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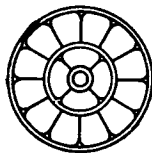
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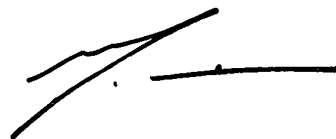
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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All correspondence to be addressed to
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Editor K D SETHNA
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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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WORDS OF THE MOTHER

How can suffering be overcome?

THE problem is not as simple as all that. The causes of suffering are innumerable and its quality also varies a great deal, although the origin of suffering is one and the same and comes from the initial action of an anti-divine will. To make this easier to understand, one can divide suffering into two distinct categories, although in practice they are very often mixed.

The first is purely egoistic and comes from a feeling that one's rights have been violated, that one has been deprived of one's needs, offended, despoiled, betrayed, injured, etc. This whole category of suffering is clearly the result of hostile action and it not only opens the door in the consciousness to the influence of the adversary but is also one of his most powerful ways of acting in the world, the most powerful of all if in addition there comes its natural and spontaneous consequence: hatred and the desire for revenge in the strong, despair and the wish to die in the weak.

The other category of suffering, whose initial *cause* is the pain of separation created by the adversary, is totally opposite in nature: it is the suffering that comes from divine compassion, the suffering of love that feels compassion for the world's misery, whatever its origin, cause or effect. But this suffering, which is of a purely psychic character, contains no egoism, no self-pity; it is full of peace and strength and power of action, of faith in the future and the will for victory; it does not pity but consoles, it does not identify itself with the ignorant movement in others but cures and illumines it.

It is obvious that in the purity of its essence, only that which is *perfectly divine* can feel that suffering; but partially, momentarily, like flashes of lightning behind the dark clouds of egoism, it appears in all who have a vast and generous heart. However, most often, in the individual consciousness it is mixed with that mean and petty self-pity which is the cause of depression and weakness. Nevertheless, when one is vigilant enough to refuse this mixture or at least to reduce it to a minimum, one soon realises that this divine compassion is based on a sublime and eternal joy which alone has the strength and the power to deliver the world from its ignorance and misery.

And this suffering too will disappear from the universe only with the total disappearance of the adversary and all the effects of his action.

(Collected Works of the Mother, Vol. 15, pp. 359-60.)

SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION OF "THE MASTER OF OUR WORKS"

.... THE Master of our works and our being is not merely a Godhead here within us, nor is he merely a cosmic Spirit or some kind of universal Power. The world and the Divine are not one and the same thing, as a certain kind of pantheistic thinking would like to believe. The world is an emanation; it depends upon something that manifests in it but is not limited by it: the Divine is not here alone; there is a Beyond, an eternal Transcendence. The individual being also in its spiritual part is not a formation in the cosmic existence—our ego, our mind, our life, our body are that; but the immutable spirit, the imperishable soul in us has come out of the Transcendence.

*

A Transcendent who is beyond all world and all Nature and yet possesses the world and its nature, who has descended with something of himself into it and is shaping it into that which as yet it is not, is the Source of our being, the Source of our works and their Master. But the seat of the Transcendent Consciousness is above in an absoluteness of divine Existence—and there too is the absolute Power, Truth, Bliss of the Eternal—of which our mentality can form no conception and of which even our greatest spiritual experience is only a diminished reflection in the spiritualised mind and heart, a faint shadow, a thin derivate. Yet proceeding from it there is a sort of golden corona of Light, Power, Bliss and Truth—a divine Truth-Consciousness as the ancient mystics called it, a Supermind, a Gnosis, with which this world of a lesser consciousness proceeding by Ignorance is in secret relation and which alone maintains it and prevents it from falling into a disintegrated chaos. The powers we are now satisfied to call gnosis, intuition or illumination are only fainter lights of which that is the full and flaming source, and between the highest human intelligence and it there lie many levels of ascending consciousness, highest mental or overmental, which we would have to conquer before we arrived there or could bring down its greatness and glory here. Yet, however difficult, that ascent, that victory is the destiny of the human spirit and that luminous descent or bringing down of the divine Truth is the inevitable term of the troubled evolution of the earth-nature; that intended consummation is its *raison d'être*, our culminating state and the explanation of our terrestrial existence. For though the Transcendental Divine is already here as the Purushottama in the secret heart of our mystery, he is veiled by many coats and disguises of his magic world-wide Yoga-Maya; it is only by the ascent and victory of the Soul here in the body that the disguises can fall away and the dynamis of the supreme Truth replace this tangled web of half-truth that

becomes creative error, this emergent Knowledge that is converted by its plunge into the inconscience of Matter and its slow partial return towards itself into an effective Ignorance.

For here in the world, though the gnosis is there secretly behind existence, what acts is not the gnosis but a magic of Knowledge-Ignorance, an incalculable yet apparently mechanical Overmind Maya. The Divine appears to us here in one view as an equal, inactive and impersonal Witness Spirit, an immobile consenting Purusha not bound by quality or Space or Time, whose support or sanction is given impartially to the play of all action and energies which the transcendent Will has once permitted and authorised to fulfil themselves in the cosmos. This Witness Spirit, this immobile Self in things, seems to will nothing and determine nothing; yet we become aware that his very passivity, his silent presence compels all things to travel even in their ignorance towards a divine goal and attracts through division towards a yet unrealised oneness. Yet no supreme infallible Divine Will seems to be there, only a widely deployed Cosmic Energy of a mechanical executive Process, Prakriti. This is one side of the cosmic Self; the other presents itself as a universal Divine, one in being, multiple in personality and power, who conveys to us, when we enter into the consciousness of his universal forces, a sense of infinite quality and will and act and a world-wide knowledge and a one yet innumerable delight; for through him we become one with all existences not only in their essence but in their play of action, see our self in all and all in our self, perceive all knowledge and thought and feeling as motions of the one Mind and Heart, all energy and action as kinetics of the one Will in power, all Matter and form as particles of the one Body, all personalities as projections of the one Person, all egos as deformations of the one and sole real "I" in existence. In him we no longer stand separate, but lose our active ego in the universal movement, even as by the Witness who is without qualities and for ever unattached and unentangled, we lose our static ego in the universal peace.

And yet there remains a contradiction between these two terms, the aloof divine Silence and the all-embracing divine Action, which we may heal in ourselves in a certain manner, in a certain high degree which seems to us complete, yet is not complete because it cannot altogether transform and conquer. A universal Peace, Light, Power, Bliss is ours, but its effective expression is not that of the Truth-Consciousness, the divine Gnosis, but still, though wonderfully freed, uplifted and illumined, supports only the present self-expression of the Cosmic Spirit and does not transform, as would a transcendental Descent, the ambiguous symbols and veiled mysteries of a world of Ignorance. Ourselves are free, but the earth-consciousness remains in bondage; only a farther transcendental ascent and descent can entirely heal the contradiction and transform and deliver.

For there is yet a third intensely close and personal aspect of the Master of

Works which is a key to his sublimest hidden mystery and ecstasy; for he detaches from the secret of the hidden Transcendence and the ambiguous display of the cosmic Movement an individual Power of the Divine that can mediate between the two and bridge our passage from the one to the other. In this aspect the transcendent and universal person of the Divine conforms itself to our individualised personality and accepts a personal relation with us, at once identified with us as our supreme Self and yet close and different as our Master, Friend, Lover, Teacher, our Father and our Mother, our Playmate in the great world-game who has disguised himself throughout as friend and enemy, helper and opponent and, in all relations and in all workings that affect us, has led our steps towards our perfection and our release. It is through this more personal manifestation that we are admitted to some possibility of the complete transcendental experience; for in him we meet the One not merely in a liberated calm and peace, not merely with a passive or active submission in our works or through the mystery of union with a universal Knowledge and Power filling and guiding us, but with an ecstasy of divine Love and divine Delight that shoots up beyond silent Witness and active World-Power to some positive divination of a greater beatific secret. For it is not so much knowledge leading to some ineffable Absolute, not so much works lifting us beyond world-process to the originating supreme Knower and Master, but rather this thing most intimate to us, yet at present most obscure, which keeps for us wrapt in its passionate veil the deep and rapturous secret of the transcendent Godhead and some absolute positiveness of its perfect Being, its all-concentrating Bliss, its mystic Ananda.

But the individual relation with the Divine does not always or from the beginning bring into force a widest enlargement or a highest self-exceeding. At first this Godhead close to our being or immanent within us can be felt fully only in the scope of our personal nature and experience, a Leader and Master, a Guide and Teacher, a Friend and Lover, or else a Spirit, Power or Presence, constituting and uplifting our upward and enlarging movement by the force of his intimate reality inhabiting the heart or presiding over our nature from above even our highest intelligence. It is our personal evolution that is his preoccupation, a personal relation that is our joy and fulfilment, the building of our nature into his divine image that is our self-finding and perfection. The outside world seems to exist only as a field for this growth and a provider of materials or of helping and opposing forces for its successive stages. Our works done in that world are his works, but even when they serve some temporary universal end, their main purpose for us is to make outwardly dynamic or give inward power to our relations with this immanent Divine. Many seekers ask for no more or see the continuation and fulfilment of this spiritual flowering only in heavens beyond; the union is consummated and made perpetual in an eternal dwelling-place of his perfection, joy and beauty. But this is not enough for the integral seeker; however intense and beautiful, a personal isolated achievement cannot

be his whole aim or his entire existence. A time must come when the personal opens out to the universal; our very individuality, spiritual, mental, vital, physical even, becomes universalised: it is seen as a power of his universal force and cosmic spirit, or else it contains the universe in that ineffable wideness which comes to the individual consciousness when it breaks its bonds and flows upward towards the Transcendent and on every side into the Infinite.

*

In a Yoga lived entirely on the spiritualised mental plane it is possible and even usual for these three fundamental aspects of the divine—the Individual or Immanent, the Cosmic and the Transcendent—to stand out as separate realisations. Each by itself then appears sufficient to satisfy the yearning of the seeker. Alone with the personal Divine in the inner heart's illumined secret chamber, he can build his being into the Beloved's image and ascend out of fallen Nature to dwell with him in some heaven of the Spirit. Absorbed in the cosmic wideness, released from ego, his personality reduced to a point of working of the universal Force, himself calm, liberated, deathless in universality, motionless in the Witness Self even while outspread without limit in unending Space and Time, he can enjoy in the world the freedom of the Timeless. One-pointed towards some ineffable Transcendence, casting away his personality, shedding from him the labour and trouble of the universal Dynamis, he can escape into an inexpressible Nirvana, annul all things in an intolerant exaltation of flight into the Incommunicable.

But none of these achievements is enough for one who seeks the wide completeness of an integral Yoga. An individual salvation is not enough for him; for he finds himself opening to a cosmic consciousness which far exceeds by its breadth and vastness the narrower intensity of a limited individual fulfilment, and its call is imperative; driven by that immense compulsion, he must break through all separative boundaries, spread himself in world-Nature, contain the universe. Above too, there is urgent upon him a dynamic realisation pressing from the Supreme upon this world of beings, and only some encompassing and exceeding of the cosmic consciousness can release into manifestation here that yet unlavished splendour. But the cosmic consciousness too is not sufficient; for it is not all the Divine Reality, not integral. There is a divine secret behind personality that he must discover; there, waiting in it to be delivered here into Time, stands the mystery of the embodiment of the Transcendence. In the cosmic consciousness there remains at the end a hiatus, an unequal equation of a highest Knowledge that can liberate but not effectuate with a Power seeming to use the limited Knowledge or masking itself with a surface Ignorance that can create but creates imperfection or a perfection transient, limited and in fetters. On one side there is a free undynamic Witness and on the other side a bound

Executrix of action who has not been given all the means of action. The reconciliation of all these companions and opposites seems to be reserved, postponed, held back in an Unmanifest still beyond us. Put, again, a mere escape into some absolute Transcendence leaves personality unfulfilled and the universal action inconclusive and cannot satisfy the integral seeker. He feels that the Truth that is for ever is a Power that creates as well as a stable Existence; it is not a Power solely of illusory or ignorant manifestation. The eternal Truth can manifest its truths in Time; it can create in Knowledge and not only in Inconscience and Ignorance. A divine Descent no less than an ascent to the Divine is possible; there is a prospect of the bringing down of a future perfection and a present deliverance. As his knowledge widens, it becomes for him more and more evident that it was this for which the Master of Works cast down the soul within him here as a spark of His fire into the darkness, that it might grow there into a centre of the Light that is for ever.

The Transcendent, the Universal, the Individual are three powers overarching, underlying and penetrating the whole manifestation; this is the first of the Trinities. In the unfolding of consciousness also, these are the three fundamental terms and none of them can be neglected if we would have the experience of the whole Truth of existence. Out of the individual we wake into a vaster freer cosmic consciousness; but out of the universal too with its complex of forms and powers we must emerge by a still greater self-exceeding into a consciousness without limits that is founded on the Absolute. And yet in this ascension we do not really abolish but take up and transfigure what we seem to leave; for there is a height where the three live eternally in each other, on that height they are blissfully joined in a nodus of their harmonised oneness. But that summit is above the highest and largest spiritualised mentality, even if some reflection of it can be experienced there; mind, to attain to it, to live there, must exceed itself and be transformed into a supramental gnostic light, power and substance. In this lower diminished consciousness a harmony can indeed be attempted, but it must always remain imperfect; a co-ordination is possible, but not a simultaneous fused fulfilment. An ascent out of the mind is, for any greater realisation, imperative. Or else, there must be, with the ascent or consequent to it, a dynamic descent of the self-existent Truth that exists always uplifted in its own light above Mind, eternal, prior to the manifestation of Life and Matter.

For Mind is Maya, *sat-asat*: there is a field of embrace of the true and the false, the existent and the non-existent, and it is in that ambiguous field that Mind seems to reign; but even in its own reign it is in truth a diminished consciousness, it is not part of the original and supremely originating power of the Eternal. Even if Mind is able to reflect some image of essential Truth in its substance, yet the dynamic force and action of Truth appears in it always broken and divided. All Mind can do is to piece together the fragments or deduce a unity; truth of Mind is only a half-truth or a portion of a puzzle. Mental

knowledge is always relative, partial and inconclusive, and its outgoing action and creation come out still more confused in its steps or precise only in narrow limits and by imperfect piecings together. Even in this diminished consciousness the Divine manifests as a Spirit in Mind, just as he moves as a Spirit in Life or dwells still more obscurely as a Spirit in Matter; but not here is his full dynamic revelation, not here the perfect identities of the Eternal. Only when we cross the border into a larger luminous consciousness and self-aware substance where divine Truth is a native and not a stranger, will there be revealed to us the Master of our existence in the imperishable integral truth of his being and his powers and his workings. Only there, too, will his works in us assume the flawless movement of his unfailing supramental purpose.

*

But that is the end of a long and difficult journey, and the Master of works does not wait till then to meet the seeker on the path of Yoga and put his secret or half-shown Hand upon him and upon his inner life and actions. Already he was there in the world as the Originator and Receiver of works behind the dense veils of the Inconscient, disguised in force of Life, visible to the Mind through symbol godheads and figures. It may well be in these disguises that he first meets the soul destined to the way of the integral Yoga. Or even, wearing still vaguer masks, he may be conceived by us as an Ideal or mentalised as an Abstract Power of Love, Good, Beauty or Knowledge; or, as we turn our feet towards the Way, he may come to us veiled as the call of Humanity or a Will in things that drives towards the deliverance of the world from the grasp of Darkness and Falsehood and Death and Suffering—the great quaternary of the Ignorance. Then, after we have entered the path, he envelops us with his wide and mighty liberating Impersonality or moves near to us with the face and form of a personal Godhead. In and around us we feel a Power that upholds and protects and cherishes; we hear a Voice that guides; a conscious Will greater than ourselves rules us; an imperative Force moves our thoughts and actions and our very body; an ever-widening Consciousness assimilates ours, a living Light of Knowledge lights all within, or a Beatitude invades us; a Mightiness presses from above, concrete, massive and overpowering, and penetrates and pours itself into the very stuff of our nature; a Peace sits there, a Light, a Bliss, a Strength, a Greatness. Or there are relations, personal, intimate as life itself, sweet as love, encompassing like the sky, deep like deep waters. A Friend walks at our side; a Lover is with us in our heart's secrecy; a Master of the Work and the Ordeal points our way; a Creator of things uses us as his instruments; we are in the arms of the eternal Mother. All these more seizable aspects in which the Ineffable meets us are truths and not mere helpful symbols or useful imaginations; but as we progress, their first imperfect formulations in our experience yield to a larger

vision of the one Truth that is behind them. At each step their more mental masks are shed and they acquire a larger, a profounder, a more intimate significance. At last on the supramental borders all these Godheads combine their secret forms and, without at all ceasing to be, coalesce together. On this path the Divine Aspects have not revealed themselves only in order to be cast away; they are not temporary spiritual conveniences or compromises with an illusory Consciousness or dream-figures mysteriously cast upon us by the incommunicable superconscience of the Absolute; on the contrary, their power increases and their absoluteness reveals itself as they draw near to the Truth from which they issue.

For that now superconscient Transcendence is a Power as well as an Existence. The supramental Transcendence is not a vacant Wonder, but an inexpressible which contains for ever all essential things that have issued from it; it holds them there in their supreme everlasting reality and their own characteristic absolutes. The diminution, division, degradation that create here the sense of an unsatisfactory puzzle, a mystery of Maya, themselves diminish and fall from us in our ascension, and the Divine Powers assume their real forms and appear more and more as the terms of a Truth in process of realisation here. A soul of the Divine is here slowly awaking out of its involution and concealment in the material Inconscience. The Master of our works is not a Master of illusions, but a supreme Reality who is working out his self-expressive realities delivered slowly from the cocoons of the Ignorance in which for the purposes of an evolutionary manifestation they were allowed for a while to slumber. For the supramental Transcendence is not a thing absolutely apart and unconnected with our present existence. It is a greater Light out of which all this has come for the adventure of the Soul lapsing into the Inconscience and emerging out of it, and, while that adventure proceeds, it waits superconscient above our minds till it can become conscious in us. Hereafter it will unveil itself and by the unveiling reveal to us all the significance of our own being and our works; for it will disclose the Divine whose fuller manifestation in the world will release and accomplish that covert significance.

In that disclosure the Transcendent Divine will be more and more made known to us as the Supreme Existence and the Perfect Source of all that we are; but equally we shall see him as a Master of works and creation prepared to pour out more and more of himself into the field of his manifestation. The cosmic consciousness and its action will appear no longer as a huge regulated Chance, but as a field of the manifestation; there the Divine is seen as a presiding and pervading Cosmic Spirit who receives all out of the Transcendence and develops what descends into forms that are now an opaque disguise or a baffling half-disguise, but destined to be a transparent revelation. The individual consciousness will recover its true sense and action; for it is the form of a Soul sent out from the Supreme and, in spite of all appearances, a nucleus or nebula in which

the Divine Mother-Force is at work for the victorious embodiment of the timeless and formless Divine in Time and Matter. This will reveal itself slowly to our vision and experience as the will of the Master of works and as their own ultimate significance, which alone gives to world-creation and to our own action in the world a light and a meaning. To recognise that and to strive towards its effectuation is the whole burden of the Way of Divine Works in the integral Yoga.

(The Synthesis of Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 20, pp. 241-251.)

A GROSS MISUNDERSTANDING OF SRI AUROBINDO

1. A LETTER FROM PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

HERE IS something for the Editor of *Mother India*: I have been in correspondence with Dr. K.K. Nair (Krishna Chaitanya), the eminent philosopher and litterateur, apropos his comment apropos the Peter Brook film on the Mahabharata, "Anticipating Buber, he (Vyasa) saw history as the encounter of the temporal and the eternal, the empirical and the transcendental; and anticipating Berdyaev, he saw in history a divine programme for divinising human existence." I had asked Nair why he had to refer to Berdyaev when India's very own Sri Aurobindo had posited the same thesis Nair replies, "I had dodged your query in my earlier letter. But you have brought it up again. So I have to say something though I am afraid it will be a dodge in disguise. Briefly: I hero-worshipped Aurobindo in my college days; but now, half a century later, I am terribly disappointed His discussion of time and eternity is wholly derived from that of Boethius; page after page in *Life Divine* is watered down Plotinus. His vision of History has the bookishness of Hegel's tidy schema, Spirit fulfilling its schedule of progress with no problem whatever. But history is fatefully open-ended, for man can abuse his freedom to become an Asura and wreck himself too thereby. Man can regress to a cannibal, Bhima drinking Duhsasana's blood. Man may commit race-suicide, as nearly happened in Kurukshetra where only nine men survived out of 18 vast armies. I am afraid Aurobindo's inflated rhetoric does not see the terror and the tears at the heart of things. I must confess your casual rating of Vyasa and Berdyaev vis-a-vis Aurobindo shocked me "

Coming from someone who is an acknowledged name in these matters, this needs an answer from you. To provide you with some insight into this argument against Sri Aurobindo, I enclose a xerox from his latest book, *The Betrayal of Krishna* (Clarion Books, 1991)

(15.10.1993)

2. K.D. SETHNA'S COMMENT

The letter you quote from Dr K.K Nair (Krishna Chaitanya) "the eminent philosopher and litterateur", as you put it, and the xerox you have sent of the "Epilogue" to his latest book, *The Betrayal of Krishna*, have been lying before me for quite a time. Now I have a bit of leisure and feel inclined to make the comment you have asked for.

The trouble with Nair is that he is amazingly ill-versed in Sri Aurobindo—amazingly because he is expected to be a good student of both spiritual thought and spiritual experience. At the very outset he should know that Sri Aurobindo is not spouting mere philosophy: he is putting in intellectual terms

the insights brought him by Yogic realisations. The question of plagiarising an early Christian writer or profusely pouring out Plotinus-*cum*-water does not arise at all. Again, an acknowledged intellectual and literary master plus Yogi does not need to cast about for adequate language from past philosophers to couch his illuminations. Besides, I am pretty sure that Sri Aurobindo had less than nodding acquaintance with *De Consolatione Philosophiae* and was very far from being immersed in the *Enneads*. Furthermore, I begin to doubt not only whether Nair has read Sri Aurobindo enough but also whether he has even dived sufficiently into Boethius and Plotinus. Boethius expounds the “blessedness” of a good life according to God’s self-revelation as seen by him in the Christian Bible and glimpsed in Neoplatonism—a good life with its eye all the while on a heavenly hereafter. What could he have genuinely in common with Sri Aurobindo’s setting forth of the Yogic process of “psychicisation, spiritualisation, supramentalisation” on this very earth—a process which brings about a relation between Time and Eternity quite apart from Boethius’s idea of temporal values having to be sacrificed for eternal ones? A radical difference is bound to exist too between Plotinism’s ultimate “flight of the alone to the Alone” and Sri Aurobindo’s vision of a collective terrestrial fulfilment due to the supreme Divine operating not only from a free status beyond and a subtle omnipresence around but also from a Rigvedic “darkness wrapped within darkness” below—an “Inconscient” in which the Divine has figured its own opposite as the starting-point of a difficult evolution which is yet meant to express the supreme plenitude in earthly terms in what has been till now the Gita’s “transient and unhappy world”. What has the Aurobindonian “divine life” in common ultimately with the philosophy of one who, according to his biographer Porphyry, was such an intransigent mystic that “he seemed ashamed to be in a body”? Indeed a world away is Sri Aurobindo who affirms that “anyone who wants to change earth-nature must first accept it in order to change it”¹—Sri Aurobindo of those lines of his “A God’s Labour”, which he himself quotes in this context:

He who would bring the heavens here
 Must descend himself into clay
 And the burden of earthly nature bear
 And tread the dolorous way.

I should like to know if any mystic has had more sense of “the terror and the tears at the heart of things”, as Nair finely puts it with reminiscence of Virgil’s “Sunt lacrimae rerum” (“Tears in the nature of things”) and Wilfred Owen’s “heartbreak at the heart of things”, than he who talked of having undergone more difficulties than any spiritual seeker before him because he wanted to face in full all the grievous lack and sorrowful strain which man in his imperfection suffers and to assure him of the possibility of overcoming them. Has Berdyaev,

to whom both you and Nair refer, or even the great Vyasa ever written words like the following in a letter of Sri Aurobindo's to a disciple?—"No, it is not with the Empyrean that I am busy: I wish it were so. It is rather with the opposite end of things; it is in the Abyss that I have to plunge to build a bridge between the two. But that too is necessary for my work and one has to face it."²

Let me cite also some other words to bring home to Nair's unseeing mind the character of the work Sri Aurobindo undertook. "It is only divine Love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness towards the Divine. The Gallo-like 'Je m'en fiche'-ism (I do not care) would not carry me one step; it would certainly not be divine. It is quite another thing that enables me to walk unweeping and unlamenting towards the goal."³

When Nair brings in Hegel and connects him with Sri Aurobindo's "vision of History" and talks of Hegel's "tidy schema, Spirit fulfilling its schedule of progress with no problem whatever", he forgets one central point: whoever posits an Absolute has to attune the world of change to the Permanent and the Eternal in the final reckoning. This does not necessarily mean failure to take stock of the world as it is or to deny man's sense of freedom and the open-endedness of history. In the absolutely free Absolute pervading no less than subsuming everything can be the only possibility of freedom and open-endedness anywhere. No doubt, all these are recondite matters but unless we appreciate them we cannot understand the various aspects of Sri Aurobindo's vision and work. Nair seems to stumble at every step. He can only see "contradictions". Nor can he get to the core of key-concepts like "the supramental Truth-Consciousness". I find him peppering his "Epilogue" with the adjective "supramental" six times,⁴ aware—as his quotation-marks show—that it is a special term of Sri Aurobindo's but using it as if it signified nothing more than "above the mind". Sri Aurobindo focuses in it what he specifically calls "Supermind" or "Truth-Consciousness" and distinguishes it from the several other "overhead" levels such as Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition (or Intuitive Mind), Overmind. Sri Aurobindo does not just posit these levels and beyond them the Supermind: having had direct experience of them by means of his "Integral Yoga" he has described them and their workings in detail and, in his works of literary criticism, illustrated their peculiar seeing, verbal quality and expressive rhythm. Not finding any knowledge of these "planes" in Gopi Krishna, Vivekananda or even Ramakrishna, Nair finds fault with Sri Aurobindo's statement that the Gita "does not bring forward the idea of the higher planes and the supramental Truth-Consciousness..."⁵ Similarly, not understanding what precisely Sri Aurobindo intends by the word "transformation"⁶ in spite of his making it quite clear what he does not mean and what he means by it, Nair objects to his adding that the Gita overlooks "the bringing down of the supramental Truth-Consciousness as the means of the complete transformation

of earthly life”.⁷ Nair asserts: “the great central aim of the Gita has in fact been to inspire men to work for the ‘complete transformation of earth life,’ actually the divinisation of history.”⁸ Then comes Nair’s confession of faith and sight of Pisgah: “The last verse of the Gita affirms that this can be achieved only by a conjoint action by man and deity which means that man can and should attain similitude (*sādharmya*) to God, accepting deity who incessantly works for the world as his own soteriological model and working in the same manner. This I would regard as the highest perception, mental or supramental.” Now we know how far-removed Nair is from the Aurobindonian universe of discourse and how little he has cared to penetrate the deliverance of the Master of the Integral Yoga.

His own insensitivity to shades of meaning lead Nair to convict Sri Aurobindo of misjudgment and contradiction in the above issue. The charge of contradiction is also laid at Sri Aurobindo’s door in the matter of what Nair calls the former’s “philosophy of action”. “According to him,” writes Nair again in relation to the Gita, “Krishna demands of Arjuna (which means all of us) ‘to be free from repulsion and desire... to renounce self-will and become a passive and faithful instrument in his hands’ ”⁹ Nair believes such freedom and such renunciation illegitimate and ineffective. “It is Arjuna and not the Cosmic Divinity (*Viśvarūpa*),” argues Nair, “that had to liquidate the hordes of Duryodhana. For this historic end Arjuna had to resume his action... Krishna does not want man to renounce his volition and become a passive instrument... When we work with dedication, our conviction that we are real agents of action is not a deluded belief .. Desire and revulsion also should not be surrendered in a mental or supramental state of bemused apathy.”¹⁰ This is strange doctrine to be put into Krishna’s mouth Surely, what Krishna wants is no bemused apathy. Nobody, he avers, can cease from action. True, but action should not arise from personal desire, from private like or dislike, from any motive of the separative ego. There must be a vast equanimity and a surrender of the individual self to the Divine Presence, the Inner Lord, the Universal Oversoul. By a constant spiritual gesture of union (Yoga) with the dynamic Divinity (Ishwara) by the intelligent will (buddhi), the individual has to be active with the illumined energy of a more-than-human consciousness. Krishna is teaching Arjuna Karma Yoga: Karma implies Work, not passivity, but Work by Yoga (inner spiritual unification with God), not by ego-impelled desire and revulsion. Nair completely misconstrues the true drift of the Gita and the basic drive of Sri Aurobindo’s interpretation in this context.

There is some mis-seeing by Nair of Sri Aurobindo’s experience of Vasudeva (Krishna) being behind everything. This experience is identical with what is implied by the Gita’s own pronouncement which later Vaishnavism formulated as *Vāsudeva sarvam iti* (Vasudeva is all). Although Duryodhana’s armies were also Vasudeva, Krishna as Vasudeva incarnate exhorts Vasudeva-

Arjuna to destroy them. The universal Vasudeva plays many roles according to the situation presented each moment by the many-sided phenomenon of a world moving under multiform aspects. Once one has realised in Yogic experience Vasudeva's unity and multiplicity, sameness and difference, openness and disguise, friendliness and enmity, one discerns by an inner light the proper mode of action and reaction. Thus Sri Aurobindo the politician is a relentless freedom-fighter against the British rule in India, was imprisoned under inhuman conditions for a long while and yet he finds Krishna's hand behind everything and even sees him, as Nair notes, during the sedition-trial in 1908, in the magistrate and the prosecuting counsel: "It was Sri Krishna who sat there, it was my Lover and Friend who sat there and smiled."¹¹ Years later, this very Sri Aurobindo took whole-heartedly the side of the British and their allies in World War II and regarded Hitler as the instrument of a demonic force and set his own spiritual power working against him and later against Japan. Nair, unable to fathom the fact that, as a line in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* puts it,

Our life is a paradox with God for key¹²

and unable to follow the varying steps of an intuitive guidance in Sri Aurobindo's facing of diverse situations and problems, can only cry: "Contradictions within contradictions."¹³

I am sorry to mark a lack of suppleness as well as of depth in Nair's mind. It is a sharp weapon in several respects but it fails to cut sufficiently beneath the surface and to cope with the diversity no less than the complexity of event and attitude. There is also an incapacity to appreciate an expository style like Sri Aurobindo's in a book like *The Life Divine*. In this book there is at times an alliance of the direct, the lucid, the profound, the harmonious, at other times a concomitance of the wide-wheeling, the multi-layered, the symphonic. An allergy to the second stylistic mode seems to be responsible for so sweeping a characterisation by Nair of *The Life Divine* as "inflated rhetoric". I wish he had given samples.

In a mischievous spirit of tit for tat I am tempted to cite some parts of Nair's "Epilogue" as reprehensible style. At the very start he quotes the epigram: "When the gods decline, the nations wither." After five and a half lines deprecating the possible "pettifogging schoolmen-type vivisection", he puts forth his own reading of "this living truth" as follows: "It merely means that, as far as men are concerned, God can live only in their hearts and that if the hearts turn inhospitable, he will die to men and men too will die—as beings who could have grown to some similitude to him—even if they may continue to infest the world and altogether ruin its character as sacred precincts."¹⁴

This interpretation strikes me as ingenious, extravagant and pompous, a pseudo-profundity showing off. The epigram appears to mean simply that when

the religious and spiritual temper fades, the community loses its inner sustaining vigour.

On p. 542 Nair notes that “in the time of Emerson (1803-1882) not much knowledge of Indian religious traditions had percolated into the West; thus he refers to the Gita as ‘the much renowned book of Buddhism’.” Then Nair comments: “He was responding to the pure poetry of the Gita, the way it sees the halations around facts when it conceptualises, and transfigures concepts into images whose charges of affect can achieve the remaking of man; and he found the poem ‘wonderful’.” Here undoubtedly in a couple of places is a deplorable dash of jargon, an unnecessary infusion of gobbledegook.

There, Pradip, you have what “the Editor of *Mother India*” is provoked by you to say. Perhaps I have said too much. But what is writ is writ. You may do what you like with it. Don’t think I have no admiration for Nair. He has penned a series of penetrating surveys of modern thought. I only object to his sallies into regions unsuited to his intellect—and superficial sallies, at that!

(10.1.1994)

Notes

- 1 *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (Sri Aurobindo International University Centre Collection, Vol 1, Pondicherry 1953), p 222
- 2 *Ibid* , pp 222-23
- 3 *Ibid* , p 221
- 4 Epilogue, pp 535, 536, 537
- 5 *Ibid* , p 536
- 6 *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, pp 162-64, 168-69
- 7 Epilogue, p 535
- 8 *Ibid*
- 9 *Ibid* , pp 535-36
- 10 *Ibid* , p 536
- 11 *Ibid*
- 12 *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* (Revised Edition, Pondicherry 1993), p 67, last line
- 13 Epilogue, p 536
- 14 *Ibid* , p 531

TITBITS FROM MY CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO ABOUT MY BENGALI POETRY

COMMENTING on a Bengali poem of mine, Sri Aurobindo wrote: “Inconscient becoming conscient in his trance itself and creating funny things in the নিখিল গহন (profound depth) as he comes out of it.” About the poem itself he said, “Very fine. Quite all right and alive ”

I wrote back next day: “You find funny things in the poem! Then, Sir, you have only to ask me to stop writing them. But how is it that you find the poem very fine too? Is it your fun at my cost, Sir?”

He replied: “But why do you object to fun? Modern opinion is that a poet ought to be funny (humorous) and the objection to funniness in poetry is a romantic superstition.

“Well, it can be funnily fine or finely funny – can’t it?”

Q: If I take your puzzling comments seriously, they will have serious consequences, Sir! For why should I bother and spoil my valuable time in writing these “funny” things when I could sleep comfortably at noon for two hours? And is that the reason why you don’t give explanations either? Very well, Sir!

A: For the joy of the world, of course. Funny however is used in the sense of “extraordinary”. You can’t deny that these things are extraordinary.

Why should I explain when you can understand and explain yourself? As Christ came to save sinners, not the righteous, so am I here to explain the inexplicable to the non-understanding, not to the understanding.

Q: But I don’t see the logic of your threat of “strike”.¹ If people begin writing these surrealist things by your inspiration, am I to blame and suffer? That is not fair, Sir!

A. The strike was supposed to be against the 4, 5, 6 ad infinitum not against the two.

Q: My inspiration? When they catch it from you?

And about writing explanations from set to dawn for two, who are the two? One, “yes” my precious self and who is the other “yes” jewel? J?

A: Yes.

Q: But she is not a surrealist! She dreads being so and called so.

A. Yes. I have to explain for her also. Surrealist or symbolist, it comes to the same as far as need for explanation goes.

NIRODBARAN

1 When I started writing surrealist poems, and Sri Aurobindo was giving explanations of them, some others too felt inspired to write likewise and were making me a vehicle to send their work to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo, after a few attempts at satisfying them, cried out, “These should be stopped, otherwise I shall go on strike!”

SRI AUROBINDO'S CALL TO THE YOUTH

THERE is nothing more tragic than the picture of the modern youth. He is a strange divided being who seems to understand little of the world around him, still less his own self, an entity unaware of his origin and direction

Voices are hammered constantly into his ears; promptings of parties, programmes and ideologies are ceaselessly dinned and he is confused. Yet the modern youth has an idealism that yearns for Truth and Light. He is a worshipper of Beauty who feels stifled in the smog of the industrial society. Catholic and liberal is his spirit. He regards the whole world as his country. His loyalties are neither to the gospels of the old Mammon and Belial nor to those of the new ones of the technological age. His sympathies are with humanity, internationalism is his birthright.

But when he withdraws his gaze from these sublime heights and focuses it on the lower planes, he is shocked and rendered inert. The spectre of poverty, starvation and disease hits him in the eye like a ferocious storm blast. He is appalled and grieved to see a barbaric ritual of a garish, ostentatious living amidst the abject penury of unseen millions. He feels dismayed at the duplicity of a society that preaches equality but practises tyranny at every step. Merit, wisdom and honesty are the avowed platitudes dutifully mouthed, but everywhere he sees a grim and vicious rat race for power, success and money; it is a struggle that recognises no principles, scruples or fairplay. The plight of the social dropouts and the misery of the economic misfits question his conscience and haunt him relentlessly like a hound.

Heaving a sigh of despair, the modern youth throws his gaze forward into a happier tomorrow, to a future of peace and harmony, a world immune to the scourge of war and suffering and inhabited by youthful, spirited men who know the delight of work and the joy of service, a world where the value of an object is not assessed by the fixed balance of utility...

But even his rosy dreams are shattered by the pressing needs of survival. "Obligation" to his family and "duty" to the society stultify his free growth. Crushed into a stereotyped mould by the arbitrary teacher and stripped of all free will, he emerges fit to serve as an insignificant clog in the social machine. Alas! a being who came to this earth with so much of hope and promise is pathetically reduced to the state of an automaton. In desperation, he seeks a guide and a consolation and for a time he seems to have found it in science and religion. The one tells him that he is an insignificant mass of plasm, a fortuitous product of a chance-reaction, who has no independent will, moving according to the dictates of the blind material forces. The other reveals that his birth in this world is all a mistake, one of these inexplicable and some even say capricious errors of the Almighty and that his only salvation lies in a redemption from what Milton described as "the smoke and stir of this dim spot, which men call earth."

Thus, he can either lead at best a moral, altruistic and pious life, concentrating always on the quietistic Bliss of some other world, or he can throw overboard all scruples and live a life of carnal pleasure and material enjoyments and pass off after a while into oblivion.

Neither of these however has an appeal for the modern youth. For too long has he seen this meaningless drama enacted. Surely there must be more sense to life than being an efficient machine! There must yet come a time when his restless heart revolts and poses the primeval questions: "Who am I? Why am I here? What is my destiny?" And in the last reckoning he knows that this stupendous external achievement, what Sri Aurobindo describes in *The Life Divine* as "a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity for the service of his mental, vital and physical claims and urges" in which he prided so much for so long, has after all not taken him very far. Alienated and ever at war with himself, the modern youth views the existing order with utmost contempt and scepticism as an intractable eye-sore, the very symbol of all his anger, dismay and frustration. He challenges the very basis of the establishment, and attacks the cornerstone of the system. The peaceful aspiring youth of not-so-long-ago dons the garb of the anti-social anarchist and gravitates towards destructive nihilism.

The society rises in one voice to quell this arrogant challenge. But for how long? Already the disease is spreading like wild fire across the social fabric and very soon the entire race may run the risk of being overtaken by this awesome conflagration.

The youth is unilaterally condemned to the stake. But is he understood? Do we even care to listen to him with sympathy and consideration? Are his questions genuinely perplexing? Or simply a figment of the imagination? Such are the queries that need to be probed deeply, for they are no longer mere ethical questions of academic interest, they concern the very question of the survival of civilisation. "The human race," describes Dr. John Platt, research bio-physicist, "is like a rocket in a launching pad. We have been building up to this moment of take-off for a long time and if we can get safely through the take-off period, we may fly on a new and exciting course for a long time to come." But at this moment, he warns, "as the powerful new engines are fired, their thrust and soar shakes and stresses every part of the ship and may cause the whole thing to blow off before we can steer it on the way."

If we reflect for a while, we shall notice that the youth unrest is not an isolated phenomenon, it forms part of a greater crisis that engulfs all humanity at large. We are at present at an evolutionary juncture; old values and beliefs are in a flux. This crisis of an unprecedented magnitude assaults man on two principal fronts: civilisation and evolution. Proceeding from matter, evolution ascends progressively on to life and mind. But, mind, Sri Aurobindo tells us, is not the paramount creation, or the *point finale* of Nature. There is beyond mind a yet

higher and luminous status, what Sri Aurobindo calls the Gnosis or the Supermind. "Man", he declares, "is a transitional being", a being who is yet to discover his normalcy. The crisis occurs primarily due to the failure of man to look beyond the immediate and the ephemeral. As Sri Aurobindo explains:

This erring race of human beings dreams always of perfecting its environment by the machinery of government and society, but it is only by the perfection of the soul within that the outer environment can be perfected, what thou art within, that outside thee thou shalt enjoy, no machinery can rescue thee from the law of thy being.

Now the question would naturally arise: What is the role of youth in this evolutionary crisis? We can do no better than turn to the inspired voice of Sri Aurobindo:

The future belongs to the young. It is a young and new world that is now under process of development and it is the young who must create it. But it is also a world of truth, courage, justice, lofty aspirations and straightforward fulfilment which we seek to create. For the coward, for the self-seeker, for the talker who goes forward at the beginning and afterwards leaves his fellows in the lurch there is no place in the future. A brave, frank, clear-hearted, courageous and aspiring youth is the only foundation on which the future nation can be built.

Today, when the nation lies low in selfishness and fearfulness and littleness, steeped in ignorance, fear and lassitude, Sri Aurobindo's call reverberates once again across this ancient land:

Our call is to young India. It is the young who must be the builders of the world—the young who are free in mind and heart to accept a completer truth and labour for a greater ideal. They must be men who will dedicate themselves not to the past or the present but to the future. They will need to consecrate their lives to an exceeding of their lower self, to the realisation of God in themselves and in all human beings and to a whole-minded and indefatigable labour for the nation and for humanity.

The workers of new India should have then an unshakable faith in the spiritual view of life. They will not accept that "by changing the machinery so as to make our society the ape of Europe we shall effect social renovation". Neither to a competitive capitalism nor to a co-operative socialism will they pledge their support. Their motto will not be an enlightened altruism or humanitarianism. Important as they are, such ideals do not carry us far enough. They will not

substitute an “arrogant modern dogmatism” for the “blind medieval prejudice”. They will have no unduly sacrosanct reverence for the past, “they will think on all subjects independently, fruitfully going to the heart of things not stopped by their surface, free of prejudgements, shearing sophism and prejudice asunder as with a sharp sword, smiting down obscurantism of all kinds as with the mace of Bhima ” For indeed:

the old, fixed foundations have been broken up, we are tossing in the waters of a great upheaval and change. It is no use clinging to the old ice floes of the past, they will soon melt and leave their refugees struggling in perilous waters. It is no use landing ourselves in the infirm bog, neither sea nor good land of a second hand Europeanism, we shall only die there a miserable and unclean death. No, we must learn to swim and use that power to reach the good vessel of unchanging truth. We must land again on the eternal rock of the ages.

Whatever the youth will take will be purely from the Indian standpoint. For indeed, as Sri Aurobindo remarks, “death in one’s own dharma brings new birth, success in an alien path means only successful suicide.” They will “sacrifice no ancient form to an unreasoning love of change, will keep none that the national spirit desires to replace by one that is a still better and truer expression of the undying soul of the nation”

The youth of the future will work for the greatness of India not so that “she is strong to trample on the weak” or extend her sway by a successful power politics, but “to shed the eternal light entrusted to her to the world. India has always existed for humanity and not for herself and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great.”

The workers of a resurgent India will regard nationalism not as an intellectual doctrine, a mere political programme, still less as a sentimental chauvinism. It is only the inner strength, fortitude and earnestness that can breathe a new life in a nation that has fallen, licking the dust. As Sri Aurobindo aptly observed: “It is in the spirit that strength is eternal and you must bring back the kingdom of yourselves, the inner swaraj before you can win back your outer empire.”

As long as there remains a single trace of poverty, a single act of injustice, the youth will not lay down their arms of renovation. In Sri Aurobindo’s words: “the acceptance of poverty is noble and beneficial in a class or an individual but it becomes fatal and pauperises life of its richness and expansion, if it is perversely organised into a general or national ideal.” Society, Sri Aurobindo reminds us, is not “a shadowy background for a few luminous figures or a rigidly fenced and earth-bound root for the growth of ascetic spirituality” It is for the youth to recognise the message of the East that urges man to find his destiny and salvation within him, accepting at the same time the truth of the West that rightly

attaches importance to matter and the material life, not a matter that is inert and inconscient but one that is a fit receptacle for the divine manifestation.

The agenda for the youth will look upon the child as not a mass of clay to be shaped arbitrarily by the whims and fancies of the teacher and the parents and education as a machine that turns out thoughtless human ants for the social ant hill. The child will be regarded with sympathy as a growing soul, a spark of godhead placed upon the earth for his self-discovery and a spiritual epiphany. This will promote international understanding beyond all barriers of caste, community and nation and work for a composite world-culture, holding the soul as the inexhaustible fountainhead of all harmony, equality and brotherhood.

And all these the youth must do, not for any narrow, selfish ulterior motives but simply for the joy and thrill of serving the country, humanity and God. "Is it not enough," remarks Sri Aurobindo, "if unnamed and unrecorded except in the books of God we go down to the grave with the consciousness that our finger too was laid on the great car and may have helped imperceptibly to push it forward? This talk of service is a poor thing after all. Do we serve the Mother's work for a reward or do God's work for hire? The patriot lives for his country because he must, he dies for her because she demands it."

This is the stirring call of Sri Aurobindo at this critical juncture. It is the promise and assurance for a happier tomorrow. Will the youth rise from the slumber of inertia and apathy and act as the "creative minority"?

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

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RELIGION, HUMANISM AND DIVINITY

WHAT is religion? I grope within for an answer. No clear answer is found. I feel relieved to say, "I don't know exactly what it is." Then the question comes, "Is it completely unknown to you? You feel so often the vibration of its flow in your blood; your heart is bathed at times by the spirit of its sacred influx." That is true. I simply don't know how to express it in terms of human words, to give a voice to this sublime secret of existence. Perhaps it is the source of the highest human aspiration, it may also be the outer shape and form of that aspiration. The hesitation comes again. How is it then that history shows, and we also see in front of our very eyes, even today, the ugliest brutality and the most savage antagonism take place in the name of religion? How do military invasion and forceful conversion happen to be the means of its growth and expansion? We observe how hypnotising its influence is to make its followers blind to the searching light of reason and clear vision. So many amongst the pioneers of the modern scientific age have sacrificed even their lives for their discovered truth at the altar of dogmatic religious authority. But fortunately they did not stop short at that. They broke through the iron grip of the dogmatism of the church and finally the truths discovered by them received universal acceptance not merely because of their rational integrity and soundness but also because of their practical applications in our day-to-day life.

In revolutionary Russia on the other hand the attack on religion came altogether from a different standpoint. At the sight of painful social injustices and the impotence of the common mass against religious and other influences, a question cropped up in many minds: What is the necessity at all of religion in society? Can there not be a society without it? Let men have no blind faith and meaningless devotion towards an imaginary something which they call God, a God constructed as it were by the petty and partial self-interest of a limited few. What benefit can, after all, be derived from an intoxication with such a God as appears to be flatly indifferent to and absolutely careless of human suffering and agony and, above all, the most vicious social inequalities? They came face to face with only one truth, a most pressing social need, namely, the well-being of all men irrespective of any class distinction. That necessitated the abolition of a special class which was being enriched, according to them, at the cost of others by an entirely wrong social and economic arrangement. They took on their own shoulders the responsibility of eradicating this gross social defect, since they did not believe that the change could be brought about by any other agency, influence or power. It was for them to establish efficient and proper methods of administration, production and distribution not only of the land, labour and capital of the country but also of the subjective pursuits of life, in the sphere of education, science, amusement and culture. This they did in their own way without allowing any religious motive to adulterate their purely humanitarian

zeal and power of work. They developed with considerable success agriculture, science, and technology on the one hand and, on the other, methods of education and culture, arts, music, painting, games, sports, gymnastics, etc. They helped to a great extent the common mass to have a sound mind in a sound body. According to them a perfect social relationship based on love, sympathy, kindness and mutual understanding is the essential prerequisite for a novel social order. How far that has been satisfied is to be decided by others; but, that being satisfied, what need is there to seek for a God and worship him for nothing? So they drove away God and religion from their social atmosphere.

Keeping aside the question of religion such a change was, perhaps, a necessity in the course of things to come. There was a time in the past when Church and Priesthood were the rulers of society. Even the Kshatriyas or the warrior class had to accept subordination to the Brahmins or the learned class. In the medieval period the monarchs or the Kshatriyas came into power. Then in recent times the Vaishyas or the commercial community took the lead and became the dominating class. Money became the monarch. But all throughout the period the position of the Sudras, the proletariat or the labour class, has been completely neglected and pushed away to the farthest corner. To complete the cycle this last class must also come to prominence. They have been shouldering the burden of the whole edifice of so-called civilisation half-fed, half-clothed, without name, fame or any kind of recognition. Can they remain oppressed or down-trodden eternally? So, fighting against heavy odds and opposition, they are now awakened. It appears that what they have done, they have done in accordance with nature's demand on them. But in so doing they have been very much one-sided. They have neglected the psychological or the deeper side of human nature. Who I am and what for do I live?—this eternal question did not appear to them. Rather they did not care to look at that aspect of life.

At this point it will not be out of place to discuss a little the Hindu system of four castes, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. These four, according to the Hindus, are said to have emanated from the four limbs of Brahma, the creative deity. Symbolically they are the four aspects of the human social existence. In an individual there are three gunas or modes of nature: Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. They are the constituents of the nature-part of an individual. According to the degree of predominance of any of these gunas in a man's nature, he is taken to be either a Sattwic man, or a Rajasic man, or a Tamasic man. But essentially he is above these gunas, he is a Purusha, a Soul, a projection of the Absolute. So also in collective existence Brahmin, Kshatriya, etc., are the four essential nature-parts of society. Keeping pace with the times and circumstances any of these may hold a dominating position in it. But behind all of them there is always the upholding deity, the supreme Purusha or God. In a man, no matter how far he may be a particular type, all the three gunas must exist. None of them can completely be cut off from his nature. Perfection comes

by gradual betterment and transformation of these three gunas. Thus Sattwa is transformed to Jyoti, Rajas to Tapas, and Tamas to Samata. These are respectively their divine counterparts. Just in the same way, in the nature-part of society also, all the above four aspects, i.e., Brahmin, Kshatriya, etc., are equally essential elements. None of them can completely be abolished. What is needed is the elimination of their defects, changing of the weakness of one and undue assertion of another, and gradual betterment of all the four towards divinisation. Are they not the different limbs of Brahma who symbolically represents the creative godhead? So when we deny any one of these and specially the sustaining Power or the Purusha behind the social frame or nature, we separate ourselves, as it were, from the underlying spirit of integrity and wholeness. And then for us to speak of relations based on love, sympathy and oneness is meaningless and absurd. Absurd because there cannot be any real sympathy and brotherhood without that integrating power or spirit behind, which is called God.

Coming back to the question of religion let us see what Vivekananda says about it. "In all organised religions, their founders, prophets and messengers are declared to have gone into the states of mind that were neither waking nor sleeping, in which they came face to face with a new series of facts relating to what is called the spiritual kingdom." So we see that there are worlds or states of consciousness beyond our visible world and surface understanding. Before we discard religion from society as an unnecessary imposition we should try to realise the fact that social maladies do not come from true religion but from its perversions, from its defects. True religion can never stand in the way of social progress. On the contrary it is the gateway towards the fountain-source of progress, purity and perfection. Therefore when we do away with religion itself because it is subject to defects and perversions it is as if we kill the patient for his diseases instead of curing him from them. But is it possible? Religionism may die, not true religion; that is indeed too deep-rooted a necessity for the ignorant and helpless children of earth.

In India religion is called Dharma. Although the word Dharma conveys a much more deep and universal significance than what is meant by religion, still for practical purposes the two are usually taken to be equivalent expressions. Joining the most remote past to the living present a voice comes up on Indian soil out of the depths of creation, a voice tranquil and serene,—“I am Dharma, ever ancient but ever new, I never die nor do I take birth. I simply exist. Mind cannot define me fully nor can I be abolished by ignorant refusal. Research will not find me in any ‘isms’ but I am not altogether absent in them. I am present in the temples of the Hindus, the churches of the Christians, the mosques of the Muslims, the synagogues of the Jews. But my permanent abode is in the heart of man and all created beings. I am Agni, Fire, burning eternally in the core of existence. I am equally present in the spark of the glow-worm and in the flashing

light of the stormy sky My magic touch inspires the poets and the artists, the valour of the fighters bears the stamp of my invincible will. I am all-pervading and divine.”

The critical mind will perhaps remain still unsatisfied. It may argue: “What importance is there in this airy imagination, high-sounding though it may appear? What is the tangible proof that such a voice really announces itself from the depths of creation? Can it be recorded on a tape or be reproduced through any other scientific device?” On the other hand, the believers who want to get religion in between their two hands through concrete forms of rites and rituals will cry out in surprise, as Sri Aurobindo points out, “If that is religion, where is its mind and fixed thought? Where is the form of its body? How can there be a religion which has no rigid dogmas demanding belief on pain of eternal damnation?”

Against such notions it is sufficient to say that the truth does not depend on any intellectual assent or theological doctrine. Moreover there is a fundamental difference between Dharma and religion. Dharma is a Sanskrit word derived from the verbal root *dhr*, meaning ‘to hold’. That which holds is Dharma. So its sphere is not limited or narrow. It is vast, deep, all-pervading. There can be as many dharmas as there are individuals, sects, creeds or beliefs, provided the sustaining power lives and works behind them. If that power forsakes us, everything becomes dead and mechanical. It is mainly for this reason that most of the ancient civilisations of the world are no more today. It may so happen to the present civilisation as well if it does not discover the mainspring or the sustaining spirit of life and rely on it as the guiding principle. Let us hear what Vivekananda says about religion: “By means of intellectual assent we may subscribe to many foolish things and change our mind altogether tomorrow. But true religion never changes. Religion is realisation, not talk, not doctrine, not theories however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing and acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes. That is religion.” In a different manner we hear almost the same thing when Sri Aurobindo writes: “The supreme truths are neither the rigid conclusions of logical reasoning nor the affirmations of credal statement, but fruits of the soul’s inner experience.” Again he writes: “There are no true and false religions but all religions are true in their own way and degree.”

Of course there is no denying the fact that Dharma in practice relates itself with some functions and formalities, and there is no harm in this. But the difficulty starts when it gets completely covered up by the outer attire of rites and rituals. In fact the true spirit of religion or Dharma is above and behind these frontal forms and once that is grasped it remains no more the cause of dispute, rivalry and antagonism. Then we find within it the seed of universal acceptance and tolerance. It stands liberated from sectarian ill-will and malice. Questions may be raised here: “Then what is the necessity at all of these external forms?”

Why not do away with these paraphernalia and try to attain the clear and transparent spirit within the religion?" Surely it is a very good proposition, if of course it is possible to reach at a state that state. It may be possible for a few exceptionally gifted persons, but not for the general mass. Religion does not follow any clear-cut mental dictation. It is a living principle. Just as it has its spirit within, it has also its mind and body without. It has its own inherent laws of growth and evolution, the nature of which can be appreciated only by inner attunement of spirit and knowledge through identity.

At this point let us try to follow the truth embodied in the following statement of Vivekananda: "It is good for you to remember, in this country specially, that the world's great spiritual giants have been in possession of very rich mythology and ritual. All sects that have attempted to worship God without any form or ceremony have crushed without mercy everything that is beautiful and sublime in religion. Their religion is a fanaticism, at best a dry thing. The history of the world is a standing witness to this fact. Therefore do not decry these rituals and mythologies. Let people have them, let those who so desire have them. Do not exhibit that unworthy derisive smile, and say, 'They are fools; let them have it.' Not so, the greatest men I have seen in my life, the most wonderfully developed in spirituality, have all come through the discipline of these rituals. I do not hold myself worthy to sit at their feet, and is it for me to criticise them? How do I know how these ideas act upon the human mind, which of them am I to accept and which to reject?"

Sri Aurobindo's observation on the subject also gives more or less the same conclusion. Referring to reason, he says: "It cannot lay down the law for the religious life, it cannot determine in its own right the system of divine knowledge, it cannot school and lesson the divine love and delight, it cannot set bounds to spiritual experience or lay its yoke upon the action of the spiritual man."

However, reason has also its part to play in the drama of life. Its guidance is indispensable in the pursuit of scientific truth in the physical and material field. Except for its help and guidance the present atomic and nuclear age is inconceivable. Of course whether these discoveries are going to give any real solution to the most pressing problems of man is a different question and needs a separate treatment. But it is a fact that reason cannot pronounce its judgment successfully on matters religious. In the same way it is a folly to thrust rigid religious dogmas upon the mind bent upon clear-sighted rational scrutiny and research. The fact is that religion is not a fixed thing. With the advance of time, progress of consciousness and change of circumstances, its forms also, just like other aspects of existence, undergo changes. Old forms become obsolete and new ones take their place. No doubt, reason has a role to bring about such changes, but it has its limitations as well. To clear the point we shall quote here Sri Aurobindo's view on the subject: "Religious forms and systems become effete and corrupt and have to be destroyed, or they lose much of their inner

sense and become clouded in knowledge and injurious in practice, and in destroying what is effete or in negating aberrations reason has played an important part in history. But in its endeavour to get rid of the superstition and ignorance which have attached themselves to religious forms and symbols, intellectual reason unenlightened by spiritual knowledge tends to deny and, so far as it can, to destroy the truth and experience which was contained in them."

In the above statement we get a very significant expression: "unenlightened by spiritual knowledge." What is this spiritual knowledge, and what relation has it with religion and its forms and rituals and also with the knowledge based on reason? While considering this we enter into the last phase of our survey: that is, what is called yoga and divinisation of life.

By now the main aspect of religion has been discussed sufficiently. In short it is the form or outer structure of the first movement of the rising spiritual impulse and aspiration of the mind and heart of humanity. But at times this outer mould gets perverted and loses its living freshness. Mechanical observation of rites, rituals and dogmas becomes the all-important occupation in religion, resulting in the mortification of the spirit behind. But when we come to the question of spirituality, the inner essence, the Spirit or God or the Divine matters most. In relation to that the outer ceremonies appear to be insignificant. This is how Sri Aurobindo speaks about spirituality as against religion: "The spiritual life, on the contrary, proceeds directly by a change of consciousness, a change from the ordinary consciousness, ignorant and separated from its true self and from God, to a greater consciousness in which one finds one's true being and comes first into direct and living contact and then into union with the Divine."

Now, such a change of consciousness gives an inner eye and a deeper understanding to the seeker. Things and objects unfold their essential reality to his vision. The values of life shift their centre of support. A tree, for example, will not only appear to him as standing on the ground with its roots below, it will also be seen as if upheld by a power from above taking it integrally into its bosom with its branches, roots, leaves and all. A man sitting inactive and silent will be found tremendously busy and active within. Similarly, a man vibrant with vigorous external activities will be found to bear within him an infinitely vast calmness and tranquillity. But there are different planes and gradations of such visions and experiences. The philosophy of Shankara, which declares that the world is an illusion and the featureless Spirit is the only truth, is understood to have originated from a kind of realisation which was actually partial and incomplete. However important his philosophy might have been in his own time, its adverse repercussions injured the Indian social life afterwards for a long time. As the result of a one-sided spiritual pursuit people fell under the spell of inactivity so much so that they lost all power of reaction even at the time of self-defence. Fortunately for India the essential truth of the Hindu religion was after

all brought to the forefront and proclaimed at home and abroad by India's eminent spiritual personalities. Vivekananda's clarion call invoked the rajasic power to rise once again in the consciousness of the race. The Spirit is no doubt the primary and original truth, but this phenomenal world is not on that account a falsehood or illusion. It is as real and true as the Spirit itself. It is the house and body of the Spirit.

It is interesting to note that revolutionary Russia has been following till now exactly the opposite of what Shankara proclaimed. That is: this visible world and its human interests are the only truth. There is no Spirit, no religion, no God, nothing except the bare truth of this material world. May we hope, therefore, that just as Shankara's world-negating teaching gave way to a profounder truth of the Spirit, so also the God-negating doctrine of Russia will one day give way and realise and accept the truth of Spirit? Will the followers of that doctrine also call out in despair like Tolstoy, "The conception of an infinite God, the divinity of the soul, man's conception of moral goodness and evil—are conceptions formulated in the hidden infinity of human thought, they are those conceptions without which neither life nor I should exist, yet rejecting all that labour of the whole humanity, I wished to remake it myself and in my own manner"?

The world now is passing through a period of transition. A time was when Priesthood and Church laid their immobile stony burden on the mind and body of society. Lifeless rigid conventions, religious doctrines and dogmas dictated to the common life. As a reaction came the scientific age flooding the horizon with the fresh light of practicality and reason and brushing aside old and effete social habits. But now the part played by it is approaching its end. Questions come from all quarters: what next? Men search for the reply and they seek the solution in religion and spirituality. It will be a mistake for them now to go back once again to the condition of a blind faith and unquestioning acceptance. Probably it will not be possible for them to do so. Reason has established its sway over man's nature. In all walks of life it demands the satisfaction of its legitimate claims. It is natural therefore that it will try to do the same in the case of religious and spiritual pursuits as well. But we have already seen that the scope of its application in matters religious is limited unless it is enlightened by the knowledge of the Spirit. So the natural remedy lies in the spiritualisation of reason. After the proper demand of reason has been satisfied, it should be pointed towards the new light, the supra-rational light which is gradually rising up on the horizon, unfurling its victorious banner. That is the light of the Life Divine shed by Sri Aurobindo.

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

DR. V.S. SETHURAMAN: A TRIBUTE

DR. V.S. SETHURAMAN who passed away after a brief illness on September 19, 1993, in Madras, was one of the finest of the scholars and teachers of English of the generation that has also passed into history now. He was a fine product of the English Department of Annamalai University and was the favourite pupil of my very dear friend Prof. M.S. Doraiswami who put the English Department of this University on the world map by the rigour and distinction of his teaching and scholarship.

I met Sethuraman first at Prof. K. Swaminathan's house in Madras. Sethuraman's doctoral thesis on English Literary Criticism had been referred to *Prof. K.S.*, unofficially and in draft. K.S. asked me to go through it critically and offer suggestions and comments. I went through the thesis very carefully and was deeply impressed by the scope and range of its survey of 20th century English literary criticism. But I felt that the subject admitted of a very much more detailed treatment and a more aggressive presentation. I had marked passages in the thesis which suggested a certain reluctance to draw firm conclusions, and a certain inadequacy in the approach to the trends. I ventured to say all this to Prof. K.S. K.S. said, "Sethuraman is here and is in the hall. Let us meet him. You can pass on to him direct all you have said to me." That was a moment of rare good fortune for me. When I met him, he showed a quiet warm response. But behind it was both gratitude and modesty, in fact, wholly undue modesty. When I made the critical comments on his thesis, he was far from recalcitrant or defensive. He said that Prof. M.S.D. had advised a certain humility—altogether characteristic of both Professor and pupil,—largely because it was the first thesis at the doctorate level of his department and something of an innovative exercise.

The University was almost a proprietary body then and if some mishap occurred, there was bound to be trouble, even if the mishap was exclusively in the academic assessment of a thesis. The atmosphere of the University had become extremely communalized and hardly conducive to the objective pursuit of academic goals. The Syndicate of the University in its wisdom practically rejected the names M.S.D. had suggested as adjudicators of the thesis and sent it to Prof. W.C. Douglas, then dead for a few years! This was probably due to the ignorance of the authorities: But there was room for suspicion that this was a means of delaying adjudication and the consequential claim for promotion to a Readership! Anyhow living examiners were discovered and one of them, Prof. L.C. Knights, thought so highly of the thesis that he recommended its publication by the University. This was not well received by the authorities and it was a year later, when the University Grants Commission set apart a small sum for publication of selected theses that Sethuraman's thesis got published! But I fear copies of the thesis entitled 'New Bearings in English Literary Criticism' are not now available.

When St Joseph's College, Tiruchirappalli, under the guidance and inspiration of Father Lawrence Sundaram, Professor of English of the College, opened M.A. in English Language and Litt, Principal Rev Father Erhart of the college, who happened to be on the Annamalai University Syndicate, asked for the loan of the services of Sethuraman for a period of two years and this was agreed to. At Tiruchirappalli Sethuraman proved himself an outstanding teacher. The M.A. students of his batch did very well indeed at the Madras University M.A. English Examination. When the two-year period ended and Sethuraman returned to Annamalai, the University had the inestimable good fortune to have as its Vice-Chancellor Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, a veteran statesman and administrator. Sir. C.P. promptly promoted Sethuraman as Reader in English. While this was barely his due, Sethuraman and his Professor MSD were targets of criticism from communal forces. When MSD retired a few years later, Sethuraman as the seniormost teacher in the Department should have become Professor. But as misfortune would have it, the University then had a new acting V.C. who thought discretion was the better part of valour. He bowed so abjectly to the communal forces that he would not allow Sethuraman to preside over a meeting of the Board of Studies in English, but took the chair himself. The humiliation thus inflicted soured a temperament extremely sensitive to such things.

Luckily, at Anantapur, the Sri Venkateswara University opened a P.G. Centre on English among other subjects. Myself and Prof P.S. Sastri of the University of Nagpur were on the selection committee. Though I could not personally participate owing to a curiously delayed intimation of the date of the meeting, it was a joy to me to find Sethuraman selected as Professor of the new Centre's English Dept. From then on, Sethuraman's career was set on its predestined course and there was a tremendous growth in English studies at the P.G. Centre, surpassing that at the University itself.

Prof Sethuraman had at long last an opportunity he so richly deserved and his work at Anantapur which later became a University was noted for its rigour and range. It was during this period at Anantapur that I invited him to collaborate with me in bringing out for Macmillans *The English Critical Tradition* in two volumes. This book which owed a great deal to Sethuraman's energy and practical sense has now a secure place as a standard work in its field. Sethuraman spent two years at Madras University under a U.G.C. Senior Fellowship, preparing a book entitled *Contemporary Criticism* and later still, *An Introduction to Indian Aesthetics*. Sethuraman showed a loving concern for my critical review of everything he wrote. And our weekly meetings in Madras were a joy to me. Alas! he is no more and one can only say with the poet, 'Oh! for the touch of a vanished hand/And the sound of a voice that is still.'

S. RAMASWAMI

Editor's Note

Sethuraman was a devoted disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and, whenever possible, ran down to Pondicherry. He willingly helped a number of inmates of the Ashram with books wanted by them. Through Professor Doraiswamy he was instrumental in drawing the attention of Sir Geoffrey Keynes and Miss Kathleen Raine to my thesis, "Blake's Tyger", which later was expanded and published in bookform.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Dr. Indra Sen, an old-time member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, passed away on March 16, 1994 in the Ashram Nursing Home after an illness of three months. Details of his life and work will appear in the June issue of *Mother India*.

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of 24 April 1994)

As Sri Aurobindo's activities turned more and more in the direction of politics and journalism, his secret revolutionary actions remained behind the screen. During that period Barin had been spending part of his time on a piece of land in the Calcutta suburb Maniktolla which belonged to him and Sri Aurobindo. Barin left Sri Aurobindo's residence, 23 Scott's Lane, and moved to Maniktolla Gardens in Muraripukur, North Calcutta. They comprised two and a half acres which were almost a jungle rather than a garden and were surrounded by small buildings in a dilapidated condition.

"Barin had not forgotten his dream of establishing an *Ananda-Math*-style temple as the headquarters of a band of sannyasin-revolutionaries. The idea also appealed to Upen, himself a lapsed sannyasin. When the two left *Jugantar* they resolved to make the Gardens their centre of operation.... Among the first to join them here were Prafulla Chaki, a veteran of the attempt to kill Fuller, and Bibhuti Bhusan Sarkar, a student of the National College who was eager to take part in something similar. Abinash Bhattacharya was obliged to spend most of his time in Calcutta looking after Aurobindo's household; but he occasionally found time to make the trip to the Garden, as did Upen's friend Hrishikesh Kanjilal. Other trustworthy mofussil men like Narendra Nath Goswami were also occasional visitors. And the arrival of fifteen-year-old Bijoy Nag of Khulna was a sign that new recruits would not be wanting."

Barin wanted Lele to visit Maniktolla Gardens to help the inmates in their yoga practices. But once Lele was there it took him little time to realise the true nature of their activities and he at once warned Barin to give up the dangerous schemes: "otherwise he would fall into a ditch." Barin was at that time not in a condition to listen to the advice of Lele. As Sri Aurobindo commented later, "he did fall into a ditch;" eventually he faced the gravest crisis of his life.

The historical events of the Gardens were described by Nolini Kanta Gupta in his *Reminiscences*. He was one of the inmates of the Gardens. He reported: "One would not say that life at the Gardens had settled down to a definite routine yet, for we had just begun. There were about a dozen or fourteen of us in all. There were occasional visitors from outside who would come for a short stay and then go back to their work. Naren Goswami had come like that for a couple of days, so had Bhavabhushan who later became a Sannyasin. We began with readings from the Gita and this became almost a fixed routine where everybody took part. Even the local Inspector of Police expressed a desire to join in these readings with us Brahmacharins. But he had to pay dearly for that. He did not realise that these were no ordinary lessons in the Gita but served as a façade for our preparations for the bomb. For this he was, as we heard, later dismissed

from the service. The poor fellow had wanted to acquire a bit of spiritual merit which seemed to turn against him.”²²

Nolini Kanta Gupta gave a vivid description of the Gardens’ organisation: “In the earlier stages, we did not have much faith in terrorist methods, for, as we had seen about Russia, this path led only to mutual assassinations, murder and revenge seemed to follow in an endless succession, leading to no final issue. That is why we had decided on the military solution. To that end, our efforts had been directed towards forming a new military force on the one hand and on the other towards sowing the seeds of revolt among the British Indian troops. I remember about a military police force stationed at Rungpore where the commandant had been won over to a large extent, although I could not say how it would have turned out at the end.”²³

“One of the activities of the Gardens, apart from the attempts to manufacture bombs, had been to procure and distribute guns and rifles and pistols. Purchase, theft and loot were the three methods of procurement. In this manner one might gather materials for terrorist purposes, but it could hardly meet the needs of an armed force. At the Gardens there was some shooting practice too with pistols. The trunk of a mango tree had been riddled with bullets—the police could very easily find that out later. This reminds me of Prafulla Chaki. He used to say taking a revolver in his hand, ‘I for one am not going to live on if they get hold of me. I shall neither be tortured by the police nor will I let their offers of confession tempt me. Look, this is the way I am going to finish myself.’ He would then open wide his mouth, push in the revolver muzzle and press the trigger with his fingers, adding, ‘This is the one sure way. In the other methods, one merely wounds oneself, very often with no serious danger to life. But it is much more risky to live on after getting wounded, isn’t it?’ Prafulla committed suicide after the Muzzaffarpur bomb affair in exactly the way he had rehearsed—I should not say ‘suicide’, for it was really an act of martyrdom.”²⁴

“The household arrangements at our Gardens were of the most simple, natural and unpretentious sort, the aim being to avoid all unnecessary complications and save our time and labour. The cooking was done perhaps only once a day and almost every day it was *khuchri*. For the second meal, something readymade bought from the market was found enough. We did the cooking ourselves and washed the dishes. The dishes and utensils were not of brass, they were all earthenware vessels, I believe. And the washing was done in the waters of the pond. What kind of pond it was could only be described by a Kalidasa, but perhaps some idea could be had from Bankimchandra’s description of the Bhima tank: ‘the dark shades of the palms dancing to the rhythms of the dark waters’ and so on.... That is to say, it had more of weeds and mud than water, not to speak of the fish and the frogs and other animal species, including a fair complement of serpents and things. But to us it seemed good enough and we used to take our dips there with great glee.”²⁵

Nolini Kanta Gupta who was a great exponent of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga had a unique character at that time which is well presented by Peter Heehs. He writes:

"Nolini Kanta Gupta was in many respects a typical recruit. A bright student from politically active Rangpur, he had taken part in the swadeshi and national education movements from the age of sixteen. While a student of literature and philosophy at Presidency College he was introduced to Barin by his fellow-townsmen Prafulla Chandra Chakrabarti. Prafulla had been a gold medalist at the Bengal National College when he decided to continue his studies at Maniktolla. Nolini too spent some time at the National College, at least partly with the idea of studying chemistry. Eager to master the art of bomb-making, he approached Sister Nivedita and asked her to persuade her friend Jagadish Chandra Bose, the famous physicist, to let him use his laboratory. Jagadish Chandra was sympathetic and made arrangements for Nolini to work in the laboratory of the prominent chemist Prafulla Chandra Roy. But before the eager student had a chance to start his experiments he got caught up in the life of the Garden. Early on he learned that there were two sides to the work: 'civil' and 'military'. The civil section was concerned with recruitment and publicity: *Jugantar* and so forth. Nolini opted rather for the military line, proving his mettle by successfully delivering an unlicensed revolver. But he never lost his thirst for knowledge, reading instead of *Paradise Lost* and *The Prelude* works like Clausewitz's *On War*, Frost's *Secret Societies of the European Revolution*, and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He found Gibbon's book fascinating but regretted that it gave few hints on how to undermine empires.

"Like all other members of the secret society, Nolini was a Bengali Hindu. Almost all of them belonged to the three castes—Brahmin, Kayastha and Baidya—that make up Bengal's *bhadralok*, the respectable class. Nolini was something of an exception in coming from East Bengal. The majority of the members came from the districts around Calcutta. The senior men were over twenty-five, most of the recruits under twenty, some as young as fifteen. All of them were fairly well educated. A few had failed their examinations, but others like Nolini and Prafulla were unusually intelligent. But all, whether good students or not, were 'animated by something uncommon'—to use a phrase of Upen's. In other words they had 'more stuff' than ordinary steady students even though for the most part they were 'bad boys': inattentive in class, unconcerned about their prospects, ready to pick a fight. As heroes and martyrs of the revolution they have been canonized by a grateful motherland; but it is worth remembering that at the time they were the despair of their parents and teachers and, needless to say, on the wrong side of the law."⁶

When the Gardens were taking the shape of a secret educative society especially set up to impart military training, bomb-making, inspiring to serve the Motherland through this organisation on the base of spirituality, at that time Sri

Aurobindo was preoccupied with the journal, *Bande Mataram*. He had practically no detailed knowledge of what was going on at Maniktolla. But he knew the essentials of Barin's activities. Some statements by him to his disciples later in 1938 showed that he had no direct connection with the terrorists. The whole movement was in Barin's hand. "I had no time for it. If I had been the head, I would have been much more cautious." Nolini Kanta has recorded in his *Reminiscences* how he was sent to Sri Aurobindo to fetch him to visit the Gardens. Sri Aurobindo lived with Raja Subodh Mullick near Wellington Square in the South Calcutta area. Nolini writes: "I went by tram and it was about four in the afternoon when I reached there.... As I sat waiting in one of the rooms downstairs, Sri Aurobindo came down, stood near me and gave me an inquiring look. I said, in Bengali: 'Barin has sent me. Would it be possible for you to come to the Gardens with me now?' He answered very slowly pausing on each syllable separately—it seemed he had not yet got used to speaking Bengali—and said, 'Go and tell Barin, I have not yet had my lunch. It will not be possible to-day.' So that was that. I did not say a word, did my *namaskara* and came away. This was my first happy meeting with him, my first Darshan and interview."⁷

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References

- 1 *The Bomb in Bengal—The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India*, by Peter Heehs, p 105
- 2 *Reminiscences*, by Nolini Kanta Gupta, K. Amrita, p 10
- 3 *Ibid* , pp 12, 13
- 4 *Ibid* , pp 13, 14
- 5 *Ibid* , p 15
- 6 *The Bomb in Bengal*, by Peter Heehs, pp 110, 111
- 7 *Reminiscences*, by Nolini Kanta Gupta, K. Amrita, pp 16, 17

THE BOOK OF JOB

A NEW COMMENTARY

(Continued from the issue of 24 April 1994)

Chapter 4

Verses 1 to 6

THE first six verses of Eliphaz's long discourse are prefatory. Cautious and apparently gentle, the words reveal an impatience with what Job has said. Eliphaz could not withhold from speaking. He wondered how the man who instructed others in their distress and elevated them could not stand his own calamity when it befell him. Should not the fear of God which he taught others create his own confidence, hope and uprightness?

The reference made by Eliphaz to Job's consoling others and uplifting them from their distress in his better days adds to our understanding of the "perfect" man he was. In Chapter 31 we see Job himself describing his love and kindness to the needy. God chose to educate Job though in a terrible way precisely because he had risen above the ordinary. The purpose of Eliphaz in referring to his past was not, of course, to show him in a favourable light but to show that the physician who cured others could not cure himself.

Verse 1.

Then. The word seems to suggest the nature of the moment when Eliphaz chose to speak in relation to his attitude to what he had been listening to all along, that is to say, it was immediately after Job had stopped speaking, speaking words which he could not tolerate any longer, words which seemed to contradict all that the speaker had seemed to stand for before he became the victim of misery. *Then* suggests Eliphaz's hurry, impatience to put his friend right at the earliest.

Eliphaz. As it has been noted already, the name meant *God crushes*. The name seems to suggest his message, *God crushes the wicked*. (He, like his friends and the Commentators themselves, is ignorant of the simple fact that in relation to Job, God was not so much the Judge, the Rewarder and Punisher, as the Educator, Teacher, Guru. Vide the Epigraph to this Commentary.)

Temanite. We saw that Teman belonged to Edom, the region to which Job himself belonged, a region proverbial for its wisdom. We see at the end. God did not approve of the Temanites.

It may be noted in passing that every time Eliphaz and his friends are introduced beginning a speech etc., they are referred to as Temanite, Shuhite etc. An epithet as an adjunct of a character is commonly seen in epics, etc.

Answered and said. The very first verse makes it clear that Eliphaz was

answering Job's complaints and thus initiating the debate.

It has been suggested that friends have a right to reprove and correct with the authority of Scripture:

Faithful are the wounds of a friend: but the kisses of the enemy are deceitful. (Proverbs. 27:6.)

Iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of a friend. (*Ibid.*, 27:17.)

No one denies the right. But a friend's reproof springs from his love, not from an anxiety to prove the other wrong and wicked.

Verse 2.

The opening *words* of Eliphaz are mild but the *tone* is stern. The first words spoken to Job after his calamity could at the least express some amount of sympathy even if reproof had to follow. Eliphaz, far from speaking a word of pity, if not of sympathy—one needs to love to be capable of sympathy, one could pity an enemy, or even an animal one is about to slaughter—asked him if it would grieve him if he and his friends held an intimate intercourse with him, that is, spoke their minds without reserve. But who could be silent after what he had said? Perhaps they had been silent too long!

Eliphaz ignores that Job was filled with grief, nay, overwhelmed by it; his words which, he said, compelled them to talk, were nothing but an expression of his unbearable grief.

Verses 3 to 6.

Eliphaz, pointing out how Job himself had instructed many in the moments of their distress, showed him how he was not able to bear when it was his lot to suffer.

Paul Scherer,³¹ who has rightly underlined Eliphaz's lack of sympathy, strangely comments:

Eliphaz pays a sincere and grateful tribute to one, who with mild reproof and kindly sympathy and unfailing encouragement, had strengthened and upheld and made firm many a life dejected and spiritless, halting along under burdens too heavy for anybody to carry. What Job had said to others must have been very much what Eliphaz is now saying to him... but with a world of difference.

One wonders if Eliphaz was really paying a tribute at all. All that he seemed to be doing was to tell Job of his inability to follow in his own life the instructions

given to others. When it is not a tribute the question of sincerity cannot arise. And Scherer speaks of *grateful tribute!* Grateful on behalf of those who had benefited from Job's *instructions!* The nature of his "wisdom" would not permit him such feelings.

It is not impossible that Job, sharing with Eliphaz, the Temanite, the Edomitic wisdom, was saying something similar to his listeners in his balmy days to what he himself was to hear from him soon. But as the Expositor says with a great discernment,

There is world of difference.

The Expositor himself notes one element of the difference when he speaks of

the mild reproof, and the kindly sympathy and the unfailing encouragement

of Job's which could be contrasted with Eliphaz's stern reproof, inhuman lack of sympathy and absence of any attempt at putting courage into his heart.

The chief difference consists in the nature of the extreme physical and the uncommonly excruciating mental agony which Job was subjected to suffer (by God's will) and the much lighter suffering anybody would have or could have undergone at the very worst: any

natural sorrow, loss or pain
That has been and may be again

would never be comparable to *Job's* sorrow, loss or pain.

Verse 3.

Eliphaz opened his speech with the interjection, "Behold!" The "wise" man knew how to draw Job's attention to the contrast between his precept and practice as he saw it. The word "Behold" is of greater force than "Look" because it points to an exceptional spectacle, something that is strange and inexplicable. He reminded Job that he had instructed many in the past.

In this and the verse that is to follow Eliphaz spoke of two kinds of men whom Job had counselled. In verse 3, he spoke of

the weak hands

that Job had strengthened. By "weak hands" the speaker must have meant persons who were incapable of doing their work, discharging their duties, performing worship or sacrifice (according to the custom of the day) and the like.

Verse 4.

In this verse Job is reminded of his upholding the fallen, strengthening “feeble knees”. Those Job strengthened could have “fallen” from prosperity, social position, moral rectitude, state of happiness or even physical ability. Correspondingly the feeble knees could have referred to inability to *stand* in any of the above senses or even “kneel” with a sense of submission to the Lord.

It is needless to add that Eliphaz’s own description of the suffering of those who came to Job for comfort reveals it had no comparison with Job’s.

Verse 5.

The point of the speaker is clearly made out in this verse: when the distress is his own, Job is unable to bear it. *thou faintest*: the words should not be understood literally. They just mean he is not able to stand it. *The Revised Standard Version* renders the words,

you are impatient.

The rendering of the *Authorised Version* is more powerful though, perhaps, less precise than RSV.

Verse 6.

Against the *Authorised Version*,

Is not *this* thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways?

the RSV reads,

Is not your fear of God your confidence,
and the integrity of your ways your hope?

The RSV paraphrases rather than translates the original. It lacks the force of the AV. It may be noted incidentally that when a word is italicised in the AV it indicates that the particular word is introduced into the English version for clarity without anything to correspond to it in the original.

Terrien³² explains the word fear (of God) as “faith and piety” and quotes the rendering of Moffat,

Let your religion reassure you.

Scherer³³ raises the question,

What is there about that to reassure a life which like Job’s has fallen away

into the dark night of despair?... The integrity of ways (= uprightness) is precisely what he has relied on; and it has offered no stay to his calamity

Scherer is taking a human approach: to the extent he questions the inhuman attitude of friends it is perfectly right and justifiable. Though elsewhere, Scherer sees that God had a purpose in using Satan to inflict calamity on Job he does not clearly perceive it as a means of raising him above our notions of integrity not to speak of "religion that reassures".

Verses 7 to 11.

In the five verses Eliphaz tried to present to Job the doctrine of earthly retribution. No one who was innocent perished but those who sowed unrighteousness were compelled to reap the same. The wicked would perish by the blast of God. The wild animals would be destroyed, the old ones in one way and the young ones in another

Terrien³⁴ sees an inconsistency between the tones of verse 7 and verse 8:

Vs. 7 suggests that the sufferer is innocent, but vs. 8 shows a decided change of tone.

There is no definite suggestion in his first discourse of either guilt or innocence in any verse. Eliphaz in his learned ignorance was anxious to warn Job of his bringing upon himself the wrath of God by not submitting himself to Him. If anything the implication is that Job could be guilty. As Scherer points out in the Exposition more than once, Eliphaz did not know that Job's need was a complete sympathy and not any instruction.

Eliphaz's thesis that only the guilty would perish goes against all facts of life: the death of heroes and martyrs and the suffering of the innocent clearly proves him wrong. We, mortals, are not able to understand God's purpose in each individual case. God crushes the good as well as the wicked or allows them to prosper as is necessary in each individual case. Apples have to be crushed to produce cider, roses to yield their perfume and sometimes the good have to be crushed so that their essential quality can be brought out, their soul evolve. God's purposes are different and varied and how can we make a rule? A verse³⁵ reads:

Here is a Super-Robinhood
Who robs the good
And tortures the pure
To make sure
That no one enters His realm.

Verse 7.

Eliphaz prayed, implored that Job should remember that none perished being innocent or was cut off being righteous.

As both Terrien and Scherer point out, Job was not afraid of dying. In fact he longed for death.

Verse 8

Eliphaz told Job that from what he had seen those who sowed unrighteousness and wickedness had to reap the fruit thereof.

Verse 9.

They perished by the violent breath of God. They are destroyed by the breath of his nostrils.

Verses 10 and 11.

The wicked were presented in the image of lions old and young by Eliphaz. According to him, the loud deep hoarse sound of the lion in pain, the not so loud sound but that bringing out its ferocity, and the growing teeth of the young lions (teeth that tear the victims) are all broken by God. The old lions would die for lack of prey; age would prevent them from moving about. The young ones would be scattered.

The roaring of the lion: It is quite possible, as the commentators point out, Eliphaz remembered Job's words in the lament,

my roarings are poured out like waters. 3:24

The stout lion's whelps: Eliphaz could have very well taunted Job with the destruction of his children in what Terrien³⁶ calls "the veiled allusion". He speaks of the open reference (8.4) made by the next "friend" who admonished him as "crushing meanness".

Paul Scherer³⁷ justly underlines the self-righteousness of the speaker of the verses discussed above.

Verses 12 to 16.

Eliphaz tried to make it appear to Job that the source of his knowledge was supernatural. It was "secretly" brought to him in "visions of the night". He heard a voice asking how a mortal man could be more just than God, how a man could be purer than his Maker. Even angels God charged with folly. Man, made of clay and dust, crushed with ease, perished losing whatever excellence he might have had.

Scherer³⁸ says,

We are tempted to wonder if a vision was necessary to convey it. For all the

exquisite artistry, perhaps the more so because of it, there seems to be a certain labouring of the commonplace... a pious platitude beautifully wrought and thoroughly inept.

Terrien³⁹ who calls it “the famous description...” tells us,

The style and the ideas are different from those of the prophets’ account of their own visions.

Yet in the Exegesis of verses 15 and 16 we find him comparing what Eliphaz saw and heard to Elijah’s theophany on Mount Horeb as presented in the First Book of Kings, Chapter 19! Thank God, he did not compare it with the theophany to which Job is led at the end of the Book!

Such visions as Eliphaz describes are no more than what Sri Aurobindo⁴⁰ calls “formations of the vital mind” on which “no great reliance can be put” and which “are often misleading”.

Verses 12 and 13.

The “wise” man tells his friend that a thing (= an experience revealing a great truth) was brought to him secretly and his ear caught a little of it. It came to him in deep sleep in thoughts from the visions of the night.

Verses 14 to 16.

He was filled with fear and he trembled when he saw a spirit pass before him. He had horripilation at the sight. It stood still but he could not make out its form. There was silence and he heard a voice.

Verses 17 to 21.

The voice questioned whether man subject to death could be juster than God or purer than He. Drawing his notice to something exceptional with the word “Behold” (*vide* comment on verse 3 above), God not trusting His own servants and charging His angels with folly, the voice asked how much less God would care for men housed in (bodies of) clay with foundations in dust and destroyed easily. From morning to evening they perish and no one cares. Their excellence disappears with them, they die even without wisdom.

Verse 19.

Crushed before the moth. The RSV also reads the same. Terrien⁴¹ reminds us that men are crushed *like* moths, not *before*.

Moths are too fragile to be *crushed*. Does *before moth* mean before the *moth hour* (evening) in the sense of evening of their lives, prematurely?

Verse 21.

Excellency: Terrien⁴² comments at length on the different meanings of the original word in Hebrew and discusses the possible meanings. We could accept his explanation: pre-eminence.

(*To be continued*)

K.B. SITARAMAYYA

Notes

- 31 P 934
- 32 and 33 P 935
- 34 P 936
- 35 *Mother India*, December 1961, p 63
- 36 P 938
- 37 P 936
- 38 P 939
- 39 P 938
- 40 SABCL, vol 23, p 947
- 41 P 940
- 42 Pp 941-2

O SCHOLAR

LAY down your sacred scriptures, O scholar,
 Come, for a while close your weary eyes.
 Long and deep though you may delve in numerous books,
 Unknown will remain the inmost secret of the core.
 O erudite! can you tell me something of the hereafter?
 Or the way to this creation's hidden Source?
 Can you inform me what forms a smile?
 Or unravel the mystery of a beauteous rose?
 The constant click of your rosary may drown
 That sweet sound of His soft approach,
 Passionate learner, your hapless eyes may be glued to some page,
 When suddenly he chooses to stand unveiled before your gaze.

SHYAM KUMARI

WINSTON CHURCHILL'S INNER VOICE

AIR raids were such a regular feature of life in London during World War II that many Londoners became, if not quite indifferent to the danger they posed, at least rather casual about them. Prime Minister Winston Churchill, a naturally courageous man who had often come under enemy fire during his years of active service, was as pugnacious as anyone else in the capital city and perhaps even less disposed than most to let himself be disturbed by Hitler's bombs. In any case, he was supposed to be the embodiment of Britain's unyielding resistance to the enemy, and he took the role seriously, but when his inner voice told him that danger was real and imminent, he listened and—figuratively, of course—jumped for the dugout with all due agility.

One night he was entertaining three government ministers at 10 Downing Street, the prime minister's traditional residence in London. An air raid was in progress, but this had not been allowed to interrupt the dinner. Suddenly Churchill left the table and went into the kitchen, where the cook and a maid were at work. On one side of the kitchen was a large plate glass window. He told the butler to put the food on a hot plate in the dining room and ordered the kitchen staff to go immediately into the bomb shelter. He then returned to his dinner guests.

Three minutes later a bomb fell behind the house and completely destroyed the kitchen. But the Prime Minister and his guests were, miraculously, unharmed.

One of the ways in which Churchill fulfilled his role as an inspirer of confidence was by personally visiting anti-aircraft batteries during night attacks. On one occasion, having watched the gunners in action for a while, he walked back to his car, perhaps intending to visit two or three more gun crews before daybreak.

The door on the side of the car where he normally sat was standing open for him. But for once he ignored it, walked around to the other side of the car, opened the door, and got in. A few minutes later, as the car was making its way through the blacked-out streets, a bomb exploded nearby, lifting the car and causing it to careen perilously on two wheels, within an ace of overturning. At last, though, it righted itself and continued safely on its way. "It must have been my beef on that side that pulled it down," Churchill said later.

When his wife asked him about his brush with death, he said at first that he did not know why, on this occasion, he had deliberately chosen the other side of the car. Then he added: "Of course I know. Something said 'Stop!' before I reached the car door held open for me. It then appeared to me that I was told I was meant to open the door on the other side and get in and sit there—and that's what I did."

ANON

(The Unexplained Mysteries of Mind, Space & Time, Vol 2, Issue 14)

MY FIRST DARSHAN OF SRI AUROBINDO

A SHRILL whistle from the railway guard along with the waving of a green flag, a shriller and louder response from the steam-engine siren, a sudden recoil-jerk with a mild creaking sound of the wheels, and 3 Up Madras Mail is off towards its destination.

It leaves the Howrah platform, gathers momentum and runs forward as if with the joy and zeal of a galloping horse. And something gallops within my heart, too.

This is my first pilgrimage to Pondicherry for the darshan of Sri Aurobindo. Two of my close relatives are my companions. For me, of course, it is not merely a pilgrimage but a tryst with my destiny, an encounter with the Unknown.

But before I proceed further, even as the recoil-jerk of the carriages, let me dwell a little on some antecedents leading up to my present pilgrimage to Pondicherry.

Since my childhood I had been having experiences, bordering on the spiritual, through various sense-agencies—sight, sound, smell, taste and touch.

Rose-gold dawns and crimson eves; bright quiet noons with the weary cooing of a lonely dove; the first and the last kiss of the autumnal sun on verdant meadows; the shining dew-drops on winter morns; the hide-and-seek game between the moon and the clouds; the moon smiling in her singular splendour on the balcony of the sky, all these captivated my heart and transported me to some high heaven

Even as a mere child whenever I heard the sonorous blare of a steamer on the vast expanse of the river Padma, I felt a call, in the depth of my heart, coming from a distance; the sound of the siren of a passing railway train, particularly at midnight or at dawn evoked in me the same kind of feeling—a call coming from somewhere. Bengal abounds in various songs which stirred the very depths of my being with an inexpressible yearning towards some unattained ecstasy.

The smell of 'Shephali' flowers (the Mother's significance—"Aspiration") or lotuses in autumn; the fragrance of Bassera roses in winter morns (the Mother's significance—"Loving surrender"); the aroma of jasmynes (the Mother's significance—"Purity") in summer eves, or of ketakis (the Mother's significance—"Spiritual Fragrance") in the rainy seasons: all captivated my soul and almost left me in a trance.

The taste of Jagannath's 'mahaprasad' at Puri or the rose-scented 'roshogollas' of Bengal; mangoes and lichis from Muzaffarpur or oranges and apples coming from the hills—all, all spoke to me in the language of a 'beyond' far removed from our mortal taste.

The touch on the skin of the winter-sun, or of the evening breeze from the far South, or the splash of rain in early July,—all brought me a message of a

divine compassion for the suffering creatures of the world.

I have had the experience of both the hostile and the beneficent forces since my childhood. I heard from my mother that when I was a mere baby a few months old, I fell under the evil eye of a village witch (a black magician) and caught blood-dysentery. Since then I became dysenteric and had to take lots of medicines and injections throughout my life. Also I fell a prey to many accidents and diseases.

When I was about four years old I went with my parents to a health-resort near Deoghar (a place associated with Sri Aurobindo). There at night I would sleep by my mother's side and very often I would feel that somebody was sitting near my head. I would get afraid, call and wake up my mother. Still sleepy she would reply—"That's nothing, a mere shadow." Be that as it may, I know pretty well that many a light and many a shadow have been after me since my childhood.

I have been having another kind of experience too. Whenever I remained alone I would receive an insistent query in the depth of my heart—"Who am I? Who am I?" This query became so irresistible that I would get afraid. "Am I losing my head? Am I getting mad?"—I started thinking. Then I would run into the midst of people talking or doing some work, get back to my normal self and try to forget that dreadful experience. This experience lingered long even when I came away to Pondicherry. Gradually I got over my problem through the practice of Yoga. I shall come back to this point later on.

When I was a twelve-year-old I got admitted to Tagore's Santiniketan boarding school by my father who was an idealist. Later he settled with his whole family at Santiniketan and built his own house there which is now called Sri Aurobindo Nilaya. My father was an ardent admirer of both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. It is quite in the fitness of things that his house at Santiniketan should serve as a bridge between the two great figures. About Rabindranath Tagore Sri Aurobindo wrote to Dilip Kumar Roy: "Tagore has been a wayfarer towards the same goal as ours in his own way." And Tagore wrote to Dilip Kumar Roy: "I am genuinely devoted to Sri Aurobindo."

I studied at the Santiniketan school and college approximately from the middle of 1930 to the middle of 1941. My passing of the B.A. examination almost coincided with the passing away of Tagore whom I had loved dearly. Some spiritual experiences followed and I was on the lookout for a spiritual guru. In Calcutta I came in touch with many astrologers, occultists, gurus, etc. but none of them satisfied my inner aspiration. I did not want to become a sannyasin. I wanted to make my father happy and bring peace to the whole of our family while myself following the spiritual path.

One day I saw in a newspaper an announcement by some occultist who called himself a "Yogi" offering to answer three questions of anybody by just seeing him and not his written questions. I got interested and met him. He asked

me to write my questions on a piece of paper. He did not look at it. I wrote:

1. How can I make my father happy?
2. How to bring peace to the family?
3. What is my longevity?

After writing I put the piece of paper in my pocket. He took me to a wall where a framed object was fixed. I don't know what it was. He was speaking to that object in a language which I could not follow. After that we came back and sat on our respective seats. Then he said: "The answer to your first question is—if you go on your own path your father will be happy."

"But I don't know my path; how to find it?" I queried.

"That I can't say; you yourself have to find your own path," he insisted. "And this is the answer to your second question too—if you go on your own path there will be peace in the family, you can't bring it about by your own effort," he added.

About the question of my longevity I have already written in *Mother India* (January '94 issue); I need not repeat myself here.

In Calcutta I visited Dakshineswar, Belur Math, Vedanta Math, Sadharan Brahmasamaj Mandir, even a Christian church almost regularly. I came in touch with many gurus and swamis, yet my "own path" remained out of sight. At last I almost stumbled upon Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir at Bankim Chandra Chatterji St. In Santiniketan I had seen my father reading *The Life Divine* avidly and regularly. But the language of the book had seemed to me rather difficult, the thoughts and ideas still more difficult. Here in the Pathamandir I started reading other books of Sri Aurobindo and the *Mother* and I found satisfactory answers to all my inner queries. I was fully satisfied that Sri Aurobindo's Yoga was my true path. What attracted me the most was that there was a living Presence. My heart spontaneously chanted—"Here is the temple of God and I knew it not!" Then I decided to visit Pondicherry to have the darshan of Sri Aurobindo. I had a feeling within that if I were to be a disciple of Sri Aurobindo he would recognise me at the very first sight. The 3 Up Madras Mail ended its mission at the Madras Central station. The long journey was quite pleasant. But from Madras to Pondicherry *via* Egmore and Villupuram—this short journey was extremely tiresome. Yet we overcame all this in the expectation and excitement of having Sri Aurobindo's darshan. Many pilgrims joined us from Egmore. Our train steamed into Pondicherry railway station after sundown. But a new sun was already peeping out from the core of my being.

My companions got their rooms at Golconde, a super-dormitory of the Ashram, but I was allotted a room at what is now called Park Guest House. After bath and dinner I felt refreshed and stood near the seaside embankment. It was dark, nothing could be seen clearly, but the sea in its own language accorded me a hearty welcome. The old lighthouse (the new one was not built at that time) with its revolving shafts of light beamed to me a message that my life's boat had

at last reached its proper port and from here it had to embark upon a new adventure of life. Everything was surcharged with and dominated by a 'Presence' which was simply enthralling and indescribable. After returning to my room and before going to bed I wrote in my diary:

"At last in Pondicherry There is not the slightest trace of the tiresome railway journey and I feel quite refreshed. I eagerly await the surprises that lie ahead of me tomorrow and the day after (13.8.1949)"

Next morning after bath I went straight for the Balcony Darshan of the Mother as directed by Birsingh Nahar who had been my classmate at Santiniketan school, now a resident of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He had come to receive us at the Pondicherry station.

I had no idea of what the Balcony Darshan would be like. I had had the good fortune of receiving the darshan of many a great man like poet Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and others but never an experience like this new one to come. This was not just looking but coming in personal contact with the Mother even from a distance and even for a person absolutely unknown to her. Here was something inconceivable and to me it was a sign of true spirituality.

After the darshan I went to the Ashram Dining Room with others. I had never before seen a dining room like this anywhere else. Is it a place of eating or a place of worship? It is cleaner than temples, holier than most of the holy places I have seen; and the silence, the spirit of service and dedication and discipline have to be known to be believed. It is another world, so to say. I was simply overwhelmed.

Then I and my companions accompanied by Birsingh went to the Ashram. He took us to Prithwisingh Nahar who was in charge of the Publication Department. He expressed his happiness to see us. The entire Nahar family had been at Santiniketan for some time. I knew all of them except his last two daughters. Then I saw Sisir Kumar Mitra, also an ex-Santiniketan man. There were quite a number of ex-Santiniketanites here. We were delighted to meet poet Nishikanto. He regaled us with his stories and humour. He also told us how to prepare oneself for the darshan of Sri Aurobindo.

At night, in those days, the Mother used to give blessings to everybody with a handful of jasmine flowers after meditation. The impact of the Mother's presence deeply touched my heart. That night, the 14th of August, the Mother did not give flowers, instead she distributed a small book, the second part of *Words of the Mother*. I was eagerly seeking a message, for I had reached the crossroads of my life when I had to take a firm decision.

After receiving the book from the Mother and after reaching the Ashram gate I eagerly opened the book at random and the first message that I chanced upon was:

"The Divine Consciousness is at work to transform you and you must open to it in order to let it work freely in you."

Next day, the 15th of August, 1949, the red-letter-day of my life, at day-break the Mother distributed to all a bunch of aromatic Sweet Marjoram leaves, which she had named "New Birth". I don't remember if she gave Balcony Darshan that day. On Sri Aurobindo's birthday all of us got a "new birth".

At about 1.30 p.m. the Darshan started. The long queue was not so long as it is nowadays. Our shoes were taken care of by the Ashram children. Their sense of discipline and dedication moved me deeply, although I myself had been a boy-scout at Santiniketan and knew what discipline and dedication were.

As our queue entered the main gate, even from that distance I felt that Sri Aurobindo's spiritual current was running through it. All the visitors had with them some flowers or garlands, mostly tulası garlands. I chose one pure white thick jasmine garland and some money offering from my pocket. We entered the meditation hall. I was indrawn. I felt that in the centre of my heart something like a sunflower had bloomed to receive Sri Aurobindo's light and I heard a voice also from within—"Lord, I have come." It went on repeating the same words like a mantra as I was climbing up step by step.

When I stood at the head of the staircase, on the doorstep to the right, I saw from there, across a hall, on the further side of it in a small chamber Sri Aurobindo and the Mother sitting together on a sofa. The Mother was in a deep trance with closed eyes but Sri Aurobindo was wide-awake, regal, majestic, in command of the whole situation. And standing on the doorstep, even from that distance I could see Sri Aurobindo smiling sweetly as if in answer to my prayer—"Lord, I have come" Not only that; he had been leaning on the high-backed sofa but now he sat erect as if, as it appeared to me, to accord me a hearty welcome. Before me there were many people in the queue. I was overwhelmed with emotion. Now my heart began to chant—"Om Namah Sribhagavate Sri Aurobindaya". When I stood before him I just bowed down, placed my offerings in the respective boxes, and inwardly opened myself thoroughly from the highest to the lowest part of my being before his sun-gaze. When I came out of the line I was already a changed man!

I had been expecting some surprises but what I got instead were simply miracles—at each step, at every turn! Next morning the garlands that had been offered by the visitors during the darshan were distributed by the Mother to all as prasad. There were heaps of them—mostly green tulası garlands. There was a secret aspiration within my heart to get back the very garland I had given—pure white jasmınes closely strung together—a big and thick one. But as I was approaching the Mother I forgot all about the garlands, I was indrawn. After pranam, as I lifted up my head the Mother gave me a jasmine garland! If this is not a miracle, then what is a miracle? In those huge heaps not even two per cent jasmine garlands were to be found, and almost certainly I got the very same one that I had offered!

After Darshan I got a room at Golconde and stayed with my companions

there. Altogether we stayed only for ten days and within that short period I seemed to be staying in an earthly paradise! What a beauty! what a harmony! what a love! what a joy! One could hardly breathe here without breathing Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's consciousness. Even the Ashramites seemed to me to be my near and dear ones. At night after receiving a handful of jasmine flowers from the Mother in the meditation hall, which seemed to me like a dreamland, I used to come back sometimes at 1.30 a.m. and after placing the flowers by the side of my pillow I passed into a sleep the like of which I never have had in my life and woke up quite refreshed to get ready for the Balcony darshan.

Our programme was organised by my elder brother. I myself did not want to leave the Ashram. On our way back we went first to Raman Maharshi's Ashram and had his darshan. I offered him a respectful pranam and prayed silently: "O Maharshi! May I belong to Sri Aurobindo." On my very first visit the sense of my belonging to Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and their Ashram was final and irrevocable. We saw many other places in South India before we returned to Calcutta but my soul lay captive at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—a prisoner of Divine Love! As the 4 Down Calcutta Mail left Madras, I remembered a prayer of the Mother after she had left Pondicherry in 1915—"Each turn of the helix upon the deep ocean appears to carry me farther from my true destiny..."

ABANI SINHA

TANTRICISM IN *THE MOTHER* BY SRI AUROBINDO

THE period from 1910 onwards can be considered a crucial time in Sri Aurobindo's life when a sea-change occurred at the level of his ideas, philosophical beliefs and literary writings. The reasons for this great change may be ascribed to the deepening and heightening of his consciousness as he had stepped into a greater field of activity than his earlier life. It is at Pondicherry that he practised his *yoga sadhana* most intensely and searched for a fuller and more complete experience of the Divine Reality. He undertook the most difficult task of uniting and harmonising the two ends of existence, Matter and Spirit. He learnt to look at the phenomenal world with a new understanding and governed his outward life by his inner light and force.

During this period of intense *yoga sadhana* Sri Aurobindo came to realise the Ultimate Reality as *Mahashakti*. In his practice of 'Integral Yoga' he understood the key-role played by the Mother (Mirra Alfassa). To him the Mother appeared as the embodiment of *Mahashakti*, consciousness at its highest level manifested on earth in the form of a woman. He could envision that "The Mother is the Consciousness and Force of the Supreme and far above all she creates."¹

For Sri Aurobindo the secret of *yoga sadhana* (spiritual discipline) is to remain psychically open to the Mother. All things in the world are divine because the Divine is in everything and everywhere but hidden and not manifest. The Divine Consciousness and Force manifest as the Mother of the universe, as *Mahashakti* to help in the transformation of human nature into dynamic divine nature. Sri Aurobindo elaborates the objective of spiritual evolution in his metaphysical treatise, *The Life Divine*, namely, that man has to evolve out of himself a divine manhood, a spiritual and supramental supermanhood. The *Mahashakti* brings down the supramental Light and Truth to our imperfect world so that our life, mind and soul can 'flower into the infinity of the Spirit'. Various manifestations or *avatars* of the *Mahashakti* have taken place in the world in order to help in the spiritual evolution of man.

The descent of the *Mahashakti* in the form of a woman on the earth is a rare phenomenon. Mirra Alfassa, the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, is the living embodiment of the powers of *Mahashakti*, the Divine Consciousness and Force. Sri Aurobindo directed the people of the Ashram to revere the Mother not as an ordinary woman but as the *Para-shakti* who embodies in herself the Divine Consciousness and Force of the Supreme. He taught his disciples to remember always that the Mother's light and force are the light and force of Truth. He advised them to remain in constant contact with the Mother's light and force so as to express the divine consciousness in the human consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo's study of different philosophies of India such as Sankhya,

Vedanta, Vaishnavism and Tantra had led him to view the Divine Spirit in the universe as *Shakti*. In tune with the basic tenets of Tantric philosophy he realised the imperative power of woman as the *Shakti* bestowing the attainment of the Divine on the *sadhak*. The Mother fulfilled this role for Sri Aurobindo as he revealed while replying to a query made by a disciple in 1933

The Mother and myself stand for the same Power in two forms. . Ishwara-Shakti, Purusha-Prakriti are only the two sides of the one Divine (Brahman) ²

As a guide to people about the Mother's spiritual power and her ministry as *Mahashakti*, nothing can surpass Sri Aurobindo's piece of revelatory prose work, *The Mother*. The book is written in a sublime style and the grand synthesis of visionary experience in it places it among the best spiritual writings of India

In Tantric philosophy the Mother is conceived as the Primal Energy, the Female Principle from which the universe and the gods have taken birth. Tantric philosophy gives a high status to woman and considers her the incarnate *Shakti*. This tradition in India developed as a philosophical belief and later on as the sectarian cult of Tantricism and is popularly known as the mother-worship cult. The mother-worship cult idolizes woman as the compassionate mother and goddess and, as such, is an inseparable phenomenon in Indian history, religion, philosophy, literature and art. Down the ages mother-worship has assumed various forms throughout India. The cult of mother-worship can be traced back to the pre-Vedic times. The hundred and twenty-fifth hymn of the "Tenth Mandala" of the Rig-Veda points to mother-worship in ancient India. The ancient Indian culture and various sectarian philosophies paid high regard to woman. But it is the Tantric cult that most eulogises woman's innate power and regards her as the embodied *Shakti*

In fact, Sri Aurobindo regarded Madame Mirra Alfassa's presence as the descent of *Mahashakti* upon earth. His faith in the Mother found its philosophical and doctrinal basis in the Tantric cult. *The Mother*, the prophetic book, shows his deep-rooted conviction that the highest divine principle is the eternal, primeval Energy (*Shakti*) out of which everything has originated. *Shakti* in the highest sense means God as the Mother. So Prakriti, Uma, Shakti, Mahalakshmi, Mahakali and Mahasaraswati, etc. are one and the same. They are the different names of the same great Divine Mother, the *Jaganmata*, 'the Mother of all living beings'. Speaking about the cardinal belief of the *Shaktas*, Sri Aurobindo makes a valuable observation:

In the Tantric Shakta religion which puts the female principle highest, there is an attempt which could not get itself translated into social practice,—even as this Tantric cult could never entirely shake off the subjugation of the

Vedantic idea,—to elevate woman and make her an object of profound respect and even of worship.³

In the *Shakta* scheme of cosmogonical process the unmanifested *Prakṛti* alone existed before creation. She wished to create and, having assumed the form of the Great Mother, she created Brahma, Viṣṇu and Shiva, the Trinity, out of Her own body. We have a different version of the creation in the Mahenjodaro civilisation. Referring to the Mother-Goddess-cult of Mahenjodaro, Marshall points out that in the later *Shakta* phase of the primitive Mother-Goddess-cult, the Devi is transformed into the eternally existing all-powerful Female Principle, the *Prakṛti* or *Shakti*, and, having associated with the male principle, the *Puruṣa*, she becomes *Jagadamba* or *Jaganmata*, the mother of the universe, the creator of the gods.⁴ In her highest form she is *Mahadevi*, the consort of Lord Shiva. The *Shaktas* view the Mother Goddess as the personification of the Primordial Energy and the source of all divine as well as cosmic evolution.

In the opinion of Sir John Woodroffe the *Shaktas* adore the Divine Power (*Mahashakti*) as Mahadevi, the great Mother of the Universe. *Shakti* is eternal (*Anadi-rupa*). She is *Brahmarupa* and both *nirguna* and *saguna*. She is also the *Anandarupini Devi* by whom the Brahman manifests itself. As pointed out by Sir John Woodroffe, the Devi is *Ichchha-shakti* (will), *Jnana-shakti* (knowledge), *Kriya-shakti* (action).⁵ She is that *Maya* by which the Brahman creating the universe is able to make Itself appear to be different from what It really is. As Lord of *Maya* She is known as *Mahamaya*. Devi is *avidya* (nescience) because she binds and *vidya* (knowledge) because she liberates and destroys the *Samsara*. The *Atma* (Soul) should be contemplated as Devi. *Shakti* or Devi is thus the Brahman revealed in Its mother-aspect as creator and nourisher of the worlds. The Devi as *Para-Brahman* is beyond all form and all *guna*. While discussing the concept of Shiva and Shakti, Sir John Woodroffe makes a significant remark about the divinity of woman:

The Tantrika, more than all men, recognises the divinity of woman, as was observed in centuries past by the Author of the *Debistan*. The *Linga Purana* also, after describing Arundhati, Anasuya and Sachi to be each the manifestation of Devi, concludes: “All things indicated by words in the feminine gender are manifestations of Devi.”⁶

The popular concept of the *Shaktas* is the Motherhood of God, that is God as *Shakti* or the Power which produces, maintains and withdraws the universe. So the characteristic feature of the *Shakta* doctrine is the honour it pays to woman. The incarnations (*vigraha*) of the Great Mother are all earthly women—“*Strīyā devāḥ strīyā praṇāḥ*”—says an old Hymn in the *Sarvollasa* which

means “women are gods; women are life Itself.” Indeed, to the enlightened *Shakta* the whole universe is *Stri* or *Shakti*. In the opinion of Woodroffe, any mother is sacred as the giver of life; but it is the Divine Mother of All (Sri Mata), the “Treasure House of Compassion”, who is both the giver of life in the world and its joys. She is also the Saviouress (Tarini) from the miseries of the world.

The characteristic features of Shakta-dharma are thus its monism, its concept of the Motherhood of God and the highest honour it gives to women. According to *Shakta* doctrine, each individual contains within himself a vast latent magazine of power (*Shakti*). The problem then is how to raise and vivify this *Shakti*. Only through *sadhana* can this latent *Shakti* be aroused and here lies the great importance of woman who as the living and embodied Divine Mother is adored and worshipped by the *Shaktas*. The Tantric tradition highlights the significance of feminine consciousness in the field of *sadhana* and underlines the imperative need of total surrender to the Divine Mother, *Jagatmata*. In tune with Tantric beliefs Sri Aurobindo portrays the Individual Divine as the Mother who embodies the power of the vaster ways of our existence, both as the Transcendent and the Universal. In this book, *The Mother*, he speaks about the *avatar* of the Mother descending into the Darkness and Falsehood and Error and Death of the world only for the sake of Her deep and great love for Her creatures.

The Divine Consciousness and Force of the Supreme taking a woman’s form in the personality of the Mother created shades of doubt in the minds of some disciples. In a letter dated July 7, 1936 Sri Aurobindo wrote the following lines to drive away the cloud of doubt and suspicion from the mind of a devotee about the divine personality of the Mother:

There is one divine Force which acts in the universe and in the individual and is also beyond the individual and the universe. The Mother stands for all these but she is working here in the body to bring down something not yet expressed in this material world so as to transform life here—it is so that you should regard her as the Divine *Shakti* working here for this purpose. She is that in the body, but in her whole consciousness she is also identified with all the other aspects of the Divine.⁷

The part of the letter cited above cogently expresses Sri Aurobindo’s ingrained faith in the divine self of the Mother, his spiritual collaborator. In *The Mother* he delineates the various powers and aspects of the Mother out of which only a few have manifested themselves in appreciable forms. An analysis of *The Mother* reveals that the first half of the book from section I to V is an explication of how man aspires for the Grace of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo calls upon the seekers of spiritual Truth and Knowledge to take an active role in the future spiritual revolution by practising *yoga sadhana* so as to transform the imperfect

human nature into divine nature. Without the dynamic help and intervention of the Divine Mother such a transformation is not possible. In the spiritual path the *Mahashakti* with her light, power, knowledge, consciousness, *Ananda* and other divine forces makes *sadhana* easier and successful.

The sixth and final section of the book presents a magnificent description of the various powers of the *Mahashakti*, the Divine Mother. Of course, the Supreme *Shakti* possesses innumerable personalities and emanations but the writer has portrayed only four of these in *The Mother*. Transcendent, Universal and Individual are the threefold ways in which the Mother sustains mankind and upholds this universe. As Universal the cosmic *Mahashakti* “creates all beings and contains and enters, supports and conducts all the million processes and forces”. The Transcendent Mother is the *Adya Shakti* who is the Supreme Consciousness and Power of Existence

Sri Aurobindo has portrayed the ministry of the Individual Mother as the saviour, the protector of mankind and the creator of a new world, the supramental world. It is because of her love of human beings that she accepts to descend on the earth of falsehood and suffering and death in order to transform the world into an ideal place to live in. Sri Aurobindo’s prophetic assurance is that if one desires the transformation of one’s own nature into divine nature, the first condition for one is to surrender to the Mother and her Powers “without cavil or resistance” so that she may do her work unhindered. Along with this devout surrender a *sadhak* should have two more things: consciousness and plasticity of mind

A note of caution is sounded by the writer not to judge the Divine Mother by our little earthly mind with its narrow reasonings and erring impressions. The egoistic mind of man cannot assess the many-sided personality of the Divine Mother.

Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy of future spiritual evolution is spelled out in *The Mother*. There are various works of supramental creation in which the Mother is the supramental *Mahashakti* “a power of omniscient Will and omnipotent Knowledge”. The world we live in is a world of Ignorance and our mind, life and body are separated in consciousness from their original source. The Mother’s global scheme of action is intended to create here on earth a world akin to the supramental world above us. In the execution of this great cosmic plan the Mother works as the mediatrix between the Grace from above and the aspiration of mankind from the earth. Sri Aurobindo’s profound faith in *Shakti-ism* is a confirmation of his vision of the grand Feminine Power, *Mahashakti*, the Mother, his spiritual collaborator who is at work for the radical alteration of human consciousness. The little book amply illustrates his loftiest conception of The Ultimate Reality as the Divine Mother, the *Mahashakti*.

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- 5 Sir John Woodroffe, *Introduction to Tantra Shastra*, 5th ed (Madras Ganesh & Co Pvt Ltd , 1969),
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pp 49-50

HOMERIC SIMILES

THREE CONSECUTIVE EXAMPLES

As, on the crest of a mountain, a forest of measureless growth
 Is ablaze with devouring fire, and the glare can be seen from afar,
 So, as the host marched forth, from the vast, multitudinous bronze,
 There rose a resplendent gleam that went up through the air to the heavens.
 As tribes of feathery birds, wild geese or the long-necked swans,
 Or cranes, in the Asian meadow that borders Kaystrios' stream,
 Go hither and thither in flight and exult with a sweeping of wings,
 Unceasingly settling ahead, and the meadow resounds with their cries,
 So, from the ships and the huts, did the numerous tribes of the host
 Pour forth on the plain of Skamander, and even the earth underneath
 Re-echoed with terrible sound to the tread of the horses and men.
 Thus did they take their stand on the flowery plain of Skamander,
 Innumerable as the leaves and the flowers that come in their season.

Translator: SIMON GOLDFIELD

End of Book II "The Marshalling of the Achaians", Homer's *Iliad*
 (*The American Scholar*, Winter, 1963-64, pp 63-64)

SATYAJIT RAY

WHEN all around us the world of Art is agog with the praise of Satyajit Ray and his unique creations in the field of cinematic art, it may be worthwhile to assess his contribution for no other reason than one's own satisfaction. To understand and appreciate works of art through one's own sensibilities is perhaps the best way, especially to meet the genius of an artist, a new star in the firmament, and in the medium of the fast developing art form of cinematography. It is not necessary to begin with any doubt about Satyajit's great merit or contribution. These are too evident to be denied or doubted by anyone who is sensitive to art-forms and all that they attempt to present or reveal. The purpose of these observations is to light up some aspects of his work and personality which perhaps have remained unobserved or neglected.

Satyajit comes as if into existence with his film *Pather Panchali*. Before that, in the world of art, he practically did not exist. As the director of an advertising agency, as a graphic designer of book-covers or typography, or even as an artist in his own right, if he was not spoken of seriously, it did not do him any discredit or injustice. As the editor of *Sandesh* and a writer of children's stories he would surely have attracted attention, but perhaps not enough to put him on a distinct pedestal. Film-making was his true *métier* and once he discovered it, there was nothing to stop him. His literary and musical tastes came fully to his assistance with the power of seeing through visual forms which as an artist he had already acquired. That he always had a striking personality goes without saying, quite apart from the quality of his art. He always carried a strength within himself and a self-confidence never in doubt. This was a part of his inborn personality. How far it contributed to the blossoming of his art is a subject of creative psychology and should be treated separately.

The thing that strikes me first in all his doings is the clarity of his vision, whatever be its scope and worth. This clarity remained intact, was never in doubt once it emerged to occupy the scope of his creative eye. There was no hesitation, no groping about for the right angle of view, the field he wanted to cover, a fleeting expression he wanted to catch or the scene he wanted to capture. It is clear from his productions that he went through the stages of his film-making in quick steps and sequences. His sole effort was always to satisfy himself as an artist and achieve his immediate objective. That this personal satisfaction also satisfied the vast majority of the spectators sensitive to his work is the proof of his power of expression. It stands repetition to say that with Satyajit the art of film-making in India took a significant turn and won for his country a deserving place in the world of cinema creation.

The second aspect which comes to my mind is that here is a master of his craft who does not have to go from stage to stage of development. It seems as if he came with the full bundle of all the films that he produced, carrying them

under his arm and the time he took to give them material form is the inevitable condition of life that all creatures of time have to accept. It is not always that all artists, even the most talented, come ready with their sack of tricks to reveal them one after another in the manner of a conjurer. Most artists have to struggle in order to evolve, to find the right time, occasion and inspiration for the innate genius to manifest itself partially or fully. This is not to say that all the films of Satyajit have the same element of genius or excellence. I would rather say that they all are the various aspects of his contribution as an artist. Without being selective, we can safely buy the whole basket of his works because they are from the same tree and bound to have the same acceptable flavour.

I have always felt Satyajit as a part of Rabindranath's creative work. If Tagore filled the sky of Bengal with his songs, the lilt of his poetry and the sentiments of his stories, Satyajit, as if like a true son, rendered on the silver screen in visual images the essence of Rabindranath's genius in a manner that a kindred spirit alone could do. Both Rabindranath and Satyajit had the Bengali psyche as their stage and audience. Tagore may be more versatile and lofty with a universal content, but both were true sons of Bengal in more than one sense. If they had attempted something else to make their work deliberately more universal, they would have robbed their genius of its native colour. Satyajit made it clear more than once even in so many words that his audience was Bengal. Perhaps the urban, intellectual, literary and sophisticated cultural crowd that Calcutta is, verily represents the Bengal his works are addressed to. Bangladesh is not outside this milieu. In matters of language and culture there is only one Bengal even today.

Having said this, it is still necessary to look into the personality of Satyajit as an artist and as a man who seems to have come with a definite mission and all the repertoire he would need to fulfil it.

In the very first contact with him through his art and manner of functioning he stands before us as a tall and erect personality. He did not look around himself for any opportunity to begin his work. He did not wait to ask from his destiny any special gift of expression or grace of style. His destiny on the contrary seems to have followed the dictates of his genius. He did not strain or struggle to find his way. His artistic personality, the style of his art, the angle of his vision—all were parts of the baggage that he always carried with him. He moved and acted as to the manner born. He stood erect with his head held high to shake hands with the President of France as an equal in status and confidence. If he stood up to declare open a Film Festival, he did so with the dignity of a maestro, spoke out his message on the occasion with the full strength of his personality and convictions even while the Chief Minister of his State sat beside him. As a man he was never awed by any power, of political or social eminence.

He was, as is so often observed, a complete artist, ever absorbed in his work. He was always firm and stood no nonsense from his companions. But his

artist's vanity did not reflect in or mar the quality of his work. As an individualist he rested confident on his vision of things and artistic abilities. However, I was once greatly surprised to see his signature under one of his articles in English. I found the flourishes of his signature so uncharacteristic of his art where restraint always plays an important part. Often in such things idiosyncrasies of artists find a free field. In Satyajit's case also, I wonder, if it is the same reason.

There is yet another aspect of his personality which, though not strange in a person of such self-assured confidence, reveals a deep chasm in a developed human being. It appears that his personality was self-contained and did not look up, around or below for its support, sustenance or light. When once he accompanied his friends to the home of a great religious leader, he remained sitting in the car while his friends went in to pay their respects to the great soul. We do not get any glimpse of a deeper thought or an enlightened faith in his life or works except a certain rational humanism, so often reflected in his films. He seemed to be satisfied with his art but did not reveal or care to reveal his deeper thoughts or life-values as a sensitive man or his relation with the world at large and the wherefore of things.

When we have said what we could about a particular genius we as a people cannot afford to forget that no art or individual achievement can exhaust all the possibilities of Life or even Art, and much will always remain to be done.

JAYANTILAL PAREKH

NISHIKANTO: THE MYSTIC POET AND ARTIST

(Continued from the issue of 24 April 1994)

Now the recitals, given in large or small gatherings, attracted also some notable persons. For instance, in Calcutta Bibhutibhushan Banerjee who was renowned for his sensitive prose-style was a regular and interested listener. But at the end of every programme he would invariably remark referring to his favourite song, "The Advent": "What a wonderful tune you've set to this lyric, Mr. Roy!" And then he would heartily request him to sing it.

On one such occasion Roy was visibly irritated. He was at the end of a tiring programme which he deftly concluded by moving the rapt audience to a deeper rapture with his famous '*Brindabaner Lila*'—an emotion-packed devotional lilt on Lord Krishna. Then Mr. Banerjee as usual requested him, even in the midst of that silent audience, to sing his favourite song. The singer could not help voicing his feeling, stating that he had delivered more than two hundred different songs for all these years, but Bibhuti Babu requested him to sing always that one particular number!

"Sir, I've got quite a few carping critics, I'm aware of it, but I've not come across another like you!" He blurted out pointblank.

"Why, sir, why do you say that?" Bibhutibhushan was quite surprised. "There, there, I was only praising you. Please understand. And how you take things amiss!"

"You call it praise! Till today I've set in tune nearly three hundred songs which I've sung at several places. And yet you've complimented and encored only this one song. Doesn't it mean that apart from this canticle, none of the others is worthy of the ear according to you?"

Banerjee probably had reason to feel a bit puzzled; but thereafter he started responding favourably also to the other lyrics that Roy sang.

The lyric '*Brindabaner Lila*' which is on Sri Krishna as referred to earlier is not the only one on this god. Roy has written some other poems on him. In fact a volume for the completion of which Nishikanto had probably exerted himself towards the end is titled *Lilayan*. It is also a devotional idyll on Krishna, a collection of religious poems. It took him quite some time, more than a year, to formulate and plan, then execute it to his satisfaction. It consists of a series of poems written in the same tone and manner, further linked by one common refrain in all. Therefore they are bunched together. Much care and planning went behind the publication of this volume. And it has not been the project of one man, viz., the publisher, but a joint venture, if I may say so, of a few experts. It has an attractive cover and is filled with colourful pictures which give it the look of an important album. Even these pictures, which are good reproductions of paintings drawn in the 'Kishengarh' style specially for this purpose, are the

works of a very competent designer, a fellow-artist named Indra Dugar. The latter and Nishikanto were both pupils of Nandalal Bose, maybe at different times. I would like to mention here that a line-drawing done by Dugar truly expresses the inner self of the poet which a photograph ordinarily doesn't. This pencil-portrait was published in a magazine along with a homage.

Even though Nishikanto was an accomplished artist this volume called *Lulayan* doesn't have a single painting done by him. The only reason could be that after writing the poems (totalling about a thousand lines) he didn't have any eagerness to think about the matter of illustrating them as well. (It may be noted here that none of his other books carry any kind of illustration, either.)

An appropriately worded introduction by Anirvan, very much in keeping with the style of the text, is a special feature of the book.

The poems, meant to be recited or sung, are written supposedly in the 'Kirtan' style. They are mainly eulogies on Sri Krishna. But the writer also extols other great souls, like Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Vivekananda, Sri Gouranga, etc. Therefore, the refrain on Sri Krishna at the end of all the poems may seem odd at times. Nishikanto asserts that Kirtan is unique for its theme, tone and pattern. The word ballad may only give an idea of the type.

In Nishikanto's poems Krishna is not shown as a mythical god but as a real being. That the poet considered this profound subject to be very sacred is amply shown in his correspondence regarding this book. For himself it was a fulfilment devoutly to be wished. One could plausibly say that it is his 'envoy'. Be that as it may, the first edition of this volume was posthumously published in August 1973.

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While writing about Nishikanto to mention only his literary talent and not the other sides of his artistic nature would be only speaking half the truth. For not only was he a poet but, as the readers may be aware, an accomplished painter also. So alongside writing poetry, he practised fine arts with undiminished interest for quite a few years. And those who had seen him painting simply wondered at his patience. A few have written about it. He had his own style of doing paintings. It may resemble modern art. In his work too you will find the characteristics of a surrealist; it is also based on philosophical truths, and subtle visions could be the source of his inspiration. Just as in the matter of poetry, his expression of art became surrealistic only after his arrival in Pondicherry. However, this artistic side of his nature is not talked about much. Either because people don't understand his metaphysical paintings, or because his connection with the renowned painter Nandalal Bose of Shantiniketan wasn't well-known. He is referred to mostly as a poet. He was famous here as Kobida, and not so much as an artist.

Although his colours give an impression of being most probably of modern

surrealist type, he was well-trained in the Indian tradition. The lines in his pictures are bold and prominent. The painted parts or forms are quite clear and distinct; in places they resemble collage a little, and don't always seem to fuse so much one with another as we often see in wash-pictures in general. But neither are they pastiche for that matter. He also did some genre paintings of ordinary scenes, including landscapes in the traditional style. A connoisseur certainly, and even others, can appreciate that they are executed by a talented artist.

The reason for his art having taken a turn towards symbolism was the fact that he drew his inspiration from Sri Aurobindo's poetry. It was for this reason that a radical difference from the Shantiniketan period was observed in his outlook and practice of art also. Formerly he didn't use his visionary experiences in his art and poetry.

Just like the clean and clear resonance of his poetic rhythm, the play of colours and the mode of expression in his art is pleasant and eye-catching. He was quite a master of the subject he handled and aware of the technique of composition which comes only after prolonged practice.

His works of art (in water colour) were gifted by his relatives to the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Calcutta

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Having read about the art and poetics of Nishikanto Roychowdhury one may be quite in ignorance about the person in whom those qualities flourished. And indeed as a life-story it would be incomplete unless something is told about his life. With a few short notes I will try to fill that gap to some extent.

Popular for his rather fat figure and exuberant nature, he had understandably formed a circle of friends and well-wishers. A keen and witty conversationist, each time he met a pal he would banter, cut jokes at every turn and maunder jingles or couplets quite impromptu. For this he was loved by the old and young alike. So long as his health permitted he gave some time to taking Bengali classes of stories, and recounted all kinds of interesting tales, heard and unheard, yarns from his own imagination or from the pages of the epics and Puranas, and since he told everything in a vivid language with wonderful descriptions and examples, spiced with a touch of humour, his students always enjoyed it. "Probably none could rival him in the art of story-telling," says one writer in a pen-portrait.

As a teacher he was not a mite less than the scholars when it came to correction of poems. Getting the right word, inserting the correct simile, etc., maintaining at the same time the mood of the poem and the true tone of it—in this he was indeed a follower of Tagore.

And talking about his humour, his niece jocosely reminisced in an article that right from his childhood he had a puckish sense of humour. His childhood

tendency to play practical jokes on others developed through youth into adult age to something of a better taste. Combining words from English and Bengali he would make puns which would send his hearers into peals of laughter.

A few random instances drawn from his daily life may give us an idea about it and obviously pleasure.

When he helped in the common kitchen as a chef assisted by women, sharing his gourmet interest with others, he called himself (after the then viceroy) "Lord Kitchener, with many Lady Kitcheners".

Then this one, funnier still, for the geographer. The chef's habitat was just across the street from there. So to those who enquired where he resided, his answer came pat, "Khyber Pass:" which in Bengali dialect means "just beside the Kitchen!"

There is another, similar anecdote. A man named Prof. Khanna was an inmate of the same house. Nishikanto used to tell his Bengali friends and guests, whom he met for the first time, that he knew of one who didn't bother to eat anything. Wondering who could this special person be, they would ask in amazement, "How come? Who's that?" Nishikanto would mischievously reply with a wry smile, "His name is Khannaji, my fellow-resident!" And with laughter because in Bengali "Khanna" means "doesn't eat".

All his jokes might not deserve to be put into print. But the good ones certainly add a feather to his cap. So much so that in his milieu he was known as much for his jokes as he was known in the wider circle for his poetic faculty.

There are also jokes about him. It is said that at the other end of his character was the taste for savouries, his gourmet passion, which some of his acquaintances had the habit of talking about. He had a prominent belly (that in itself quite amused people). Apropos I must mention that his skill in cooking was much appreciated by those whom he specially entertained. He was an expert in it. He liked to feed as much as he liked to eat.

Knowing this capacity of his, picnickers at times invited him to work for them. Once, for instance, he went on a picnic with a group of girls. At one place they stopped to prepare lunch. In order to cook some patties they requested our chef to bring spices. He sauntered away and brought from somewhere dry, powdered spices in a box. But what the girls wanted was freshly prepared pasty spices. That's what they explained to him then. So again he went and at a distance found a rivulet. The wit simply put the dry spices in a small bundle of cloth and soaked it in the water and came back all smiles. The party was surprised and dumbfounded.

This poet possessing many facets had his share of the great outrages of nature which the flesh is heir to. That is, his trying health condition; a setback in which he suffered for quite a long time, and particularly towards the end of his life. But all along he could remain quite undaunted and wished for recovery every time he got sick. His body itself was like a hospital, he used to remark in

his characteristic jocular vein, “where all kinds of diseases and ailments visit from time to time, and get treated.” Observing this shortcoming of his, almost from the time he came here, one admiring critic sadly opined that Nishikanto had been a fool by distancing himself from Tagore and his abode of peace. Nishikanto, who remembered well his childhood illnesses, didn’t quite agree with this solicitous quip.

However, as we know, he was in contact with some high world of beauty, and illness could never obstruct his visions and inspirations, or daunt the poet’s innate impulse always to write.

Although people knew he had been continually suffering from illness, even then when he expired in the year 1973, the news of his death came as a surprise to many, because in the past he had always recovered from his illnesses. He will of course be remembered for his poetic works which he left behind and which have enriched our literature in no small measure.

(Concluded)

DHIRAJ BANERJEE

GRATITUDE

IN the evening sky’s
 Purple golden light
 It was swaying its head
 In deep delight
 Its green foliage
 Whispering into the air
 To convey its gratitude
 To the setting sun afar.
 This gesture of gratefulness
 I saw in the tree
 Deeply touched
 The inner being in me.

GAURANGA NATH BANERJEE

ESSAYS ON THE MAHĀBHĀRATA (II)

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1994)

Śrī Kṛṣṇa—as Guru and Leader of the Pāṇḍavas

IN the previous article, titled “Śrī Kṛṣṇa—The Ritual of Departure”¹, we have learnt something about the affectionate relationship between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the five Pāṇḍavas. In a few verses we have had hints of his future role as their master and *guru*, but such a position was not yet explicitly stated. In this chapter we will trace his becoming the *guru* and leader of the Pāṇḍavas and we shall see how he already occupies an eminent position in this early second book of the Mahābhārata, the Sabhāparvan.

The first occasion for Kṛṣṇa to be called in as chief advisor presented itself when Nārada paid a visit to King Yudhiṣṭhira and suggested to him—after a long speech with many questions on the conduct of the kingdom—to undertake the Rājasūya sacrifice which would make the seniormost Pāṇḍava an unchallenged universal monarch. Even though Nārada had mentioned that Pāṇḍu himself had wished this sacrifice to be performed (Nārada had met him in his abode in heaven—2.11.65), Yudhiṣṭhira chose to approach Kṛṣṇa for authoritative advice:

Realizing that a sacrifice is not undertaken just to ruin oneself, and shouldering his task diligently, he went out in his thoughts to Kṛṣṇa Janārdana, to seek a resolution concerning his task—to Hari, whom he knew superior to all the world. (2.12.24-26).²

Once come to this final decision, Yudhiṣṭhira Pārtha as to a guru quickly dispatched a messenger to the guru of all beings. (2.12.28)

Kṛṣṇa responds readily to Yudhiṣṭhira’s request and quickly reaches the Pāṇḍavas. In the following passage Yudhiṣṭhira gives a detailed analysis of several kinds of advice which one can receive from various sources, and he explains why Kṛṣṇa alone is the perfect, objective guide whose advice can be trusted without any reservation:

There are those who out of friendship will not point out a mistake; there are those who say pleasant things in hope of gain; there are those who wish for matters that do at once please and benefit themselves: so is generally people’s advice on a proposition found to be. But you rise above these motivations, and above anger and desire—pray tell us what is most fitting for us in the world. (2.12.38-40)

Kṛṣṇa at first talks about the powerful alliance of King Jarāsaṁdha and

Kamsa, and he mentions how the Vṛṣṇis had to flee from Mathurā to Dvārakā to escape Jarāsaṁdha's invincible army. This event is likely to be historic because we can hardly assume that any poet would have invented by himself an episode in which the Great Avatār is shown to be on the defensive. Kṛṣṇa then proposes that Yudhiṣṭhira should accept to become universal sovereign (*samrāt*). As a precondition for attaining this high status Jarāsaṁdha would have to be killed. By that occasion eighty-six prisoners in his dungeons, all of them kings defeated in battle, would be released and saved from the human sacrifice that Jarāsaṁdha is planning to offer to Mahādeva.

The following scene, a dialogue between Yudhiṣṭhira and Kṛṣṇa, with Bhīma and Arjuna playing side roles as additional speakers, is a first example of Kṛṣṇa helping one of the Pāṇḍavas overcome a deep inner crisis. In fact, Kṛṣṇa's well-known discourse in the Gītā is only the culmination of a number of similar elucidations which form a whole consistent series of talks on the value of a righteous battle, a battle for *dharma*, on overcoming personal weaknesses and hesitations, risking one's life in the battle for Truth. Yudhiṣṭhira's objections to the undertaking (of attacking Jarāsaṁdha) are characteristic of his nature. He seeks tranquillity and acquiescence rather than the daring assault and upheaval. This project of rescuing those unfortunate kings would certainly disturb his peace, "*śamam eva param manye...*":

I deem tranquillity highest, but no tranquillity will spring from their release.
If I undertake the rite, the highest goal cannot, I think, be attained. (2.14.5)

Yudhiṣṭhira's weak-hearted response to Kṛṣṇa's proposal is countered by Bhīma with a strong rebuttal. He gives the standard formula for victory which is to be oft quoted in the text hereafter:

In Kṛṣṇa is policy, in me strength, in Dhanaṁjaya victory: like the three
fires we shall accomplish the Magadhan king! (2.14.9)

Kṛṣṇa supports Bhīma's inspired argument with further deliberations, trying to warm up the *kṣatriya* in Yudhiṣṭhira. He points out the glory of a *kṣatriya* dying by the sword and draws attention to the cruel fate of those eighty-six kings who are to be killed by Jarāsaṁdha.

Yudhiṣṭhira retorts with a typical *sāttvic* argument. Would it not be egoistic on his side if he would send Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma and Arjuna into the battle just for his own glory? Bhīma and Arjuna are like his eyes, Kṛṣṇa is his mind: how could he risk their lives?

This argument deserves to be analyzed. While in almost all cases the human resistance against the higher guidance has its source in the ego, in fear, anxiety, incapacity and other weaknesses which are recognized as coming from the ego,

Yudhiṣṭhira here refuses to act because allegedly it would be egoistic. And yet here too the ego is speaking in spite of all appearances. In fact, it is not Yudhiṣṭhira's personal glory for which the battle is to be fought, but the glory of *dharma* itself; even though Yudhiṣṭhira would receive the fruits of this action, his own glory is not the immediate aim. He is only a human representative destined to receive the honour of becoming *samīāt*. Even the fact that he is being asked for his permission for this action by Kṛṣṇa does not prove anything except Kṛṣṇa's politeness. The latter has already made up his mind and will proceed anyhow. But since his *līlā* is with human beings, he has to deal with their problems and resistances. And for the time being Yudhiṣṭhira would prefer to give up the project:

I should like to abandon this task for good My heart is now against it. The Consecration is too hard to achieve (2.15 5)

We feel here reminded of Arjuna's refusal to fight (Gītā 2,9):

I shall not fight, he said to Govinda, and became silent.

Paradoxically, in this scene it is now Arjuna who is using the same arguments against Yudhiṣṭhira which Kṛṣṇa will later use in the Gītā. Arjuna said: "A baron's living is always conquest.... If we achieve by way of sacrifice the destruction of Jarāsaṁdha and the release of the kings, what would surpass that? If we fail to act, they will decide that we lack character.... Afterwards the saffron robe will be easily available for hermits who hanker for peace.. " (2.15.9, 14-15)

Compare this with the Gītā (2.31-37):

(Kṛṣṇa said:) Again, looking at your own duty as well, you should not waver; for, there is nothing more welcome to a Kshatriya than righteous war.

Happy are the Kshatriyas, O Partha, who obtain such a warfare that comes unsought as an open gateway to heaven.

But if you will not wage this righteous warfare, then forfeiting your own duty and honour, you will incur sin.

People will ever recount your infamy. To the honoured, infamy is surely worse than death.

The great chariot-warriors will view you as one who fled from the war out of fear; you that were highly esteemed by them will be lightly held.

Your enemies will also slander your strength and speak many unseemly words. What could be more painful than that?

Slain you will gain heaven; victorious you will enjoy the earth, therefore rouse up, O son of Kuntī, resolve to fight.³

It is to be observed that in both these cases the argument is not developing on a higher spiritual, but rather on a lower human, level. The appeal is to the sense of human honour, human uprightness. From a higher spiritual viewpoint it should matter little what the enemies of a disciple think about him, whether it be good or bad. But since we need preparation for this higher perspective, an appeal on a lower level may be more effective and is therefore chosen by Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā and Arjuna in the above passage. The paradox of Arjuna preaching to Yudhiṣṭhira what he was later to be taught by Kṛṣṇa himself, shows that it is not the wisdom as such which is really important, but the power to be wise under all circumstances.

Kṛṣṇa advances then a new argument to change Yudhiṣṭhira's mind. He proposes a personal encounter with Jarāsaṁdha, avoiding his superior army. If Jarāsaṁdha is killed, his forces will be dispirited. And if they should attack the three aggressors, the latter would "attain heaven for our endeavours to protect our kinsmen." (2.16.9) This reminds us again of the Gītā (2.37):

"Slain you will gain heaven, victorious you will enjoy the earth."

After some hesitation and resistance Yudhiṣṭhira has now finally been convinced of the need of attacking Jarāsaṁdha and gives his consent to Kṛṣṇa:

"You are the protector of the Pāṇdavas, and we seek shelter with you. All that you say, Govindā, is right, for you never guide those whom Fortune has deserted..." (2.18.10)

Kṛṣṇa's plan of executing Jarāsaṁdha is duly carried out by Bhīma who kills the mighty king in a terrible wrestling duel. Kṛṣṇa is present as a non-combatant giving effective psychological support and tactical advice to the Pāṇdava. This support is actually giving Bhīma the edge over his equal opponent who is finally crushed on the ground. His people do not offer any further resistance. The eighty-six kings are released and urged to attend the great ceremony of the unction of Yudhiṣṭhira. His brothers conquer for him all the surrounding countries so that conditions may be ready now for the Royal Consecration. In a gesture of gratitude Yudhiṣṭhira at this moment attributes all his success to Kṛṣṇa who has master-minded the strategical move which gave him his new status as unchallenged emperor. Yudhiṣṭhira feels responsible to Kṛṣṇa to spend properly the wealth which he has amassed with his help:

It is because of you, Kṛṣṇa, that all of earth is under my sway, and by your grace, Vārṣṇeya, that I have amassed great wealth. Now I myself wish to employ all this in the proper manner for the best of the brahmīns and for the sacrificial fire, Mādhava son of Devakī. (2.30.18-19)

The final act of Kṛṣṇa's glorification as *guru* of all beings and the Pāṇḍavas in particular occurs in a chapter called 'The Taking of the Guest Gift'. At the beginning of the gathering of the kings that have been invited for Yudhiṣṭhira's coronation Bhīṣma asks Yudhiṣṭhira to offer a guest gift to the most deserving visitor. Bhīṣma then points out to him that Kṛṣṇa is by far the most important guest:

"He is the one who in the midst of those who have assembled shines as though blazing with glory, strength, and prowess, as the sun shines among the stars! For this *sadas* of ours is brightened and gladdened by Kṛṣṇa, as a sunless place is by the sun and a windless one by the wind." (2.33.28-29)

At this moment Śiśupāla, king of the Cedis, son of Vasudeva's sister Śrutaśravā, intervenes angrily and refuses to accept Bhīṣma's suggestion. In a highly polemic speech he insults Bhīṣma, Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas and does not lack arguments for denying Kṛṣṇa the honour of being the special guest. If the elders of the assembly were to be honoured, Kṛṣṇa's father Vasudeva would be the right choice. If the best ally of the Pāṇḍavas is to be honoured, why should Drupada not receive the gift? Or if a great teacher, an eminent priest is to be shown respect, why then not choose Droṇa or Vyāsa himself? Śiśupāla's language gets more and more coloured by hatred towards Kṛṣṇa whom he blames relentlessly for having accepted this undue honour of the guest gift. In his typical way Yudhiṣṭhira tries to calm down Śiśupāla with well-meant words, pointing out what is right in this matter. Then Bhīṣma speaks and makes Yudhiṣṭhira aware that Śiśupāla is not to be treated with polite words and that their choice of Kṛṣṇa does not need humble justification. Bhīṣma states that it is a simple fact that Kṛṣṇa is the greatest personality present. He boldly asserts, giving a number of reasons, that he is the most honourable guest, whatever be the merits of the others:

In this meeting of kings I do not see one who was not defeated by the glory of Sātvati's son. Not only to us is Acyuta supremely worthy of honour, by all three worlds must Janārdana be honoured. For Kṛṣṇa has vanquished many bulls of the barons in battle, the entire world is wholly founded on the Vārṣṇeya. Therefore, even in the presence of elders, we honour Kṛṣṇa and no one else. You have no right to speak as you did, get rid of the notion. (2.35 8-11)

Kṛṣṇa's personality is fully appreciated by Bhīṣma in the following passage. He is not only shown to be a great teacher and father, but also the transcendent ruler of the universe:

"Kṛṣṇa alone is the origin of the worlds as well as their dissolution... He is

the unmanifest Cause and the Sempiternal Doer... This Śiśupāla is a fool who does not know that Kṛṣṇa is everywhere and at all times—that is why he speaks thus.”

Next Sahadeva challenges all kings present to speak out if anyone does not want him to honour Kṛṣṇa. Nobody objects but a group of irate kings gathers round Śiśupāla. A little later Śiśupāla begins a frontal attack on Bhīṣma pointing out a number of alleged sins of his, specifically his abduction of Ambā who had already given her heart to Śālva and had become a most miserable creature due to his action. Moreover, Bhīṣma is being blamed for being sonless. Bhīṣma retorts by telling the story of Śiśupāla, how Kṛṣṇa gave a boon to his paternal aunt that he would forgive her son a hundred insults. It is for this very reason, says Bhīṣma, that Śiśupāla could act as he did; in fact, everything is Kṛṣṇa's decision, his game:

It is not the Cedi king's own idea to challenge Acyuta. Surely it was the decision of Kṛṣṇa himself, the lord of the world. (2.41.1)

The whole incident of Śiśupāla's challenge is now given a new interpretation. Nobody can really challenge Kṛṣṇa, since everything is contained in him. Śiśupāla is nothing but a “particle of the glory of Hari and widely famous Hari wants to recover it”. (2.41.3) Meanwhile Śiśupāla, undaunted by this mystical interpretation, continues to insult Bhīṣma, the Pāṇdavas and Kṛṣṇa. The last-named waits patiently until Śiśupāla has completed a hundred insults and then cuts off his head with the discus. A miracle follows upon this final act of the drama:

Thereupon the kings watched a sublime radiance rise forth from the body of the king of the Cedis, which, great king, was like the sun rising up from the sky; and that radiance greeted lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa, honoured by the world, and entered him, O king. When they saw that, all the kings deemed it a miracle that that radiance entered the strong-armed man, that greatest of men. In a cloudless sky heaven rained forth and blazing lightning struck and the earth trembled, when Kṛṣṇa slew the Caidya. (2.42.22-25)

The great Sacrifice has ended on a somewhat sad note, and yet it has been successfully accomplished, after Yudhiṣṭhira's last potential contender has been eliminated by Kṛṣṇa. He soon leaves for Dvārakā admonishing Yudhiṣṭhira to protect well his subjects so that they may “live on you as the Immortals do on the Thousand-eyed God”. (2.42.58)

We have traced in this article the origin and development of Kṛṣṇa's role as the supreme *guru* of the Pāṇdavas. We have seen that there was a gradual

transition from his being a mere friend and advisor to his role of a respected master. The Pāṇḍavas—in this episode Yudhiṣṭhira in particular—open themselves gradually to his influence and assimilate his teaching, his dynamic power. This is definitely a gradual process, not a dramatic upheaval. There is even hesitation and gentle opposition at times. Yudhiṣṭhira's resistance against Kṛṣṇa's plan to attack Jarāsaṁdha leads to a first crisis which Kṛṣṇa resolves without much difficulty, all the more since he is backed by Arjuna and Bhīma. As it is, the two younger brothers will yield to similar weaknesses at a later stage and Kṛṣṇa will have to use strong words to drive away their defeatist moods.⁴ All in all, we have here the faithfully recorded story of the divine Influence and the human resistance.

(To be continued)

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Notes

- 1 See the issue of February 1994
- 2 As before, all the English translations are by J A B van Buitenen, and the references are to the Poona Critical Edition
- 3 Translation by Swami Chidbhavananda
- 4 See Book Five, Chapters 72-73

SIMPLE EXERCISES FOR PERFECT EYESIGHT

THE bespectacled in the country need no longer despair as a unique institution, 'The School for Perfect Eyesight', has much to offer those with visual defects.

All that is required of a patient is a week-long stay in Pondicherry and the commitment to carry on with the simple exercises prescribed.

The fact that results have been encouraging is proved by the number of people who arrive at this unit of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram looking "literally" for light

The treatment offered is free of cost, though patients are free to make a contribution.

The idea of correcting defective vision through simple exercises was conceived by Dr. R.S. Agarwal, who realised the efficacy of this mode in conquering what modern medicine had failed to do.

Unable to find a proper environment for his practice in Delhi, from where he hailed, Dr. Agarwal's travels brought him to Pondicherry and to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Having found a mentor in Sri Aurobindo, his clientele grew with the rise in the number of devotees at the Ashram.

The treatment advocated by Dr. Agarwal over 40 years ago and continuing to the present day has been incorporated with just a few minor changes, says Dr. Shyamkumar, the present head of the unit.

The treatment can be availed of by those with defective vision as well as by the healthy. "The aim is to teach people to use their eyes properly," says Dr. Shyamkumar.

That modern medicine can provide only temporary relief for the refractive and organic errors that constitute defective vision has now come to be accepted.

Wearing glasses tackles the problems to a certain extent and may put an end to headaches and watering of the eyes, but it cannot check the deterioration in sight and the weakening of eye muscles. This is where the treatment at the Ashram's unit has a role to play.

Prompted by the belief that mental relaxation is the key to successful improvement of eyesight, the doctors concentrate on providing patients with proper eye-education and ensuring they are mentally relaxed.

It has been found that refractive errors like myopia, hypermetropia and presbyopia, which are based on factors like heredity, age and height, also occur due to strain. Removing the strain leads to minimising refraction.

The treatment consists of a series of seven exercises, requiring a minimum of 30 minutes. During their stay, patients are asked to come in twice daily, an hour in the morning and one in the evening. If done correctly, the exercises will help relieve pain and discomfort, says Dr. Shyamkumar.

The first step consists of sun treatment. The patient is made to face the sun with his eyes closed and then swing the body gently from side to side like a

pendulum for two to five minutes. The best times are mornings and evenings, and the treatment is more effective if honey is applied to the eyes.

After the sun treatment, the patient is made to wash his eyes using an eye-cup filled with ordinary or saline water.

The next step—palming—involves covering the closed eyes with the palms. Providing relief from pain and fatigue, it is one of the best methods for relieving strain and discomfort.

Reading fine print in candle light and then in good light is the next step. The distance at which the material is placed varies from person to person and this is kept up for two to five minutes.

This is followed by the 'swing' exercise, done before a window with vertical iron bars. Standing with feet apart, the patient is asked to sway from side to side, looking through the bars and blinking at the end of each movement. This is done for five to ten minutes.

The ball game, in which a ball is thrown from hand to hand with the eyes following the movement of the object, is practised for ten minutes and helps improve the accommodating ability of the eyes. Distant chart reading is followed by vapour treatment and cold packs for the eyes. The session is then complete, though patients suffering from sinus troubles are advised to avoid taking the cold pack.

In the case of squints, where there is no binocular vision, the correction is done through relaxation exercises. These are done using an eye patch over the good eye so as to strengthen and train the muscles of the defective eye.

The treatment of glaucoma in its early stages too involves the use of palming, ball game, cold packs and sun treatment.

Dr. Shyamkumar, who has been with the School for 20 years, says that they have conducted 10-day camps in many towns in South and North India and people were found to be receptive to the idea.

The ideal solution would be to have a unit in schools and colleges where students can be educated on the need for eye care. But governmental help will be necessary for such a large-scale measure.

(The Times of India, February 4, 1994.)

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

(Continued from the issue of 24 April 1994)

26. THE INVALUABLE LOVE

IN the days of yore men were privileged to enjoy the company of more than one wife. In fact, the more the number of wives a man had, the more his status in the society shot up. One need not be surprised to learn that a monogamous person was looked down on.

Hence a *kuravan* (a male of the nomadic tribe who made a living by hunting down birds and animals, and by gathering honey and rare herbs in the forests) too had two wives. But, as everyone knows two are worse than one, the husband had had to spend much of his leisure in patching up the quarrels that erupted between his pair of incompatible wives, and tried to forget his worries in nursing a young jackfruit tree.

The *kuravan* watered the tree every day, splashed water on its leaves to free them from the dust they had accumulated, swept away the dead leaves and above all took every precautionary measure to avoid termites coming anywhere near the tree. In short, he looked after the tree as if it were his child.

His affection for the tree was not without a reason. Though married twice, he was not blessed with a child.

Whenever his two wives quarrelled, he warned them thus: "Shut your mouths, you barren women! and keep quiet. If you quarrel again, I'll marry another woman and kick both of you out."

The *kuravan's* second wife who was very young mulled over the words of her husband. She concluded that peace could be restored at home only if the first wife was thrown out. She decided to do it by hook or by crook. After hours of thinking she hit upon a plan.

Accordingly one morning when the husband had gone to the weekly fair to sell the birds he had trapped, she said to her elder companion: "There is very little wood left to feed the oven. If you can go to the forest and fetch a pile of faggots, I'll mind the cooking."

The elder wife readily agreed and hurried off to the forest, carrying an axe on her shoulder.

No sooner did she disappear from the sight than the younger wife rushed with a knife towards the young jackfruit tree and hacked it to pieces.

The sun was in mid-sky when the husband returned home. Shocked beyond limit at the sight of the pitiable condition of his tree he yelled: "Who has done this to my child?"

The young woman came out of the house and retorted: "Don't shout at me. Do that to the other wench who has done this to our tree. As soon as you left for

the fair, that devil of a woman hurled abusive words at me and thrashed me with a winnow. And when I retorted she vented her wrath on our tree and went away. I don't know where she has gone. But I saw her carrying the axe she had used in butchering our child."

Fretting and fuming the husband sat by the felled tree awaiting the arrival of his first wife.

The first wife came balancing a pile of faggots on her head. Ignorant of the situation she looked inquiringly at her husband and the dead tree.

"What have you done to my child?" growled the husband. Picking up a log in his hand, he began to thrash her black and blue. She yelled in pain all the time wriggling like a worm on hot sand.

Avvai who happened to pass by, saw the gruesome scene. Pulling the *kuravan* by his arm, the old lady advised him: "Don't do anything you can't undo after it's too late."

"Leave me... Leave me... This fool of an ass deserves nothing but death," roared the *kuravan*.

"What has she done to deserve death?" asked Avvai.

"She has cut down this jack fruit tree I have looked after as if it were my own child."

"Can you bring your tree back to life by killing your wife?"

The *kuravan* stared at the old lady and retorted: "Will my tree spring back to life if I leave her alive?"

"Yes. By all means," said Avvai and sang a song requesting the Divine to bless the dead tree with life.

Out came a shoot from the stem of the tree. It grew to a great height, branched out, flowered and bore fruit. All this happened before one could say "wow!" The fruit were clinging to the tree like giant-sized beetles.

Witnessing a miracle take place before his very eyes, the *kuravan* fell at the feet of the old lady taking her for a Goddess in human form. While the miscreant wife begged Avvai to pardon her, the affected wife praised the wise lady for rescuing her from the clutches of death.

The entire family honoured Avvai with a grand feast and tom-tommed the miraculous powers of her songs to all their neighbours.

Avvai sojourned with the *kuravan* family. And when she prepared to go back to King Chozhan, the *kuravan* gave her a measure of *thinai* (millet in general; *panicum italicum* in particular) with all his heart. His now friendly wives who had promised Avvai that they would never quarrel again bade her adieu with parting tears.

On seeing Avvai King Chozhan shouted with joy and welcomed the 'Song-bird' with wide-open arms.

Avvai beamed with a smile. The King hugged her frail body affectionately and felt something heavily resting in the pouch of her saree.

“What is that, Mother?” he asked, pointing his finger at her pouch.

“Oh! That’s a love token,” she said and giggled.

“Love token?”

“Yes! From a *kuravan*. It’s a measure of *thinai*,” said Avvai and rehearsed to him the story of the love token.

“What? Just a measure of *thinai* for the miracle you have performed! It’s too meagre a present!

“Well! Well! Dear King! There is nothing called ‘meagre’ Only thinking makes it so. I very much esteem the love which people show towards me and don’t care much for what they present to me. I value the invaluable love more than the valueless reward. And that is why I sing for a bowl of porridge, or for a handful of salt or tamarind,” said Avvai.

“It’s this modesty I like in you, O Mother of poets!” said the King in all humility.

27. VIRTUOUS VASUKI

Konganavar, a Siddha, had his abode in a forest. He lived mostly on air and water. On rare occasions when he wanted to eat solid food just for a change he went to the nearby villages and begged for alms. Since Siddhas had divine powers in them, the villagers were happy to serve them with food and in turn get blessed.

Very close to the forest was a village called Mayilai (now known as Mylapore in Madras) wherein lived a weaver. During his leisure he wrote couplets destined to be talked about round the globe.

The weaver-poet was Thiruvalluvar and *Thirukkural* is his immortal classic.

Tamils quite often speak highly of their virtuous women and there is no dearth of such women in Tamil literature down the ages. It is said that a chaste woman is the very incarnation of the Goddess at whose command the sun too would not get up from his slumber and the cities would burn to ashes.

Thiruvalluvar was blessed with such a woman for his wife. Vasuki was her name.

Having heard of virtuous Vasuki, Konganavar wished to see her and beg food of her. And so one day he left his abode for Mayilai. But even before he could cross the forest, a lonely crane winging across defecated and its excrement fell on his nose and splashed to his eyes and lips.

In spite of attaining the *astama siddhi* (eight kinds of occult and supernatural powers achieved by constant practice of asceticism), Konganavar had not killed his ego. Hence he felt humiliated by the bird.

Wiping his face with the back of his hand, he stared at the bird. The penetrating stare of the Siddha burnt holes in the bird’s flesh and within seconds

it was reduced to ashes in mid-air. Konganavar patted himself for the occult power he possessed and resumed his journey.

The sun had started his downward journey, when Konganavar reached Thiruvalluvar's home.

Standing at the entrance of the house, Konganavar cried for alms.

Vasuki heard the call for food. But since she was serving food to her husband, it took some time for her to answer the call of the Siddha.

Unable to tolerate Vasuki's delay in giving him food, Konganavar fuming with rage looked daggers at her when she made her appearance.

Vasuki smiled and said: "Oh, Konganavar! Have you mistaken me for a crane?"

The Siddha couldn't believe his ears. "Truly she is divine... or else how could she know my name? How could she know what had happened to me on my way?" he murmured. The glances of the Siddha's scorn-beaming eyes fell without effect. For the first time in his life he understood his limitations.

Bowing in all humility, Konganavar got the food from the hands of Vasuki, sat on the *pial* of the house and began to partake of the food.

"Eat! I'll fetch you water," Vasuki said and walked towards the well nearby.

Noosing a pot to one end of the rope, she pushed it down the well holding the other end. The rope slid down through the pulley attached to the centre of the beam above the well, and the vessel filled itself with water.

Vasuki began to draw the pot up. As it was half-way up the water level in the well, Vasuki heard her husband Thiruvalluvar call her from inside the house. And she let the rope off her hands immediately and went into the house.

Konganavar stood up in amazement, for the pot didn't go down pulling the rope along with it. He darted towards the well and peeped into it. He saw the pot of water dangling in the well and the rope inert.

"Who is holding the rope for Vasuki?" Konganavar asked himself.

"Perhaps God himself," came the answer from his ego-free heart. A couplet of Thiruvalluvar which he had heard from someone long back began to reverberate in his mind:

"If wife be wholly true to him who gained her as his bride,
Great glory gains she in the world where gods in bliss abide."

(*Thirukkural*, couplet No. 58)

28. THE NEEDLE AND THE SHELL

Never did the weaver-poet Thiruvalluvar take his food without having by his side a needle and an oyster shell filled with water.

Vasuki who had a lot of faith in her husband's wisdom never asked him why.

Thiruvalluvar who bathed in the sunshine of her love never bothered to tell her why.

Virtuous Vasuki never forgot to keep the needle and the shell by her husband's side when he sat down to eat and removed them from there after he had finished. But what actually surprised Vasuki was that her husband found no use for the shell and the needle either before or during or after eating. Yet she kept them in their places as a ritual.

Many happy years had been passed by the happy couple.

Age began to wither Vasuki. Prolonged ailment sent her to her death-bed.

Thiruvalluvar, in spite of his old age, sat by her and looked after her as a parent would his child.

Vasuki felt that her end was near. She looked inquiringly at her husband. Her lips quivered.

"Have you something to say?" asked Thiruvalluvar in a very affectionate tone.

Vasuki nodded her head.

"Then go ahead," permitted the poet.

"You have always insisted that I keep by your side a water-filled oyster shell and a needle during your meal time. But I've never seen you use either of them. What were they for?"

A smile spread over the poet's face. He held her hand in his and patted it.

"My dear! Don't we toil and sweat to earn our food? How could we afford to waste even a single grain of rice? And that's why I wanted a needle and an oyster shell of water to be kept by my side while I ate my food. In case the grains of cooked rice fell off my leaf-plate while you served me or while I ate, I could use the needle to prick and hold the strayed grains and wash them clean of dust in the water kept in the shell, so that I could add them to the food on my leaf-plate. But in all these years you have never given me a chance to use the needle and the water in the shell."

Vasuki smiled. Thiruvalluvar could see a sense of satisfaction lingering on her face before she breathed her last.

Her demise didn't bring tears to the poet's eyes, for he knew for certain what death is:

"Death is sinking into slumbers deep;
Birth again is waking out of sleep "

(*Thirukkural*, couplet No. 39)

(*More legends on the way*)

P. RAJA

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Special Seventy-fourth Seminar

25 April 1993

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

Speech by Mita Chakravarti

At the very beginning I would like to draw the attention of all, that the Mother did not like to call Her words a teaching. She said, "Do not take my words for a teaching. Always they are a force in action, uttered with a definite purpose, and they lose their true power when separated from that purpose."¹

Her words did not teach us lessons, they directed, inspired, drove us towards a new way of life, to a new aim, to the Life Divine. Her touch was alchemic; even in the densest *tamas*, She could bring down aspiration for the higher light and life.

However much I may try to answer the question as to what inspiration, what illumination, did I receive from the Mother, I will not be able to make that account because Her grace was beyond any accounting. As a Bengali *sadhak*-poet wrote, বেদ বেদান্ত পাষ না অন্ত, আমি অন্ত পাব কিসে? "Veda and Vedanta could not find Her end, who am I to find that?"

Her limitless bounty overwhelmed my life. She must have corrected, purified, illumined such nooks and corners of my life, of which I was not even conscious. Her one glance could efface intolerably persistent burdens of depression and despair. Her touch, Her smile used to bring wondrous felicity and sweetness. She was Anandamayī, whose very presence brought down the Ananda of the Supreme.

With my limited vision, my ignorant unconscious physical awareness, I am unable to reckon all Her numerous, multifarious directives that have enriched my life. Even behind a seemingly ordinary action of receiving or giving a flower, there used to be far-reaching implications for all the parts of my being. It was not only to my inner and outer being, but also through me She would reach out to our family, to so many others, an action which is beyond all my reckoning. She has helped, guided, enriched me to be where I am; I am certain that She will not stop till I have reached the goal which She and Sri Aurobindo have envisaged for me.

¹ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 14, Frontispiece

Of that huge all-encompassing programme of development, I am hardly aware even of a small iota, so how could I say what are the lessons that I have learnt from Her? She has formed me, She has been moulding me, She will be shaping me for ever. I am only conscious of the central Truth, the essential point of Her directives and guidances that She wants me to possess, that is to be in integral intimacy with the Divine, with Sri Aurobindo

Her great work, which is unfolding gradually before me, Her huge mystery which is slowly being opened up in its full grandeur is that I should live for Sri Aurobindo.

She is teaching me to worship Sri Aurobindo, She is helping me to love Him, to adore Him, to cherish Him, to know Him as the Lord and the Master of my life. The Mother wants that I become what Sri Aurobindo wants me to become.

I have learnt that the whole purpose of this life and of those lives which are past and also of those which are to come, is the fulfilment of the Lord's Will in me.

Speech by Kamal Shah

Often, people coming from the outside world remark that as soon as they enter the precincts of the Ashram, they feel a certain force, a certain intensity in the atmosphere. Some even say that the very quality of the air of Pondicherry is different, it is charged with a vibration that seems to be enveloping all. Some of us have been here for so long, that to us the atmosphere and the surroundings seem quite normal. However, on Darshan Days, and on our Birthdays, we too feel this power in the air. In fact the Mother herself says that her consciousness and its ring of protection spreads to a radius of ten kilometers around the Ashram.

The first lesson that I have learnt from the Mother is to be grateful to her. To be grateful for all the good she does for us, for all that we overlook or take for granted or as a birthright.

For those who are able to understand the value of the Ashram life know that it is a unique place on the earth. Nothing compares or even comes close to it. It is unparalleled. The surroundings here, the conditions that are prevalent here are filled with an atmosphere conducive to doing intense Sadhana, going within oneself and realising one's true self.

The second lesson that I have learnt from the Mother is her open invitation to all those who wish to be on the Divine's side, to prepare themselves for his work, and make most of the opportunities given to them here.

My stay in the Ashram has made one fact clear in my mind and heart, that there is a deeper life, a living within that transcends the superficial consciousness

in which we normally live, and those who are ready for it must take a plunge into it, must decide to leap and never look back. But for those who are not yet ready for it, the ordinary life of the world, if lived with some idealism infused in it, can serve as a stepping-stone to the higher spiritual life, a preparatory transitional phase which can open wider vistas of a higher existence.

However, those to whom the call has come must leave all and begin to live the spiritual life. This awareness, this knowledge of a truer and spiritualised living is the third lesson that I have learnt from the Mother.

Another lesson is to never waste time, to make most of all the facilities and opportunities given to us in life. In brief, it is living at our maximum at every moment, never relaxing and saying, "Now that I have worked so hard, I can take it easy for a while." It is living at each moment with intense aspiration and thus drawing the most out of it.

A fifth lesson that I have learnt from the Mother is that it is true love that sustains the world. This would hardly seem true if we were to look around. However, in the heart of our hearts, we know it is so and that it is an indisputable fact.

Lessons are learnt, but forgotten swiftly too. A sixth and final lesson that I have learnt from the Mother is to put into practice what I have learnt. She herself says "No words—acts", and this is my motto, to live out my highest aspirations to realize my soul-longings.