magical touch. The exhibition titled "Even the body shall remember God" arranged by the Department of Physical Education in the Exhibition Hall was a very rare opportunity to see the Mother at work with Her full divine dynamism giving shape to an organised system of physical education along with education of the mind and the vital nature, which is indispensable for this Integral Yoga. With Pranab as Her instrument this huge department, P.E.D. as it is called, which started with one or two dumb-bells, a few skipping-ropes and one or two footballs, cricket-balls and volley-balls—came into being with almost all the amenities of the present international standard.

On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee, the ex-students staying in various parts of India as well as abroad were invited here by the Ashram School. While trying to invite them all, it was found that out of a total of 2082 ex-students from 1943 to 1993 (this includes 18 out-going students of this year i.e. 1993 also) it was impossible to contact 440 of them who had left no trace of their whereabouts with us. It was a shocking surprise because these 440 mean more than 20%!

About the rest, the record shows that 370 have joined the Ashram and are working in various departments and most of them are group members of P.E.D., 269 are householders in Pondicherry, 582 are scattered over other parts of India and 351 are staying abroad. Besides that, 52 of them have prematurely left for the other world, taking the necessary rest and biding time to start the Mother's work in a new body with renewed vigour and enthusiasm. Or, who knows, some of them may have started already here or elsewhere. And all of them are bound together by the "golden chain" of our Sweet Mother.

Those who rushed to Pondicherry for the great event responding to the call, immediately joined the others here and started practising and rehearsing regularly the special item "Torch Bearers". We (the group-members) on the other hand started practising, according to each one's fitness and capability, the Mass Exercise and other drill-items like Construction, Cultivation, Bakery or Laundry based on this year's theme: "Let us work as we pray, for indeed work is the body's best prayer to the Divine."—a mantra, so to say, given by the Mother for all of us here.

The much-awaited day arrived at last. We offered our collective effort at her lotus feet. Among the various items demonstrated this year, the spectators were moved to joy as much by the formation-changing novelty of the Mass Exercise, as by the illuminating movements of the Torch Bearers. In the Mass Exercise, this year records the maximum number of participants, 18 files each containing 18 persons, i.e. 324 persons. It is for the first time that we were asked to appear for a test before being allowed to participate in the Mass Exercise and as a preparation for this test we had a rigorous practice of the whole Mass Exercise figure by figure one hour thrice a week for two months. At the end of this tough session, Capt. Namita, the organiser of this item, was sympathetic enough to give a second and even a third chance for those who could not pass the test straightaway and that naturally with more rigorous practice preceding each test. We did all these as per bidding with unmixed pleasure and at the end these tests proved to be very helpful to us. We were in a position to practise at ease with music during the November-session and had ample time to rectify all the little mistakes and shortcomings here and there with a lot of finer polishing.

Now let us go back to the Sports Ground of 2nd December.... Just at 5-30 p.m. the March Past started with a whistle from Capt. Mona accompanied by the Ashram Band—a moment unprecedented indeed! In that solemnly colourful March Past a record number of participants in the history of these fifty years took part and saluted the Mother with the heart's effervescence of love and devotion. The ex-students' group dominated the show with an imposing number of 250(+) participants. Norman Dowsett (Jr.) from Australia headed the group as the standard-bearer. Their golden flag got a significant place just below the Mother's huge sky-blue flag—flanked on both sides by the flags of the different groups.

After the 2nd December Demonstrations were over, it was announced that the item “Torch Bearers” was going to be performed again for the participants within a short while. We all virtually ran to the gallery to seize a convenient seat. Then, all the lights were switched off... and slowly emerged the luminous form of the aspiration of the torch bearers. Two of them entered running in Olympic style and after encircling the arena disappeared in the background. Behind them came all the others and they stood in files ready to start. Then, with the music, hundreds of torches bloomed with rhythmic movements of beauty and delight like so many arms of light stretching with an ardent yearning towards the Mother. Larry (1966-'67) from California expressed his emotions saying: “Tears rolled down uncontrolled as we raised the torches with our hearts’ gratitude towards Her.” As the ex-students were leaving the main ground waving their hands in a gesture of bidding good-bye after the repeat performance, Arunbhai’s voice reverberated in the Sports Ground from the microphone: “This is our last announcement tonight. We invite all of you ex-students here again after ten years” (evidently for the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations). We shall wait for the next ten years for a more beautiful, more lively, more touching Diamond Jubilee—surely these ten years will pass happily by Her Grace.

SATADAL

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

(Continued from the issue of March 1994)

23. THE INCOMPATIBLE COUPLES

THE sun was high up in the sky, beating down mercilessly on people. Avvai, the wandering minstrel, having journeyed several miles on foot became weary. She was thirsty and hungered for a meal.

She staggered towards a nearby hut and sat on its *pyal*. She heaved a great sigh of relief. A man, perhaps attracted by her sigh, peeped out of the hut. He was all smiles for he knew who had honoured his hut.

He scurried into the hut and came back with a mug of water to quench her thirst. As she emptied the container into her mouth, the man said: "Grandma! I'll be most honoured if you lunch with me."

The old lady smiled and readily nodded her head.

The man took her inside the hut, spread a mat on the floor and told her to take rest till the lunch was ready.

Avvai sat, stretched out her tired legs and began to massage them. She saw a woman cooking in the backyard of the hut.

The man went and sat by the woman, his wife. He looked at her very sympathetically, and with a corner of his dhoti mopped the sweat from her face. She smiled and he simply melted. With great care and attention he combed her raven black hair. She paid his services with looks of love. "What is it this time?" she asked smiling.

"We have a guest. Avvai, the wise old poet, has honoured us by her presence. I've requested her to lunch with us."

The smile that was flashing across her face contracted into a grimace.

"Guest!" she yelled. "And that too a poet? To hell with you and your guest!" She rose from her seat as if possessed by an evil spirit. The husband fled.

She picked up a winnow lying nearby and thrashed him again and again pursuing him wherever he ran.

Avvai witnessed the scene and recorded it in a song.

The husband who heard the song came darting towards the old lady, fell at her feet and told her not to take offence and that he would give her food by hook or by crook.

Avvai stood up and, before she resumed her journey, gave him a few words of advice:

"Alms stained with insult
are worse than giving no alms.
A nagging wife is worse than a ghoul.
A phoney friend is worse than a bitter enemy.

A life without means is worse than Death itself.
 Life is worth living
 under any conditions
 with a dutiful wife
 worthy of a gentle husband.
 But if there is incompatibility
 turn into a hermit
 telling none about it.”

The husband took Avvai’s advice to heart and kicked off his worldly encumberances and became a hermit.

As Avvai moved on, a kind-hearted woman welcomed her to her hut and affectionately served her food.

Happy at heart, the old lady began to eat. But before she could finish eating, the woman’s husband who had gone out on business returned home.

Being a super-miser, he looked at the old lady with a piercing scowl on his face, and then at his wife. The penetrating stares of her husband were burning holes in her flesh. He took a broom and thrashed his wife, all the time hurling abusive words at her for feeding the old lady.

Avvai washed her hands and left the hut cursing Lord Brahma, the Creator, for bringing together such incompatible couples:

“If only I could get hold of Brahma
 who united with a marital knot
 this deer to the one as senseless as dry wood
 I would wring all four of His necks
 and hurl all his heads out
 in the same direction the fifth went before.”

24. THE GOLDEN GOAT

Avvai was once badly in need of a goat. No one knew for certain why she wanted one. Definitely she was not in need of it to taste its meat for she had no teeth left to munch flesh. She always preferred cow’s milk to goat’s.... Then why? Since ancient Tamil literature speaks of her as a kind-hearted generous lady it may be construed that she wanted a goat to give away to someone who sought her help

“Who will give me a goat?” Avvai asked herself

“Ask King Cheran, the magnanimous,” came the reply from her inner self.

“Quite true! King Cheran would give away anything to a poet who goes to him with a request. But should I approach a king to request a paltry thing?”

Avvai asked herself. "Then who else?"

"Ah, yes. Why not try the three rich brothers? I am sure at least one if not all of them will be as magnanimous as the king."

Avvai approached the eldest among the three brothers, Vadhavakōn, and requested him for a goat.

"Goat! I don't know what an old lady like you is going to do with a goat! Anyhow that is not my concern... But not now... Come some time later," said Vadhavakōn and walked away.

Avvai then went in search of the second of the brothers, Vandhavarkōn, found him and put forth her request.

"A goat! What the hell are you going to do with a goat?... But I am too busy to listen to your answer. Anyhow try tomorrow," said he and continued to mind his work.

Avvai was not disappointed. Still there was hope. The youngest of the brothers was yet to be approached. "I am sure he is different from the others. My request will be granted," so saying, the old lady went all the way on foot to the mansion of Yadhavarkōn.

Yadhavarkōn listened to Avvai's request with all humility. Then without a moment's hesitation he said: "I can't afford it... I am sorry."

Avvai was disappointed. Yet her inner self said to her that the youngest of the brothers was better than the rest. She liked his outright 'no' to the dragging 'come some time later,' and 'try tomorrow' of the other two.

Avvai had learnt her lesson. She would never again go to a rich man for a favour, unless she was quite sure of his magnanimity.

Finding none other than the king who would immediately come to her rescue, she went to the palace.

King Cheran, a connoisseur of the arts and letters of his times, stood up and welcomed her with wide-open arms. No sooner did he learn the purpose of her visit, than he said feigning arrogance: "A goat! Do you deserve a live goat for all your songs? Poor old lady! King Cheran wouldn't like to give you a live goat."

As he paused, the old lady felt like shedding tears. But she bridled her feelings and asked him: "Don't I deserve a live goat?"

King Cheran, who had great admiration for Avvai and her poems, replied: "Certainly not. You deserve a golden goat... And I'll give you one."

25. SILAMBI THE DANCER

In a temple town of Ambar, lived a nubile woman named Silambi. A dancer by profession, she entertained many a young man at sundown in her house. The toothless old men too thronged to see her dance accompanied by the lilting music made by her anklets.

History speaks of temple towns being infested with dancers and harlots. And so Silambi had to struggle in a highly competitive world.

How to attract a greater number of men? She asked herself and racked her brains for an answer. Hours of thinking and rethinking made her conclude thus: "Publicity is the only way."

Then came the second poser: "How to publicise herself?"

"If you could make the great poet Kamban sing in praise of you and make his verse known to the public, then you are bound to pull a crowd every evening," said one of her well-wishers.

Kamban, the great Cham of literature, was the author of *Ramayanam*, a well-known epic. Highly respected by the people and very much honoured by King Chozhan, Kamban was a household name. "A weaving shuttle too would sing verses, if it belonged to Kamban's household," goes a Tamil saying. Such was his fame.

Silambi decided to have a song sung in praise of herself by Kamban.

"But it would cost you a fortune. Kamban charges one thousand golden coins for a song," said one of her customers.

Silambi counted the golden coins she had saved in her pot. They were not even three hundred. She sold all her golden ornaments to a jeweller and managed to have another two hundred.

Then what to do for another five hundred?

Silambi blinked for a moment and then mustered courage to send word for Kamban.

It was noon when Kamban knocked on the door of Silambi.

"I expected you in the evening," cooed Silambi smiling enticingly.

"Well! What am I to do in the evening with you here?" said Kamban in an arrogant tone.

"Come in. A dinner awaits you. We shall talk about business after dinner."

"No! My legs that carry me to the palaces of emperors and temples of gods will refuse to enter a house of ill-fame. Let us talk about business."

Silambi rushed in and brought with her a bag of gold. "Will you please honour me with a song? A song that would make me quite popular among young men. And here is your payment," said she passing on the bag to the poet.

Kamban untied its mouth and began to count the coins.

"Only five hundred here. What about the rest? I charge one thousand golden coins for a song," said Kamban.

Silambi turned pale. "I can afford only this much now," she drawled. "But do not turn down my request. When my business picks up, I'll be able to pay the rest".

Kamban guffawed. He called for a piece of charcoal and began to write a verse on the white-washed wall of the dancer's house:

Unmatched are the waters of Kaviri.
 Unrivalled monarch of the world is Chozhan.
 Unsurpassed is his land ever fertile.
 So is

He stopped writing and threw the charcoal away.

Silambi who was looking anxiously at the moving hand of Kamban was taken aback by his unexpected action.

“Shall I get you another piece of charcoal?” she asked.

“No need. I’ve done enough for your money’s worth.”

“But you can’t leave your poem incomplete.”

“The money you gave me is not enough to inspire me further.... I can complete my poem only when you give me the rest of the amount.” Kamban didn’t wait for her words.

Nothing could stop him. Silambi broke down.

Passers-by giggled. Shame began to gnaw at her.

Only a poet as great as Kamban would be able to complete the verse that he left unfinished. But where was such a poet to be found?

Silambi lost hope. She had brought shame on herself by spending all her money. Very few men visited her and so her business dwindled.

Days passed.

Early one morning Silambi came out of her house. As was her habit, she swept clean the doorway, sprinkled it with water to keep the dust down and drew a *kolam*. And when she turned back to enter the house, she saw an old lady sleeping curled up on the *pyal*

Silambi shook her awake and said. “I would have let you in had you knocked on my door last night! Anyhow come in now, and share the porridge I have for breakfast ”

The old lady gladly went in, bathed and then drank the bowl of porridge that Silambi offered. Thanking her profusely she took her leave and moved out of the house.

The incomplete verse on the wall didn’t escape her eyes. She read it. Rushing back to Silambi she said: “This must be Kamban’s verse. Why did he leave it incomplete?”

Silambi recounted the whole story to her.

The old lady asked for a charcoal. When Silambi brought her one, she continued from where Kamban had left:

... Ambar Silambi, the paragon of beauty,
 whose golden anklets that adorn her lotus feet
 are beyond any comparison.

Silambı read it. She spread her arms wide and felt joyous and exalted and free. She then hugged the old lady and yelled: "You must be Avvai... Who else is talented enough to complete the unfinished poem of Kamban?"

Avvai smiled.

"I never knew that my bowl of porridge would be worth five hundred gold coins," Silambı said.

"It is worth more for it was given unasked and that too with lots of love," said Avvai and moved on.

The poem on the wall which circulated by word of mouth spread among young men far and wide. Silambı became a crowd-puller. Should one say that she became the most affluent artiste in the Chozha kingdom?

(More legends on the way)

P. RAJA

THY BLISSFUL GRACE

In the far avenues of the Land Beyond
 Thy footsteps ring and ring,
 And the buds blossom here on earth,
 The birds begin to sing.
 The springs dance, and towards the ocean
 The river joyously flows,
 The creeper flaunts her tender form
 In each soft breeze that blows,
 The horizon then with glowing smile
 Receives the message of Light
 From the great jubilant golden Sun
 Who breaks the grip of Night.
 The child laughs on its mother's breast
 And the mother adores its face,
 From magic eyes like drops of pearl
 Fall here Thy blissful Grace

SAMAR BASU

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 Anandam Das

BEFORE I begin to speak on the topic of today's Seminar I must say that we, the present generation of students, unfortunately, did not have the opportunity of coming in direct contact with The Mother's physical Presence, as some of our elders had and cherished it. Therefore, through whatever ups and downs of life we pass, we do not have the privilege they had then to go and refer them to The Mother physically and seek Her direct and immediate guidance.

But, fortunately, The Mother and Sri Aurobindo have left to us Their immense body of teachings which serve as permanent guidelines not only to us but to the whole of mankind. And if we try to practise these valuable teachings consciously, remembering them at every moment of our life, we are sure to find The Divine's Hand guiding us.

In my speech this morning, I will take the opportunity of recounting to you a very personal incident which has taught me a valuable lesson of life from The Mother.

I had read a certain novel by the renowned Bengali writer, Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyaya. While I was reading it, I often felt an inner urge or aspiration to express the novel in a dramatised form. And, as a result, I sometimes began to visualise in my mind how such and such a character would deliver his or her dialogues; what would be the setting of the stage in different scenes; what type of dresses the various characters would put on; and other images concerning the make-up of the play.

And the more I got inside the spirit of the novel, the more intense grew the urge to express my latent potentiality to dramatisate it.

So, I decided to go ahead to fulfil this urge, and very soon I finished dramatising the novel.

And then, when the entire project came down to the practical level, all sorts of problems began to crop up; problems with actors, organisation, materials and other things which are indispensable for the making of a play

In one moment all my inner aspiration seemed to become extinct! I was

filled with a total sense of discouragement, and the desire to give up constantly harped on my mind!

Then I began to analyse myself and see whether this aspiration was true or just a mere personal ambition to gain a little bit of popularity. But I was not clear about it. And thus started an inner duel.

Then one evening as I entered the Ashram with this conflict in my mind, I first went to the board where The Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's words for getting peace of mind were displayed. I read them carefully.

And there, to my surprise, I found an answer or a solution to my inner conflict—as if I had gone to The Mother physically and She had given me the necessary guidance.

I do not remember the exact words of The Mother that I read, but the idea was that each difficulty is an opportunity to progress and that to realise that progress we must know how to surrender ourselves completely to Her.

I read and re-read the message trying to absorb it within me, and then went to the Samadhi to express my gratitude to The Divine Mother for the guidance I had received. And then I prayed to Her that if She wished that my inner potentiality should express itself, then the play would take place, but if She did not want it, however much I may try with my human effort, it would not succeed.

With this act of surrender, I again began to work for the play, always remembering the words of The Mother.

Whenever any difficulty arose in the work, I offered it to Her and continued to act, remembering always my prayer.

And as I moved on in this manner, I found an inner peace and no more got worried about any difficulty or problem.

Gradually overcoming one problem after another, the final day of presenting the drama arrived. And even on this day an obstacle seemed to come up—the sky from the morning was shrouded with dark rainy clouds.

Some of my friends and co-actors began to get worried and even advised me to postpone the programme. But I tried to remain as tranquil as possible and repeated my prayer: "Mother, if You want it, it will take place, otherwise not."

By the evening the sky was clear, and so at 8 30 p.m. the drama took place.

This was a very personal experience in my life. I do not know how others would interpret it but to me it did convey a great deal, because I truly felt it was a lesson of life that I learnt from The Mother.