

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

JANUARY 1995

PRICE: Rs. 8 00

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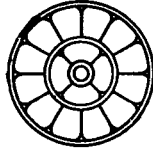
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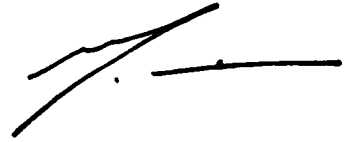
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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

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

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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XLVIII

No. 1

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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SEVENTY-SIXTH SEMINAR, 20 FEBRUARY 1994		
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WORDS OF THE MOTHER

ARE YOU FULLY CONSCIOUS OF YOURSELF?

THERE are so many things you think, feel, want, even do, without knowing it. Are you fully conscious of yourself and of all that goes on in you?—Not at all! If, for example, suddenly, without your expecting it, at a certain moment I ask you: “What are you thinking about?” your reply, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, will be: “I don’t know.” And if in the same way I ask another question like this. “What do you want?” you will also say: “I don’t know.” And “What do you feel?”—“I don’t know.” It is only to those who are used to observing themselves, watching how they live, who are concentrated upon this need to know what is going on in them, that one can ask a precise question like this, and only they can immediately reply. In some instances in life, yes, one is absorbed in what one feels, thinks, wants, and then one can say, “Yes, I want that, I am thinking of that, I experience that”, but these are only moments of existence, not the whole time.

Haven’t you noticed that? No?

Well, to find out what one truly is, to find out why one is on earth, what is the purpose of physical existence, of this presence on earth, of this formation, this existence... the vast majority of people live without asking themselves this even once! Only a small *élite* ask themselves this question with interest, and fewer still start working to get the answer. For, unless one is fortunate enough to come across someone who knows it, it is not such an easy thing to find. Suppose, for instance, that there had never come to your hands a book of Sri Aurobindo’s or of any of the writers or philosophers or sages who have dedicated their lives to this quest; if you were in the ordinary world, as millions of people are in the ordinary world, who have never heard of anything, except at times—and not always nowadays, even quite rarely—of some gods and a certain form of religion which is more a habit than a faith and which, besides, rarely tells you why you are on earth.... Then, one doesn’t even think of thinking about it. One lives from day to day the events of each day. When one is very young, one thinks of playing, eating, and a little later of learning, and after that one thinks of all the circumstances of life. But to put this problem to oneself, to confront this problem and ask oneself: “But after all, *why* am I here?” How many do that? There are people to whom this idea comes only when they are facing a catastrophe. When they see someone whom they love die or when they find themselves in particularly painful and difficult circumstances, they turn back upon themselves, if they are sufficiently intelligent, and ask themselves: “But really, what is this tragedy we are living, and what’s the use of it and what is its purpose?”

And only at that moment does one begin the search to know.

And it is only when one has found, you see, found what he says, found that

one has a divine Self and that consequently one must seek to know this divine Self.... This comes much later, and yet, in spite of everything, from the very moment of birth in a physical body, there is in the being, in its depths, this psychic presence which pushes the whole being towards this fulfilment. But who knows it and recognises it, this psychic being? That too comes only in special circumstances, and unfortunately, most of the time these have to be painful circumstances, otherwise one goes on living unthinkingly. And in the depths of one's being is this psychic being which seeks, seeks, seeks to awaken the consciousness and re-establish the union. One knows nothing about it.

... How many of you have asked yourselves this question: "What is the true reason for my being here?"

Have *you* asked yourself the question?...

Until then you live in a cloud, gropingly, under the weight of a destiny which at times crushes you, gives you the feeling of having been made in a certain way and being unable to do anything about it. You are under the burden of an existence which weighs you down, makes you crawl on the ground instead of rising above and seeing all the threads, the guiding threads, the threads which bind different things into a single movement of progression towards a realisation that grows clear.

One must spring up out of this half-consciousness which is usually considered quite natural—this is your "normal" way of being and you do not even draw back from it sufficiently to be able to see and wonder at this incertitude, this lack of precision; while, on the contrary, to know that one is seeking and to seek consciously, deliberately, *steadfastly* and methodically, this indeed is the exceptional, almost "abnormal" condition. And yet only in this way does one begin to truly live

(*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 9, pp 15-19)

WORDS OF SRI AUROBINDO

KRISHNA LIGHT

THERE are different Krishna lights—pale diamond blue, lavender blue, deep blue etc. It depends on the plane in which it manifests....

There is one blue that is the higher mind, a deeper blue belongs to the mind—Krishna's light in the mind . .

All blue is not Krishna's light

Diamond blue, Krishna's light in the overmind—lavender blue in intuitive mind.

(SABCL. Vol 23, p. 961.)

*

Violet is the colour of the light of Divine Compassion, as also of Krishna's Grace. It is also the radiance of Krishna's protection.

(SABCL, Vol 23, p 965.)

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

A PERSONAL LETTER

ONE of Amrita's nieces informed me that 1995 would mark his birth-centenary. This piece of news has prodded my memory. Here are some reminiscences of him, a little rambling, I am afraid, but as true to fact as I can make them. They are not selective with an eye to presenting him solely in a rosy light. He was a frank unpretentious friend and what I am writing is faithful to his own temper. Most of this sketch is based on his own report of things. Here and there that report has entailed some digressive but relevant passages on others.

I am starting with the day I reached Pondicherry: December 16, 1927—in my twenty-third year. When the metre-gauge train from Egmore touched its destination in the early morning, I and my wife Daulat (later renamed by Sri Aurobindo “Lalita”, signifying, in his words, “beauty of harmony and refinement” and also pointing to “the name of one of Radha's companions”) were not quite ready to get down from it. She was still in her night-gown. As we did not wish to keep waiting the member of the Ashram (named Pujalal, as I learnt later) who had come to receive us, we alighted just as we were attired. The news of my wife's informal dress reached Amrita's ears and he said to the Mother in a somewhat ironical vein: “The Parsi lady who has come to do Yoga here is in a European dress.” The Mother replied: “What has any dress got to do with Yoga?” There was never any other superficial remark by Amrita to reach me. He always kept himself in tune with the Mother's judgments.

Amrita was one of those with whom I came into close contact right from my early days in the Ashram. After Lalita and I had voluntarily separated in the interests of Yoga, and I had been shifted, from the house where now the Embroidery Department functions, to the rooms in the then-called “Guest House”—rooms which Sri Aurobindo had once occupied for nearly six years and were later Purani's for about two and a half and went on being mine for over fourteen (1928-1942)—Amrita was a frequent visitor to them. It was on my typewriter that, day after day, he tried to master the touch-system with the help of Pitman's exercise-manual. He arrived with a silent smile but left with a stock-formula, seeming to be a translation from the Tamil: “And then I go.”

Once, when he was typing, a funeral passed in the street. In a low voice he said: “I feel that such a thing won't happen to me.” These words did not strike me as either vacuous or vainglorious. For, in the whole period of the allotment of those rooms to me, the general conviction in the Ashram was that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would completely transform and divinise their bodies with their “Integral Yoga” and that those who had joined them whole-heartedly would do the same. Even after the fracture Sri Aurobindo sustained of his right thigh because of a fall in late 1938 the conviction did not seem to change, for his

comment was reported to have been simply: "It's one more problem to be solved." Only at the beginning of 1950 is Sri Aurobindo said to have remarked to the Mother: "Our work may demand that one of us should leave and act from behind the scene." The Mother's response was: "I will leave." Sri Aurobindo decided: "No, you have to fulfil our Yoga of Supramental Descent and Transformation."

Only during Amrita's later days did I once hear him say apropos of some sadhak dying: "We all have to do the same one day." When his own death took place, the Mother remarked that in the ordinary course of things he would have died fairly earlier but she had prolonged his life-span. Some time after the departure of Pavitra (Philippe Barbier St.-Hilaire) the Mother said to a sadhak: "Amrita and Pavitra are both within me, but time and again Amrita comes out in his subtle body and sits in front of me along with whoever is having an interview with me whereas Pavitra remains inside and keeps looking out half-amusedly."

Right up to the time of his death, Amrita was a close companion of Nolini and they always had their meals together in Nolini's room. However, the comrades differed much in temperament. Nolini, unlike Amrita, was far from being a good mixer, though quite genial with his few chosen associates. There was also an element of shyness in his nature plus the scholar's distant air. I have heard the Mother say of him that he never spoke ill of anybody. At a certain period he appeared to be not close enough even to Amrita. Once I quoted to the latter my designation of Nolini after a phrase of Yeats's with a punning play on the first half of his name: "A green knoll apart." Amrita said: "Yes, and it is partly because of some aloofness by him even from me that I am pressing closer to you. Nolini has a psychic knack to get over his problems and doesn't need much company." I told Amrita that he was always welcome to be my friend. I had observed that he had considerable reliance on my judgment in several matters. He valued especially my so-called artistic sense. Thus, in rearranging his office-room's furniture, he made it a point to consult me. He also trusted me to pluck out grey hairs skilfully from his moustache with a tweezer.

I was frequently in his room, often exchanging jokes. He was a witty chap. I recollect a quip of his when a woman, who often came to the Ashram in the company of a man, arrived accompanied by a child as well. Amrita said: "Formerly there were two of you. Now the two have become three!" He had a half joke about the word "nectar": "Is it a drink that tars the neck?" He was witty with the Mother too. I have heard that once the Mother gave him a small slap. He smiled and said: "Luckily I shaved before coming to you. Otherwise your palm might have got hurt by my bristles!"

On one of his visits to me we talked of subtle bodies. He said: "The Mother has a huge vital body. Anything even distantly approaching it is the vital body of Purani." Purani was another sadhak with whom I was in close touch. Indeed, with the exception of Pujalal, he was the first Ashramite I met. Pujalal had taken

us to his room which, as I have said, had been Sri Aurobindo's earlier. Purani was out. He was in the main Ashram-complex where—as I soon learned—his job at the time was to prepare hot water for the Mother's early bath as well as to massage one of her legs which was not functioning in a fully normal way. I may mention in passing that for a long time Purani was to my wife and me the most impressive figure among the Ashram-members. In comparison to his energetic personality, both physically and psychologically, all the other Ashramites we met seemed rather colourless. I remember Nolini remarking after Purani's death many years later that his personality had such force that he could have caught hold of anybody on the road and turned him to carry out what he willed. Nolini also used at that time the term "mahapurusha" ("great being") for him. Purani had some occult powers and could go out in his super-forceful subtle body and act effectively. Once Vaun McPheeters, who with his wife Janet (renamed "Shantimayi" by the Mother) was the first American to settle in the Ashram, spoke a trifle lightly of India during a somewhat heated discussion with Purani. Purani, an arch-nationalist, could not stomach it. He told me that during the ensuing night he had found Vaun's subtle form worrying him during sleep and he had gone out in his own subtle form and given Vaun a thrashing. Almost immediately there was a notable change in Vaun's outer life. He went into retirement and was spiritually in a disturbed state. The Mother found her inner work on him getting difficult and did not know why until Purani narrated to her his encounter.

I may note here that though Purani's relationship with Sri Aurobindo was very deep and intimate it was not always steady and secure with the Mother. After Sri Aurobindo's departure he was often uneasy in the Ashram and once, when I happened to be in Bombay, wrote to me about feeling like leaving it. I earnestly advised him not to decide anything before having an interview with the Mother. He asked for an interview. During it, amidst other matters, the Mother said: "I am here only to do Sri Aurobindo's work. Won't you help me in it?" Purani burst into tears and pledged unflinching co-operation.

One visit of Amrita's to my room I particularly remember. For he had come on a "delicate" mission. Connected with the event is what is perhaps the only time I thought Nolini had made a complaint to the Mother. In the early days the Mother had put me in charge of the furniture department. I had to deliver tables and chairs and beds to the sadhaks' or visitors' rooms. I observed that quite often the visitors failed to come and the furnishing of their allotted rooms was in vain and involved unnecessary expenditure of the Mother's money in getting the goods delivered and then taken back. So I used to delay the delivery as much as possible. Now and then Nolini would inquire whether I had done the needful. I would say: "No." This negative answer seems to have been construed as inefficiency and most probably mentioned to the Mother who had earlier asked Nolini to tell me about the job to be done. She had also come to know that on

rainy days I was put to considerable hardship in getting the furniture transported under my supervision. Suddenly I had a bad fall and my left knee swelled up like a balloon I had to stay at home for a few days. Amrita visited me and wanted to deliver a message about my work but seemed to hem and haw for a while. I guessed that he was hesitating to break the news that henceforth furniture-moving would be done by somebody else. Obviously he was thinking I would take it badly. Noting his rather fumbling talk, I said: "Amrita, please come out with it." Then he softly said: "You know, now it will be hard for you to manage the furniture. We wonder how you will do it. I mean somebody else will take up your work." I said: "Certainly, why not? I'll be happy." He looked surprised. He went and reported to the Mother, as he admiringly told me afterwards: "Amal took the change like a real Yogi."

I think Amal took another incident too in a similar way. I had brought with me from Bombay a fine hunting-knife, whose length just fell short of a dagger which would require a Government licence. At one period of my stay in Pondi I hung it on the wall touching the inner side of my bed. Amrita saw it and evidently reported it to the Mother. At that time the Ashram was still under the eye of the British C.I.D. (Criminal Investigation Department) whose minions were daily on the watch, sitting where now the Ashram Post Office stands. So the Mother must have received Amrita's report with some concern. He took it upon himself to set it at rest, walked into my room one day and, though finding me not there, carried off the hunting-knife. I came to know of his visit and felt rather annoyed, but kept quiet, understanding my impulsive friend's intention and taking his unceremonious act as a test of my Yogic equanimity.

In the early days there was a good deal of talk about past births. The being who had been behind Jesus, Chaitanya and, most recently, Ramakrishna was said to be behind Pavitra now. St. Paul and Vivekananda were seen in the background of Anilbaran. In connection with Nolini we heard of Roman Virgil and the late-renaissance French poet Ronsard as well as the French-revolution poet André Chenier. As for Amrita himself, the forces in his past were Moses, Micheiangelo and Victor Hugo, powerful personalities quite in contrast to his gentle, amiable present disposition. To help me in my historical researches I made sure from Amrita that the Egyptian princess mentioned in the Old Testament as getting her attendants to pick up baby Moses who had been left in a basket on the bank of the Nile was Hatshepsut before she became queen—Hatshepsut who was believed to be a past incarnation of the Mother. The only certainty announced about myself by both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was that I had been an ancient Athenian. It is curious that I never inquired who the fellow had been. If, as reported, Sri Aurobindo had been Pericles and a little later Socrates (as declared by Nolini), I guess I must have belonged to the period of the one or the other. The two certainties about Sri Aurobindo's past, as deducible from his correspondence with me, were Augustus Caesar and

Leonardo da Vinci. To Amrita he said he still felt the edge of the guillotine on his neck. This would indicate that his birth immediately before the present one was associated with the French Revolution. If he was a guillotined front-liner, we can think only of Danton and Robespierre. But the Mother has seen Debu, Pranab's brother, as having been the latter. So Danton has to be our choice. To me Sri Aurobindo wrote that he had "a psychic memory" of Dilip Kumar Roy as Horace, evidently a carry-over from the time he had been Augustus. The Mother, on one Pranam-occasion, saw two figures behind Dilip. When she described them to Sri Aurobindo he identified them as Horace and Hector. In the age of the siege of Troy Sri Aurobindo is taken to have been Paris, the Mother Helen and Nolini the husband of Helen, King Menelaus of Sparta from whom Trojan Paris seduced away Helen. On one occasion when I remarked to the Mother that the way she had poised her arm and hand a moment earlier reminded me of the depiction of Mona Lisa's in Léonardo's famous painting, she said that at times even physical characteristics were carried over from one life to another. I think Amrita told me that Doraiswamy, the well-known Madras advocate who was a staunch devotee of the Mother in those days, had been Francis I of France in whose arms Leonardo is said to have died.

Doraiswamy was as humorous and witty as Amrita. Once, soon after he had arrived from Madras in early morning, Amrita visited him in his room, saying he had hurried there before his own bath. Doraiswamy struck an attitude of awe and exclaimed: "What a privilege for us to see you in your unbathed grandeur!"

In the early days Amrita and Nolini served as emissaries from Sri Aurobindo to a prominent Indian political leader in the town, named David, who often asked for Sri Aurobindo's advice. At 7.30 or 8 p.m. they would cycle to his house with the message and had the pleasure of a non-vegetarian dinner with him. It was to this person that in the first years of Sri Aurobindo's stay in Pondicherry when British political agents were still at work against him, the manuscript of his English translation of Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* ("The Cloud-Messenger") was given for safe-keeping. The work was kept at the bottom of a trunk. Unfortunately, white ants got interested in it and finished it off before any human could start relishing it. It was Amrita who first told me that Sri Aurobindo had a private pamphlet prepared on simplified Sanskrit-learning but nobody has been able to trace it. Amrita told me also of Sri Aurobindo reading out to him portions of his play *Eric* which its author felt to be not at all badly created.

Referring to his earliest contact with Sri Aurobindo, Amrita mentioned how he used to come from school to Sri Aurobindo and at times lie on a mat, with Sri Aurobindo sitting by him and gently caressing his body with his hand. Amrita recollected a special odour coming from Sri Aurobindo's body. In later years the Mother has mentioned a faint lotus-like scent emanating from it. A recollection by Amrita at a somewhat subsequent but pre-yogic period figured a young girl

who lived in a neighbouring house. Youthful Amrita grew fond of her and talked to Sri Aurobindo of his fervent friendship with her. Sri Aurobindo once asked him: "Have you kissed her?" When told "No", he said: "Why not? Be bold and go and kiss her." Evidently Sri Aurobindo felt his disciple needed a bit of life-experience. Some time afterwards, when a movement started among the youngsters around Sri Aurobindo for an experiment in Yoga, Sri Aurobindo told the romantic youngster to stop all intimacies. Amrita muttered to himself: "How cruel to pull me back now!" But he had to obey. It was also at the pre-Yoga time that he learned French from Sri Aurobindo. He told me how Sri Aurobindo taught him to pronounce the French "ou" meaning the English "or" and, when accented over the "u", "where". The teacher said: "Form your mouth into a small pout as if you were preparing to kiss a girl " Indeed a Frenchy way to teach French!

More serious lessons too were taught. Once Amrita was watching a spider's web in which some insects had been caught. He started amusing himself by throwing some ants into the web. Sri Aurobindo saw him and very forcefully forbade him to go on with the game. It was a warning against thoughtlessness and wanton cruelty towards lower creatures that Amrita never forgot.

From him as well as other early Ashramites I have heard of Sri Aurobindo's fast for about three weeks, during which he continued his daily routine of literary work and of walking across his rooms for six or seven hours. At the end of the fast he took a full normal meal instead of the usual orange juice and liquid food. Connected with Amrita is a special eating experiment by Sri Aurobindo—one with opium. Sri Aurobindo asked him to fetch from the bazaar a substantial lump of this stuff. Opium is usually eaten in small quantities as either a stimulant, intoxicant or narcotic. Sri Aurobindo ate the whole lump brought to him—with no perceptible harmful effect. I am reminded of a story by de Quincy, the author of the famous *Confessions of an Opium-eater*. He tells of a Malay who suddenly appeared at his quarters. As an act of hospitality de Quincy put before the Oriental a quantity of opium. The visitor ate up at one stroke the entire big piece and took his leave. De Quincy was horrified. Day after day he looked into the local newspapers to see if any foreigner had been found lying dead anywhere in the county. No trace of a laudanum-poisoned Malay was reported. Amrita saw Sri Aurobindo going merrily on in spite of the abnormal amount of the poppy-product consumed. No wonder the Mother, knowing of such feats, told me during an interview soon after Sri Aurobindo had passed away in the early hours of 5 December 1950: "Sri Aurobindo did not leave his body because of physical causes. He was not compelled to do it. He had complete control over his body " On my asking her what had made him go, she said: "It is quite clear to me, but I won't tell you anything. You have to find out the reason yourself." I requested: "Please give me the power to do it." She put her hand on my head to bless it. What lingered most in my memory was that, while countering the possible

general impression that Sri Aurobindo had departed because of an illness, she had made the clear-cut assertion. "There was nothing mortal about Sri Aurobindo"—words uttered when I had read out the short note for the next issue of *Mother India*, in which I had employed the conventionally turned phrase: "the mortal remains of Sri Aurobindo." In this mind-boggling denial, which would apply just as well to Sri Aurobindo's partner in spiritual world-work—the Mother herself—lies the ultimate Avataric secret of the birth no less than the death of both of them.

It is one of my observations that Amrita as well as Nolini, for all their familiarity with the Mother, stood somewhat in fear of her. They would not venture to say anything appearing to be even a little critical of her pronouncements. So, to contradict her in any way was difficult for them. When the Mother gave an interview to the half monk half journalist Chamanlal, Nolini brought to us a cyclostyled report of it written by the interviewer and approved by the Mother as authentic. In it we read that she had visualised the danger of a world war in 1957. When this topic was touched upon some time later by young Manoj Dasgupta during one of the evening sessions at the Playground, the Mother was surprised and twice cried out. "Jamais dans ma vie!" ("Never at any time!") and added in French what in effect would run in English: "It is not there in what he has written, because I would never have let it pass. There was the possibility of a war but I did not say 1957. I haven't spoken about a crisis in 1957. There would be a fulfilment in that year. The crisis comes before." According to her, no world war could come about after 1956, the year meant for the Supramental Manifestation. When Nolini, Amrita and I were going together to the Ashram after the Mother's outburst, I reminded Nolini that the possibility decried by the Mother now was clearly spoken of in the supposedly authentic report he had brought down from the Mother's room to us. He said: "Oh, it was like that? I don't quite remember." I suggested he should draw the Mother's attention to the facts of the case and get a clarifying word from her. The next morning, after he had been to her as usual, I asked if he had done the needful. He said: "No." On two other days I questioned him again and got the same answer. I mentioned my quandary to Amrita. He at once exclaimed. "How can Nolini dare to ask the Mother after she had twice cried out, 'Jamais dans ma vie'?"

I had to take up the matter myself. I set Nolini's mind at rest by saying: "Now you won't be speaking anything on your own. You have only to read out my letter. All the responsibility will be mine." In my note I put the case as tactfully as I could. The same evening, at the Playground when the groundnuts were being distributed by the Mother, she pressed my hand, smiled and whispered: "The fellow has made a confusion."

Two personal opinions conveyed to me by Amrita may be cited. One was about Lalita. He said. "Lalita is like a part of the Mother herself." On a later occasion he reported to me with a smile. "On the pavement outside one of my

windows Sahana and Rani, while waiting for the Mother's return from her car-drive, were discussing whom to consider the most good-looking sadhak. The double vote was in your favour." I think I managed the required blush.

In spite of the little romance Sri Aurobindo had jocularly encouraged in Amrita's early days, Amrita was not considered by the Mother to have an experienced and seasoned "vital being" where sensual matters were concerned. Thus, while admiring Jules Romain's psychological acumen along with his style in his famous series of novels, *Les Hommes de la bonne volonté*, she asked Udar to go through the books but did not advise Amrita to read them. Evidently he was considered as being still a bit of an "innocent".

Once he proved to be an "innocent" in social contacts too. He sent a letter to Madame Vigie in a folded form without an envelope. She expressed her surprise to the Mother about this impoliteness on his part. The Mother put him wise about social niceties.

During several years of the Ashram's early career the Mother put together as chums Amrita and the chief engineer of the Ashram at that time—Chandulal. Chandulal was quite a character both in physical appearance, which was a little deformed, and in working capacity: he could give himself to non-stop work almost the whole of the working day. He often called Amrita his brother and sometimes hugged him. Amrita always took the relationship with a twinkle of humour.

What on the whole struck everybody about Amrita was not only his extreme devotion to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo but also his sweet nature. He was ever ready with sympathy for whoever brought him a tale of woe. And he would be glad to convey to the Mother her children's needs or grievances. I remember only one occasion on which not only Nolini but even he was unwilling to "bother" the Mother with a certain sadhika's message. Barred by them she came to me. I transmitted her plea. As a result the Mother gave her a chance to come up to the first floor and meet her for a few minutes. I remember Amrita was not pleased by what I had done.

There are two other instances of his displeasure. I used to be friends with a French family who had two outstandingly pretty daughters. When I went out for my evening stroll during which I might come across them, I sometimes wore the full English dress to which I had been accustomed in my pre-Pondy days. At the end of the stroll I would often come to Amrita's room and chat with him. After a few days I found his room padlocked and he gone out. This occurred a number of times and I deduced that he felt disturbed by the "atmosphere" I carried of that family. I wondered why he had not told me of it directly. My temperament is such that I would never take a communication of that kind amiss: I have no special high conceit of myself. Another time somebody's adverse view of the Mother had been reported. He said he took it to heart very much. I said: "I feel the same." He blurted out: "You don't!" The next day he told me: "I should not

have made that remark. Mother didn't approve." I assured him I hadn't taken offence. At no time was there ever a rift between us

When he died, all of us felt the loss. I believe his niece Kumuda, of whom he was very fond, felt it most acutely. I was told she had fainted on hearing the news. He had spent a good amount of time with her, part of it in tutoring her in French. It is fitting that she should be prominent, together with her sister Saroja, in celebrating the centenary of his entry into this world to serve Sri Aurobindo and the Mother faithfully.

The Mother's own words are: "He was a good servant of the Divine." She has revealed that his "natural" life was only 50 years long. The rest of his span of 73 was due to the Divine's intervention.

Connected with his death is a tribute paid him by the Ashram's employed workers. Along with Padmasini, he had been in charge of the department dealing with them. On hearing that he was to be cremated, they made the plea to the Trustees that they would like him to be buried so that they might be able to visit his grave and offer flowers to it. Hence his body lies in the Ashram's cemetery. His nearest neighbour there is Nolini who, before he passed away, expressed his wish to be laid to rest near his old-time friend (15 10 1994)

AMAL KIRAN
(K.D. SETHNA)

THE MISSING FIRE

THE chamber is dark again—
 No light to read the story
 Of the missing fire, only a chain
 Of smoke hurrying away in shame.
 The delight of someone being so close
 Is replaced by a painful feeling
 Of entry into a dark, unguarded labyrinth,
 The eyes can't even dream of the once-familiar horizon,
 A dreadful note of wastefulness
 Dogs every step, this brief transit
 Into the nether world is so stifling, yet
 As the gracious wings of brooding Love
 Come enfolding, like sudden clouds,
 So will the Light burst into the chamber one day.
 A bubbling surprise will then fill the heart's chalice—
 The mystery of the missing fire be swiftly known

SEIKH ABDUL KASAM

MY BOSS: K.D. SETHNA

[K.D.S.,

Yogendra Rastogi has sent an article for the festschrift Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic to celebrate your completing 90 years on 25 November 1994. I would have very much liked to include it in this volume of tributes but, unfortunately, it came too late. Being an 'intimate story' of his early associations with you, in particular as a member of the Mother India 'Office' of those days, I consider it very pertinent that it should reach the readers and admirers of this periodical. My request to you is to favourably consider it and publish it in one of the earliest issues of Mother India, preferably the January 1995 issue. I can understand the embarrassment this will cause to you in the sense that you would be presenting an eulogy in a magazine edited by yourself but, I believe, there will be no scope for any misapprehension in this regard; it will be taken as a part of the festschrift itself. – R.Y. Deshpande]

I AM grateful to the Divine for having kept my boss K.D. Sethna alive and kicking even at the age of 90. May Gurudev Sri Aurobindo and the Mother shower their choicest blessings on him to enable him to complete a century, even though his grandfather failed by a few months to achieve that distinction.

Though I have known him since November 1946 when I had the first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo, he became my boss in 1949 when the Mother sent me to Bombay to help him, Soli Albless and Keshavdeo Poddar (Navajata) in every way to run *Mother India* which Sri Aurobindo considered his own paper. My request to make me a permanent Sadhak was turned down by the Mother saying that my work was in Bombay, not here in Pondicherry. She told me how to write to her to get quick answers. She kept her word. I used to get quick replies. Her abiding interest in our work was evident when at my request she granted three interviews on successive days in December '49 in Pondicherry at what is now called Society House. Pavitra also was present at these meetings.

19th February '49 was fixed as the date to bring out the first issue of *Mother India*, which was meant at that time to be a fortnightly. But everyone developed cold feet as sufficient matter was not there to bring out the second and third issues. Seasoned journalists advised us to postpone the date of bringing out the first issue. So a wire was sent to the Mother. I was at that time in Pondicherry for the February Darshan. The Mother was not happy about the proposed postponement. A telegram from her to the editor read: "Stick to the date. Live on faith." After this there was no looking back. *Mother India* came out every fortnight.

It was while working with him on *Mother India* that I began calling him

'boss'. I learnt from him subtle nuances of the English language—both in prose and poetry I had never done any proof-reading. I learnt it from him. I found that he was very particular about every word and every punctuation-mark, about line-spacing, about type-setting. Once he took me to the press-machine to help him show the press-workers how to compose a page which the workers were unable to do with last-minute alterations and additions in the final page-proof. This also proves that he knew the intricacies of page-composing. Proprietor Mr. Gambhir of Popular Printing Press, Taideo, where *Mother India* was being printed, was deeply impressed.

K D.S. is a voracious reader, tackling books on various topics. He is a completely absorbed worker—even interruption during the work does not sever the link, he continues his work as if nothing has happened. He has no diversions like TV, Video, etc. He enjoys his work even though he may have to go on working till late at night. He is quite fresh to commence his daily work after a little sleep. Once during his sleep he got inspired lines which resulted in starting his famous book of poems, *The Adventure of the Apocalypse* which Sri Aurobindo praised in high terms. Once when my boss asked Sri Aurobindo to give a message for *Mother India*, Sri Aurobindo on the suggestion of Nolini sent a poem. It so happened that this poem was written by my boss and touched up by Sri Aurobindo. It was a great tribute that this piece, "Sakuntala's Farewell" published in the first edition of *The Secret Splendour*, Sri Aurobindo considered as his own! When my boss pointed out the fact, Sri Aurobindo wrote that it could not go as his work.

K D.S. types and retypes. He used to have an old typewriter till the Mother gave him a new one. He is a master of English prose as well as poetry. Like Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore he can write both with ease. He also follows them in chiselling whatever he writes. He had never written political editorials. Everyone now knows what masterly editorials he wrote for *Mother India*. To give one example the well-known politician Minoo Masani regarded his editorial, *The Folly of Recognising Red China* (approved by Sri Aurobindo) as meeting his viewpoint from altogether a different angle. The result was that Minoo Masani made the Tatas subscribe to the magazine. Even Shri K.M. Munshi praised his editorials. It is an open secret that Sri Aurobindo went through his editorials and approved them for publication, suggesting small changes whenever he felt like doing so.

Sri Aurobindo indicated the line of thought for the editorials on the Korean war. I wish my boss would write more political editorials and the work already done should all be brought out in book-form. Also he should publish a book on *Savitri*. Before *Savitri* was published Sri Aurobindo used to send him pages for his comments. Few people know that he was part editor of a commercial magazine *Bazar* brought out by Navajata (Keshavdeo Poddar) before launching *Mother India*. There too my boss was at home. He could authoritatively discuss

earthly matters like which shares to buy. Not only that, he is at home in many diverse fields: Einstein's relativity and other scientific subjects, subjects like *Karpāsa* (cotton) and the Indus-script, the problem of Aryan origins, the chronology of Ancient India. Even horse-races and wrestling he used to discuss with great excitement. I am told that sometimes to get more information on a subject he was writing on, he used to climb a high ladder in the Royal Asiatic Library to hunt for a book not found in the lower shelves. He had seen well-known wrestlers like Gama, Imam Bux, Hamida, Goonga, Harbans Singh, King-kong (Dara Singh was not on the scene then). I too participated in such discussions as I used to see wrestling-bouts. He was fond of racing and could discuss it with authority. I had been to races a few times. Once on the race-course I talked to Qaid-e-Azam Mr. M.A. Jinnah in April 1947 before India's partition. I met Gandhiji after partition in Birla House, New Delhi. Thus I was lucky to meet the fathers of both the nations—India and Pakistan. My boss held that all life is yoga, so he dabbled in everything with the right attitude, even cinema-criticism! I too had a fondness for the cinema. He had no car of his own though he lived at Nepean Sea Road in the aristocratic Hamilton Villa. This did not dissuade him and his wife Sehra from travelling by bus which meant standing in a queue for a long time. Any other man wouldn't have risked it specially when one leg was not all right. He used to dress well and sported a felt hat at a particular angle to look impressive. Thus we had so many common points of interest. There was never a dull moment in his company. He was always cheerful and full of jokes even when undergoing terrible body-aches on top of all mundane worries. My boss and I, Soli Albles, Kishor Gandhi, Jehangir Billimoria, Minoo and Phiroze Solena used to meet every week in the lounge of Eros Cinema to discuss all sorts of things under the sun. When I came to live in Dariya Mahal (Cutch Palace) on Nepean Sea Road, it was a pleasure to take him to the Popular Printing Press in my car. Once we travelled together to Pondicherry to attend the International University Centre Convention to be opened by the Mother. Shyamaprasad Mookherji was presiding over it. Not only during the journey both ways but even during our stay in Madras at the Ambassador Hotel there was never a dull moment. He used to take bets easily. Once I told him on the phone that Sri Aurobindo had written to Dilip Kumar Roy that there was bound to be a clearance regarding the Pakistan imbroglio. Sri Aurobindo did not indicate when. My boss immediately took a bet with someone, which showed his faith. I couldn't agree with his action. After the Nehru-Liaquat Pact the situation became almost normal. He thus lost his bet.

He had and has a flair for writing wonderful letters. His many-sided genius comes out here. I am grateful for having received numerous remarkable letters from him. He is full of concern. He was so concerned about my cataract-operation in January 1993 that he wanted to know the exact date and time so that he could offer me to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo when he spent one hour

before their joint samadhī every afternoon. In a letter he writes: “Short of the Psychic Being’s intervention, we have to go in for a detached mind which, for all its aloofness, is yet ever sympathetic, ready to understand all human movements without being caught up in any... one must also know where to stop action” (*Mother India*, p. 689 of October ’94 issue).

When he fractured his good leg and was in the Ashram Nursing Home, I specially flew from Bombay to see him. He was very much touched. Even then, lying in bed in a very uncomfortable position due to complicated traction I saw him busy with press-proofs. He doesn’t waste time. He has tremendous energy. Otherwise how can he do reading, writing and seeing people day after day? He feels no strain, this is made clear from a letter he wrote on 17.4.94 (published in *Mother India*, September ’94 issue on p. 612): “This letter in reply to yours has been written very gladly and without any sense of strain. Although I am confined to a wheel-chair, I am extremely happy at heart and psychologically feel no sign of old age.” Though a great poet he does not generally write verse-letters. If I remember rightly, he penned only one short verse-letter in 1954, unlike Dilip Kumar Roy who wrote verse-letters so often. Sri Aurobindo did not answer when Dilip Kumar Roy sent letters from various correspondents lamenting the present situation. But when he sent my letter Sri Aurobindo immediately answered. Dilip Kumar Roy sent me Sri Aurobindo’s letter together with his short verse-letter which reads (I am quoting from memory):

“I urged the Guru in your name,
And here you see the answer came,
A courser you are whom none can tame
And a galloper whom none shall lame.”

The letter of Sri Aurobindo was distributed by the Mother under the title: ‘The Present Situation.’ It begins: “I can hold out but cold comfort.”

When Sethna is unwell he throws all caution to the winds. He doesn’t heed medical advice to be careful. This I saw when I went to see him in the KEM Hospital, Bombay, where he underwent a cataract operation. In those days there was no implant surgery and one had to be very careful. He said he took liberties because he had immense faith in the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Sometimes the Mother and Sri Aurobindo warned him against taking liberties.

He doesn’t lose his equipoise whatever happens. He very nearly lost it when his wife Sehra died and when his nephew Dhun Canteenwala passed away. He rarely gets angry. Once when someone wrote against Sri Aurobindo he was furious and invoked Mahakali’s wrath and felt its destructive force. The Mother warned him that there should be no personal element in it.

When Sri Aurobindo gave up his body on 5th December 1950 Sethna had just reached Bombay from Pondicherry. He made up his mind to return to

Pondicherry immediately. In spite of heavy odds against him he succeeded in getting on to the plane which brought him to Pondicherry in time for his Guru's Darshan. This shows what a tenacious fighter at times he can be against all odds.

Though old enough to be my father I look upon him as my boss who taught me so many things of life and spirit. There are many facets to his personality. Here I have brought out his outer personality. He alone is capable of writing about his inner life.

YOGENDRA RASTOGI

OLD IS GOLD

ALL that glitters, we know well, is not gold.
 The contrary at least is partly true, and tersely told
 In the wise adage which clearly declares that "Old"—
 Which usually does not glitter—"is Gold".

This silent claim often seems a bit too bold
 To the ignorant youth set in a modern mould;
 But time digs out the treasure our "Old" can hold,
 Maybe, in a wrapper deep a thousandfold.

"New", no doubt, has an attractive look, no utility cold,
 But, this failing, we feel obliged to look for "Old".
 Higher values are its lot when maturing to be ensouled,
 And at times rise to the surface for all to behold.

For men, the truth of the adage gets slowly unrolled;
 For things, it comes to light when antiques are sold.
 About "New" too, something could be said like "Old is Gold":
 "New is Dew"—its truth, of course, one has to unfold.

GOPAL DASS GUPTA

ABOUT WOMAN

3. FEMININE DISTINCTION

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

IN the West women are trying to become as masculine as possible while in the East women show a tendency to remain as feminine as possible. Both these are things beyond limits. Woman too must develop as a human being, but that does not mean to become a man. On the other hand, it is not binding that she must remain as the “weaker sex” in order not to lose womanhood. Man must develop his potential, woman too must develop hers—even though both may not be exactly similar, they are not totally different either. But the problem is where to draw the line of separation between the two.

In our country, the line of separation has been drawn very easily and clearly. Woman remains at home, man outside. Woman can never go out—if ever at all she goes out, she must move under the shadow of man, remain totally dependent on him. And man too can never enter the zenana; if ever he wants to enter, he must do so after putting on the mask of a woman, by becoming a woman so to say—leaving behind his manliness. The two have separate domains walled apart with only a small door hardly perceptible in between for going in and out.

In our country, the life of menfolk is active outside—in society, in meetings, reunions, in majlises but only in company with his own sex. In the field of study, in performing some work, even in joyous festivals menfolk are our companions. Woman has no place in all these. When we remember the womenfolk, we return home, forget all those affairs, keep our lips tight about them and start talking about feminine things—about household affairs, about children, at the most a little bit of humourous conversation added here and there. Women are generally ignorant about outside affairs, half the life of their husbands is unknown to them. They are completely detached about the fate of the outside world—simply satisfied with the household requirements. They only know how to talk among themselves about household matters, about clothes, and to gossip. If a male member by chance starts discussing a serious topic after entering the zenana, then the females are put into deep waters.

What has been the result of this separation? Finding no other scope for a union, the relation between man and woman has manifested only in the sole field of the physical body in a vast and monstrous form. No other relation save sex found any expression between husband and wife. We cannot even easily think of any other relation between man and woman. Whenever we find man and woman together, our mind starts conjecturing that only and label it as vulgarity, indiscipline, etc. etc. The framers of our sastras therefore have sternly cautioned, saying: Thou shalt know man as fire and woman as fuel, never allow

these two to come together. Thus we are so much perplexed with the problem of home and of outside that we have pushed the outside as far out and forced the home as much within the house as possible, as if it is forbidden to allow the two to meet face to face.

Many will say that I have failed to depict correctly the social condition of the country. The profound meaning of the relation between man and woman of our country did not touch my gross intelligence. They will say that unlike Europe the authors of our sastras did not want to commingle man and woman as one. Knowing the separate inherent natures and dharmas of man and woman, they have prescribed separate work-bases for both. Man's domain is outside, woman's inside the house. What does it mean? Man's work is before people, woman's work is in secrecy and silence. Man will give work, woman will give love. Man will fight and clash, but woman will console him. Hard occupation needing masculine feats is the dharma of man, tenderness and grace are the ornaments of woman. The brain and the arms of man are one aspect of life, the heart of woman and her soothing hands are the other. Let her remain at home, she is in a better position to supply the *rasa* there from behind the veil; don't dry and burn her through exposure to the scorching sun. Man becomes full of *rasa* and vigour under the sweet shade of the woman's *ānchal* (border of sari) and dives into the field of action with redoubled enthusiasm. "Love of ladies, Death of warriors"—is not for our country alone, Europe's ideas were the same as ours before she was divested from her dharma and was flooded with indiscipline.

Just for this, don't say that thus only woman has been left weak and incapable. The strength and power of man is active and that of woman is passive. In our society the burden of the household falls on women. As for men, they only bring money—each one earning according to his capacity—and are then free. But man can hardly realise the Herculean strength needed to run the household with skill, to hold the steering with patience and calm under the torment of sorrows and sufferings and diseases. There may be a hue and cry, an outer glitter in the strength of man—but whoever has tried to peep a little behind the screen must have seen the silent capacity, untiring labour, unabated perseverance, dignity and beauty abounding in women. It is because of women that a strong and disciplined society has crystallised into being.

Next, from the viewpoint of knowledge, our womenfolk may not be learned scholars, but in intelligence, true knowledge and right consciousness they are not only in no way inferior, but in some cases they are fit to be the ideals for men. Being under the spell of the West, we don't understand this simple thing any more that illiterate does not necessarily mean stupid. Man's learning has made his brain sophisticated, while the intelligence of our women is simple, natural, straightforward and spirited. What is the use of knowing too many words? That is sheer triviality. What does it matter if we don't hear from our women about the Khilafat movement or the politics of Poland? If needed, let men discuss and

judge it. But why draw women into that? What is expected of women are things about dharma, morality, ideals and indoor affairs. Book-knowledge, newspaper-stories need not reach all women. It is enough if they are familiar with those that elevate and refine the nature and character. Let man remain occupied with science with his brain, woman should remain occupied with her knowledge, with her heart and life.

I don't know what more laudable explanations can be put forward to support the condition of women, their education and initiation, their work and faith as conforming to the ideal. But whatever I have given seems to be enough. Now the question is, how far is it true in reality, and even if it is true whether or not it is the ultimate ideal. Our mothers are affectionate, patient, powerful, intelligent, wise—all these qualities are attributed fully to woman by our society; it is easy to think this to be true in imagination but one who has the opportunity to test this truth with the touchstone of day-to-day life will be able to recognise there a lot of baser elements—rather the major part of it. Even if we accept this to be true, yet that truth is bound by petty narrowness—it is not beyond one's own family members, own husband, own household and children. And it is quite natural that the qualities which have not enough space and many-sided scope for play are bound to wear out and become weak and sick and lifeless naturally with time. If the field is not large then the power of itself gets contracted. One cannot always escape by stressing on the profundity alone—profundity without mobility and bounded by rigid walls does not last for long, gradually it becomes shallow and rotten. Did such a thing not happen to our womenfolk?

Woman's work is in silence and secrecy, woman is the presiding deity of the house—such expressions are nothing but our attempt to captivate the mind with a wink. To be honest, woman is really considered to be inferior (should I say, untouchable?). In practice, she is given a small field, a small subject but with high-sounding names. To remain occupied with the kitchen is termed house-keeping, to feed and nurse anyone fallen sick in the family is termed service and greatness, and to know the myths of Sita and Savitri is termed knowledge of dharma. I may have exaggerated my statements a little, but one can realise the basic truth in them with a bit of serious thinking.

Even if man's field is outside and that of woman's inside, don't we see clearly that woman has failed to advance as much in her own field as man has in his own, that it has become extremely difficult for her? If woman remains completely indifferent about new ideas, new thoughts, new inspirations which have stirred man, then will either of the two ever be fulfilled? Will the integral life of society be vigorous and sublime? We are used to calling woman *sahadharminī*—but does that dharma denote performing rituals and worship inside the house or only house-keeping? We suppose that a great disharmony has found expression in our life, a seed of ill-health has entered our society simply because a line of separation has been drawn between the brain and the heart,

between knowledge and life, between outer and inner. The fear which prompted us to shut down all interchange between our home and outside, has become the cause of our destruction. The triviality and indifference with which we keep half the body of society infirm is rendering infirm the other half also; the power of society does not get the fullest ability.

Men are always active to make of woman a bundle of matter by covering her with a veil, taking the support of a saying that the beauty of woman lies in her grace and modesty. But this not only gives no advantage or relief to woman, but merely increases the burden of man. It is a bit difficult to accept that shyness, modesty and beauty, the functions of heart and life can only develop under the veil within the four walls. Besides, there are certain functions and activities which man believes to be his own monopoly; but to what extent this monopoly is true, to what extent woman has also an equal right and duty in it is debatable. Woman is a house-wife in the house, a beloved at the bedside; is that very woman again not worthy of being a counsellor in the field of life, if not anything else, at least a dear disciple in the sadhana of knowledge?

The inner story of the revolt of woman that is afoot in Europe today is the effort of the soul of woman towards freedom. Woman is unable to admit any more as her permanent nature and as the Divine's dispensation the custom or habit of centuries framed by man and accepted by herself. She strives to build a new field, a new life, according to her soul. The first impulse towards freedom therefore appeared in the form of a revolt, as a sort of vengeance only, against the pressure from above. Woman therefore strives to have her sway over all the institutions of man, and, having found nothing else in view, to become a replica of man in all respects.

Here in India, don't we see a similar revolt fuming in the heart of Bengal's womenfolk? Not only that, are not the menfolk themselves adding fuel to this fire? Without having woman as a companion in life outside, a sense of want is moaning in man also. Unknowingly all of a sudden this fact finds expression in the stories, novels and poetry of present-day literature. That sense of want—that uneasy feeling of man hurts woman in turn even through life and work. The parents of marriageable daughters are able to realise a bit of that sense of want on the part of man in the present-day matrimonial market

That this new education and culture of women will be to some extent an imitation of man's is quite natural at the outset because neither the women nor their parents are able to find a living ideal of education and culture elsewhere. The way we were frenzied by English education and culture when the English came to govern our country, is of this sort—women are being frenzied by the education and culture of man. But there is nothing much to fear in it; it is rather hopefully positive. Just as we don't feel glorified any more by making a show of our knowledge of English, don't feel this language to be our own any more, and have now turned our attention back to express our feelings in our own mother

tongue, in the same way woman won't be able to move for long wearing the mask of man, she will build her body, her altar, according to the need of her soul.

But the first and foremost thing is to consider oneself as a human being, to get acquainted with one's humanity. What comes first is the human being and not man or woman. If for the moment woman grows to some extent in the likeness of man in her attempt to awaken the full humanity of her soul, it need not be redressed. One who has room for and right to error, has also the room for and right to truth. If this holds true in all other fields then why not in the case of woman? Let woman liberate first her human being within, thereafter the time will come for her to understand and decide that she is woman. If she attains true humanity, then true womanhood will automatically develop and adorn her.

The ancient old wall demarcating the boundaries of outdoors and indoors has become dilapidated with crevices all over; it will hardly stand any longer even if repaired with some patchwork. That wall has to be broken down and removed clean; in the open field, activities natural to each will demarcate the boundaries of man and woman; the mode of outdoors and indoors if needed will of itself be gradually unfolded. Neither the rajasic arrogance of man nor the tamasic allegiance of woman, but the inspiration of the inmost soul of both, the diverse yet harmonious movement of the common human nature in them will determine the relation between man and woman and their fields of activity.

But prior to that are needed complete independence and self-determination. Then only will there be real unity and harmony between man and woman. Otherwise one will only sacrifice oneself at the altar of the other, the relation between the two will be that of the eater and the eaten—*bhakṣya-bhakṣakayor-sambandhaḥ*. Formerly, if needed to be reviled, woman was mentioned as freedom-loving or dissolute, which reflects clearly the attitude and demand of man towards woman. But how far this attitude is tenable today becomes visible to all excepting those who keep their eyes totally shut.

BY THY TOUCH

By thy tender touch of Grace and Love
Awakened to the silent self above,
The heart now throbs with measured beat
Prone before thy lotus feet.

Soothing and warm like a candle's gleam
This being bathes in thy joy's stream,
Swimming the moonlit seas of Silence
It feels that silver touch, thy Presence!

KRIPA ANURU

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of December 1994)

SRI AUROBINDO'S book *Karakahini* in Bengali and his English Messianic *Uttarpara Speech* gave full accounts of his feelings when he found himself suddenly torn from the society and thrown into solitary confinement. Then what did he think? How did he feel, in what manner did he bear the rigours of the imprisonment, the bad food, the prison clothes, the lack of books and journals, the want of light and free air and, above all, a gloomy nine-by-five feet windowless cell? That was then his Ashram, his Sadhanalaya—his living tomb—in the worthy Government Guest House or Hotel at Alipore.

Prison life too was bearable, for after all God gave the sufferers the strength to bear even that life. In answer to a Poona Editor trying to raise a laugh over this "Excess of Godwardness in Prison", Sri Aurobindo wrote: "Alas for the pride and littleness of men... The manifestation of God, should it not be in prisons, in huts, ashrams, in the hearts of the poor, instead of in the temples of luxury of the rich or the bed of repose of the pleasure-seeking selfish worldly folk? God does not look for learning, honour, leadership, popular acclaim, outward ease and sophistication. To the poor He reveals Himself in the form of the Compassionate Mother. He who sees the Lord in all men, in all nations, in his own land, in the miserable, the poor, the fallen and the sinner and offers his life in the service of the Lord, the Lord comes to such hearts."¹

In spite of subjection to a thousand indignities, privations, jeers, insults, it was surprising that the prisoners could yet find restful sleep at night.

"It is the time when the weak of heart weeps over his misfortune or in anticipation of the hardships of prison life. And the lover of God feel the nearness of his deity; and have the joy of his prayer or meditation in the silent night. Then to these three thousand creatures who came from God, victims of a miserable social system, the huge instrument of torture, the Alipur jail, is lost in a vast Silence."²

The hardships hurt at first. But Sri Aurobindo used to tolerate them, then to ignore them, and finally to become wholly immune to them; the mind was used to soar above them, even to laugh at them; it was Divinity that had shaped the ends and regrets were wholly out of place.

After the first few difficult and dreary days, Sri Aurobindo was permitted to obtain his clothes and books from home. He accordingly requested his maternal uncle, Krishna Kumar Mitra, the editor of the *Sanjivani*, to send him these—notably the *Gita* and the *Upanishads*. Sri Aurobindo sensed the splendours of the Infinite and learned to lose himself in the "vastness of God".

He reminisces about his inner spiritual development in the following sentences:

“I called upon God with eagerness and intensity and prayed to him to prevent my loss of intelligence. That very moment there spread over my being such a gentle and cooling breeze, the heated brain became relaxed, easy and supremely blissful such as in all my life I had never known before. Just as a child sleeps, secure and without fear, on the lap of his mother, so I remained on the lap of the World-Mother. From that day all my troubles of prison life were over. Afterwards on many occasions, during the period of detention, inquietude, solitary imprisonment, and mental unease because of lack of activity, bodily trouble or disease, in the lean periods of yogic life, these have come, but that day in a single moment God had given my inner being such strength that these sorrows as they came and went did not leave any trace or touch on the mind; relishing strength and delight in the sorrow itself the mind was able to reject these subjective sufferings. The sufferings seemed as fragile as water-drops on a lotus leaf. Then when the books came, their need had considerably lessened. I could have stayed on even if the books had not been there. Though it is not the purpose of these articles to write a history of my inner life, still I could not but mention this fact. From this one incident it will be clear how it was possible to live happily during long solitary confinement. It was for this reason that God had brought about this situation or experience. Without turning me mad he had enacted in my mind the gradual process towards insanity that takes place in solitary confinement, keeping my intelligence as the unmoved spectator of the entire drama. Out of this came strength, and I had an excess of kindness and sympathy for the victims of human cruelty and torture. I also realised the extraordinary power and efficacy of prayer”³

“During the period of my solitary confinement Dr. Daly and the Assistant Superintendent would come to my room almost every day and have a little chat. From the beginning, I do not know why, I had been able to draw their special favour and sympathy. I did not speak much with them, but just answered only when they specifically asked something. If they raised any issues I either listened quietly or would stop after speaking a few words. Yet they did not give up visiting me. One day Dr. Daly said to me, ‘I have been able, through my Assistant Superintendent, to get the big boss to agree that every day, in the morning and evening, you will be allowed to take a walk in front of the decree. I do not like that you should be confined throughout the day in a small cell, it’s bad for both body and mind.’ From that day on I would take a stroll every day in the morning and evening in the open space before the decree. In the afternoons it would be for ten, fifteen or twenty minutes, in the morning for an hour; at times I would stay out for two hours, there was no time-limit about it. I enjoyed this very much. On one side were the jail industries, on the other the cowshed—my independent kingdom was flanked by these two. From the industrial section to the cowshed, from the cowshed to the industrial section, travelling to

and fro I would recite the deeply moving, ageless, powerful *mantras* of the Upanishads, or watching the movements and activities of the prisoners I tried to realise the basic truths of the immanent Godhead ”⁴

Some other reminiscences of jail-life are given here:

“This reminds me of a compliment given to my eyes by Sir Edward Baker, Governor of Bengal. He visited us in Alipore Jail and told Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘Have you seen Aurobindo Ghose’s eyes? He has the eyes of a mad man!’ Charu Dutt took great pains to convince him that I was not at all mad but a Karma Yogi ”⁵

The preliminary trial went on its meandering course while a great peace reigned in Sri Aurobindo within and overflowed without. At first he hardly met any co-accused persons.

It was on an identification parade in the jail he first met his brother Barindra after his arrest. It was at parade too that one Narendra Nath Goswami (Gossain) thrust himself upon Sri Aurobindo’s attention and often stood by his side, so Sri Aurobindo had a little more exchange with him. Sri Aurobindo reminisces:

“Extremely handsome, tall, strong, plump, but the eyes spoke of his evil propensities, nor did his words reveal any signs of intelligence. In this respect he was quite different from the other young people. On their lips were often expressed high and pure ideas and their speech showed keen intelligence, a love of knowledge and noble selfless aspirations. But though Goswami’s words were those of a fool and a light-hearted person, they expressed vigour and boldness. At that time he fully believed that he would be acquitted. He would say: ‘My father is an expert in litigations, the police can never beat him. My evidence too will not go against me...’ I asked him, ‘You had been with the police. Where are your witnesses?’ Gossain answered unabashed: ‘My father has conducted hundreds of such cases, he knows this game very well. There will be no lack of witnesses.’ Of such stuff are approvers made ”⁶

Sri Aurobindo further remarked about Naren:

“During this period Gossain developed a tendency to be curious and ask all kinds of questions. At this many felt suspicious about him. He would ask big and small questions, of Barindra and Upendra, if they knew or were close to the ‘big men of India’, and who were the people that helped the secret society with money, and the men belonging to the group outside India and in the different provinces of India, who would run the society now, where were its branches, etc. The news of Gossain’s sudden passion for learning soon reached everyone and his intimacy with Shamsul Alam too, instead of remaining a confidential love-talk, became an open secret. There was a good deal of comment over this and it was noticed by some that these ever new questions would sprout in Gossain’s mind after every visit from the police. It is needless to add that he did not receive satisfactory answers to his questions. When these things were being first talked

about among the accused, Gossain himself had confessed that the police were trying to persuade him in a number of ways to turn into a 'King's approver'. He had once mentioned this to me in the court..."

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References

- 1 *Tales of Prison Life* by Sri Aurobindo, translated by Sisir Kumar Ghosh, from the Bengali (Third Ed , January 1985), pp 35, 36
- 2 *Ibid* , pp 42, 43
- 3 *Ibid* , pp 61, 62
- 4 *Ibid* , pp 62, 63, 64
- 5 Talk of 3 January, 1939, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, by Nirodbaran (Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir, 1966), p 147
- 6 *Tales of Prison Life*, pp 45, 46
- 7 *Ibid* , p 98

O FIRE!

KINDLE. O Fire!
 Kindle, kindle
 Ever more.
 Burn higher,
 Yet higher
 And give the warmth
 Of my restless
 And rest-seeking heart
 To my Beloved.

Though unbearable
 Yet desirable,
 Consume all dross
 And purify this being gross.

Burn brighter
 And straighter
 Clarioning
 The footsteps
 Of a golden future.

ASHALATA DASH

FISH DREAMS

ONCE I swam in limitless deeps
—Blue green silver black—
Unaware of expanse
Yet carrying endless space with me
Firm in ocean's clasp.

Now I swim in a bowl.

It's also endless—round and round....
But the medium I move in has lost all hue
And sea has solidified
Inches from my eyes.

Outside
Something like seaweed sways,
New lights and colours come and go,
Strange creatures loom and peer and disappear.

I peer back, but cannot see
Where they come from, where they go.

Nothing can get inside this skin to eat me,
I suppose.
But it feels like a trap.
And what if the bowl breaks?

Remembering,
I miss the purple hollows,
The undersea shadows,
Ocean's extent,
The great depths buoying me up.

Sometimes in dreams I swim
Beyond bowl's rim
Through warm gold-blue light
Where fins become wings in flight—
A new vastness my all-embracing element.

SHRADDHAVAN

MUSINGS ON PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1994)

2. AWAITING OUR LORD

Part One

THROUGHOUT the ages, devotees and aspiring yogis have done unimaginable Tapasyas, borne unbearable pain, in short have moved heaven and earth to have the Darshan of their Lord. It is said that so intense used to be the pain of Sri Radha at parting from Sri Krishna that blood used to ooze out from each pore of her skin. Nor is this phenomenon an imagination or an exaggeration by the poets and devotees, because in recent times when Sri Ramakrishna did Tapasya in Radha bhava, totally identifying himself with Sri Radha, so much so that he became extremely beautiful and while he was dressed in female attire by the women of the Mathura Babu's family, people mistook him for a woman of high rank. At that time he experienced the same excruciating pain which Sri Radha is said to have felt, and also the resultant phenomenon of blood oozing out of the pores of his skin. This sacred manifestation was witnessed and attested to by impeccable persons. The fact of the intense and excruciating pain the devotee suffered on being parted from his *ārādhyā devatā*, his chosen deity, has been a recognised feature of all spiritual and religious disciplines be they Eastern or Western.

The songs of Mira Bai, Kabir, Ramprasad, Andal and of countless other saint poets and seekers of India, the chronicles of the Sufis as well as of the Christian saints (the stigmata appear even today) are too well known and well-documented to be doubted.

But it is not the only way. The age of violent tapasya and Vaishnava ethos, of ecstasy of union and the anguish of parting lost its *raison d'être* with the advent of the Avatars of the Supermind. Nowhere in the voluminous records of their sadhana and the guidelines laid for this highest of paths, the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, do we read of the need for any emotional extremes. In fact even before she met Sri Aurobindo physically, the Mother pointed to a sweeter and quieter way of attaining a union with the Divine. On February 10, 1913 she wrote in her diary, *Prayers and Meditations*:

All those who seek Thee with ardour should understand that Thou art there whenever there is need of Thee; and if they could have the supreme faith to give up seeking Thee, but rather to await Thee, at each moment putting themselves integrally at Thy service, Thou wouldst be there whenever there was need of Thee, and is there not always need of Thee

with us, whatever may be the different, and often unexpected, forms of manifestation?

The secret of *siddhi* is then to await in a joyous, expectant and confident faith that all will be done, that the Mother will reveal herself in her own way and in her own time, that we have not to go anywhere to seek and we don't have even to seek, but only to be always listening for the soft footfalls of the Divine. For, the manifestation may come in the most unexpected of forms. An opening flower, the rust and gold of a falling leaf, an animal seen fleeing away, an elemental entity, a crystal or any other formation of the mineral world, a laughing child or a fleeing cloud—anything and everything can manifest the Divine, or, if she so chooses, she can appear before us in her familiar or transcendent forms also. Let us not spoil and delay the manifestation by our vain imaginings. All that is asked of us is to await with trust. In another prayer written on December 5, 1912 the Mother clarifies the requisites:

In Peace and Silence the Eternal manifests; allow nothing to disturb you and the Eternal will manifest; have perfect equality in face of all and the Eternal will be there.... Yes, we should not put too much intensity, too much effort into our seeking for Thee; the effort and intensity become a veil in front of Thee; we must not desire to see Thee, for that is still a mental agitation which obscures Thy Eternal Presence; it is in the most complete Peace, Serenity and Equality that all is Thou even as Thou art all, and the least vibration in this perfectly pure and calm atmosphere is an obstacle to Thy manifestation. No haste, no inquietude, no tension, Thou, nothing but Thou, without any analysis or any objectivising, and Thou art there without a possible doubt, for all becomes a Holy Peace and a Sacred Silence.

And that is better than all the meditations in the world

This then is the simple secret and silent way to find our sweet Mother—to quietly await in total trust, at each moment yet without any tension, her Divine Grace.

Part Two

The devotee and the aspiring yogi of the Integral Yoga is constantly baffled by the throng of crowding events which as if conspire to shake him down from the precarious perch of equality on which he has somehow found a toe-hold. The Gods seem to join hands to topple him, people provoke him, the door-bell rings constantly, irrationally, almost in hostility to draw him back when he is about to drift in some inner ecstasy. The sadhaks and sadhikas try their best to create a sea of harmony around their frail fort of trance. Yet as even the Indian Ocean

around Lanka could not save it from destruction, in the same way our hard-earned quietude is constantly intruded upon and destroyed, our small success is annulled by the hordes of universal lower nature, ours and others'.

In this context let me narrate two incidents. My neighbour, out of compassion, fed two stray dogs which had made the pavement under the window of my bedroom their home and for six years barked half the night to make reposeful sleep impossible for me. Something in me found it most unjust but I was helpless against my influential neighbour. I was especially worried because the barking woke me up several times each night with sharp pain in the heart. The doctors upon examining me said that there was nothing wrong with my cardiovascular system. Still the pain was so sharp that I could not help being worried. One day in answer to my prayer the Mother led me to a passage where she had explained that when the being goes out of the body at night and some sudden disturbance makes it rush back into the body it experiences great pain. Now the phenomenon was explained. I had the habit of leaving my body at night. When I understood the cause of my pain I became free of my worry. Soon the dogs also died mysteriously.

One day my other neighbour on the other side of my house fixed a loud-speaker just under my window to celebrate some auspicious occasion in his family. The din was so hellish that my tiny house reverberated and I could not bear the onslaught and went to the Ashram and sat there till the gate was closed at 11 p.m. Then I had to return home. The cacophony of Tamil film songs made sleep impossible. Closing the window only slightly muffled the racket. I was truly upset. Then I asked myself, "What would happen if I could not sleep?" My seething vital answered that if I could not sleep I would not get enough rest and consequently it would not be possible for me to wake up in time for my daily reading and translation of *Savitri* early in the morning—a work which was very important for me. For once my mind, under the psychic influence, chided my agitated vital thus, "There is nothing you can do about the situation and neither is it your fault. Then why worry? If the Mother wants you to do this work she will send you sleep." With this thought my heart was relieved of its futile agitation. And the marvel was that as soon as my head touched the pillow I drifted into a deep invigorating sleep in spite of the night-long blaring of the loudspeaker, one meter from my bed.

It is sufficient to make it clear to us that if we would constantly and steadily advance, it is imperative for us to accept with resignation the things which we can not change and for which we are not responsible. On August 2, 1913 the Mother wrote in her diary:

This morning, as I was glancing over the month that is beginning and wondering how I could serve Thee better, I heard the small voice within like a murmur in the silence, and this is what it said to me: "See how very little

all outer circumstances matter. Why strive and strain so to realise thy own conception of Truth? Be more supple, more trusting. The only duty is not to let oneself be troubled by anything. To torment oneself about doing the right thing causes as much harm as a bad will. Only in a calm as of deep waters can be found the possibility of True Service.”

This then is the secret, *Be more supple, more trusting*. How irrational is it for a child who has an omnipotent loving Mother to worry about anything? Do we not belong to the Mother? Are we not forever sheltered in her arms? Then why be troubled by anything? The constant worry about doing the right thing is detrimental to our own progress. Let us do whatsoever has to be done to the best of our ability, without worrying if it is a very poor ‘best’ at best, for we are imperfect creatures. And the results of this attitude can be truly striking. The Mother continues her prayer,

And this reply was so luminous and pure, it carried within itself such a striking reality, that the state it described was communicated without any difficulty. It seemed to me I was floating in the calm of deep waters; I understood; I saw clearly what the best attitude would be; and now I have only to ask Thee, O Sublime Master, my Supreme Teacher, to give me the strength and clear-sightedness I need to remain constantly in this state.

This, then, has to be our prayer and surely in answer we will receive from our sweet Divine Mother the response,

“Do not torment thyself, child. Silence, peace, peace.”

(To be continued)

SHYAM KUMARI

EVENING MEDITATION AT THE SAMADHI

"Beauty is an invitation to what is within us."

Emerson

THIS is the Divine Moment,
The Hour of God,
The hour for collective in-gathering
At the SAMADHI;
A Centre of Peace and Serenity,
'Tis Heaven crammed into one spotless speck
In the Scheme of Infinity.

The Presence that is here
At the SAMADHI (The Soul's Repose)
Is the same Cosmic Presence,
Which the spirit of Man,
In all time and clime,
Has felt and adored and invoked
Within him and without,
In all Nature around him,
At all temples,
At all places of worship and pilgrimage.

Jerusalem is here, Mecca is here,
Here Varanasi of old and Bodhgaya;
They are where they are,
For they are nowhere and everywhere;
They belong to none and to everyone.
They are people's shrines,
The physical shrine-symbol
Of the intangible Collective Self—
The Universal Spirit without
And within every man's inner Temple:
The Jerusalem and the Mecca,
The Varanasi and the Bodhgaya
Or the Kingdom of God within us all.

Men of all walks of life
From all over the world flock here;
Men of all colour, all manner, all creed
Come here, stand or sit a while

To soothe or heal the severed Communion,
 Or to reflect upon the nature of things,
 To feel the Eternal's Breath
 On the waters of their being,
 To impress the Infinite's Image
 On the mirror of their finite self,
 To aspire or pray, to worship or pay their homage:
 To retain in their bosom
 The Moment's precious appeasement
 Amidst the many cares and chores of life.

As they pray, out of their heart,
 From the spirit's utter nakedness,
 The best in Man rises up
 (Even as the incense smoke spirals
 And fades into nothingness);
 Then no figures of speech are they,
 Nor figures, as it were, of flesh and blood,
 But silhouettes of aspiration and meditation,
 Or entranced features of silent intimations
 In varied psychic moods and modes
 At the Altar of self-regeneration.

What do they pray for?
 What wish or desire?
 Are they granted what they ask for?
 Do they succeed in their high endeavour?

Granted or not, succeed they or not,
 Some time or other,
 Before the inner Altar,
 Stand they must
 To look the indwelling Deity in the face;
 Or come here they must,
 Or proceed elsewhere
 To other sacred places,
 Like tragic moths inexorably drawn to light;
 Thus self-flung, they shed their baser elements
 And seem re-charged and re-possessed,
 Indrawn and other-worldly

In the infinite endlessness of Space,

In the infinite timelessness of Eternity,
 What relevance has Man or his Vanity,
 When earth itself is almost a nullity?...
 Yet how fascinating to behold
 This undying Faith in God—
 This wondrous Belief of Man that his prayers
 Are heard by a Superconscient Being,
 His wishes granted by the benign Bountiful,
 His sins cancelled by the All-Merciful!

Ah, hapless prisoners of self-delusion,
 Helpless victims of an Ancestral Superstition,
 Like trapped flies in the spider's web,
 Or netted birds vainly struggling for release!
 It all seems like a mad rush after what is not—
 After a mirage or the will-o-the-wisp,
 Or 'tis only an Ancient Fixation or Conditioning,
 Remaining as a vestige of endemic striving
 Through regular repetition of rituals unrelated!

But even as doubts
 Fail to assail the inmost self,
 Peace hangs from the "Service Tree"
 And all its leaves dance
 To the sweet touch of the soft summer breeze.
 All things in and around the Ashram courtyard,
 Bathed in this spirit-charged atmosphere,
 Whisper rumours of a blissful state of being,
 Between the sleep-world and the waking,
 Where Time seems to stand still
 And the Human Aspiration,
 Compelled by Nature's upward urge,
 Impels the Gods to hasten
 The advent of a sunnier race—
 Evolutionary beings less limited
 Than the ones hitherto known—
 The Race of the "Supermind"!

BIBHAS JYOTI MUTSUDDI

PASSING THOUGHTS

POLITICS and Economics in their *tête à tête* and intimacy gave birth to two hefty offspring: Democracy and Socialism, both vigorous, strong and fighting trim. Unfortunately, they were born incurably blind, but with a keen sixth sense, sometimes called the 'Sense of Self-interest'. There was also a female child—Social Justice. Though not blind, it was squint-eyed. We have seen for the last two centuries how these two sons have been fighting all other gods and upcoming forces. Not that they do not kick each other once in a way, but they make up because they have to live together and with each other's support.

The squint-eyed weakling sister has been all the time hoping that with the supremacy of her two brothers in the world she will see better days. For the time being, she lives on crumbs; but hopes to live in comfort, peace and plenty, and at ease.

A voice from afar (was it Society?) came rumbling down to assure the unfortunate weakling that its adopted son, Human Rights, was being sent on the scene to lend the much-needed dignity to the new life of comfort, plenty and freedom. He has even been instructed, if necessary, to take Social Justice as his life-companion to doubly assure the humans what they have lacked all this while.

But suddenly the assuring voice stopped... but why? Rumour has it that it received an S.O.S. from the Power-that-be—The State?—that Economy in her haven in the East had collapsed and her very survival was in doubt. Even the transfusion of blood by the neighbours was not proving helpful.

Her son, Socialism, fled from the field dragging the Free Market with him to where he had a numbered account.

This sent tremors in the Stock-Markets all over the West. The future turned bleak and ominous. Politics, perspiring profusely, felt weak in the knees and dry in the mouth. In his nervousness he advised all countries to strengthen their defences and double their arms and armed forces.

An appeal went out to the Super-powers to produce and export more military hardware and uncodable software to the oil-rich and developing countries and give the sinking Economy a shock treatment tempting her to live. There is nothing like *WAR* or scare of war to enliven the markets. How will he succeed in his games, Politics felt, without the manipulating power of Economics?

The most unfortunate outcome of this sudden turn was that the marriage of Social Justice to Human Rights had to be postponed indefinitely. Even the invitees could not be informed. Poor girl!

JAYANTILAL

A PLUNGE INTO THE UNKNOWN

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE UNEXPECTED

(2)

WHEN I reached Puri my elder brother had not yet arrived there. In Puri we had a big house made entirely of stone. It had big halls and spacious verandas some of which had been paved with marble. The work was not yet finished when the owner of the house, my maternal great-grandfather, left his body. Before that he handed over the property to my maternal grandmother who on her part handed it over to my mother. At last it devolved on my elder brother, and ultimately the house found in the Divine Mother its proper Owner. Now it is named Sri Aurobindo Dham where Sri Aurobindo's relics were installed in the year 1979.

Before this event, in 1961, Tagore's birth centenary year, my father offered his house at Santiniketan at the feet of the Mother. In giving shape to both of these events I had an important role to play. I shall come to the details later on. Both Sri Aurobindo Nilaya and Sri Aurobindo Dham are now directly under the Ashram Trust at Pondicherry.

We had a very old Oriya servant whom I had been seeing since my childhood as keeper of the house. He was a very soft-natured and devoted servant who was also a great devotee of Lord Jagannath. He brought me some food and arranged my bed when I reached there in the evening. Our family had a long association with that house and with that servant. I heard from my mother that when I was a six-month old I had my "annaprashan"—the ceremony of first eating of rice by a baby—with Jagannath's mahaprasad. And it has been among the best few food-articles which have had an unearthly taste for my palate ever since!

After a tiresome journey I relaxed on my bed with the cool and soothing sea-breeze lulling me to a comfortable sleep while the splashing waves sang to me a lullaby. And through all this I felt the Divine Mother's loving Presence.

That very night I saw Sri Aurobindo in a dream. A procession with Sri Aurobindo on a car, just outside our house, was being arranged. I was standing near the car and talking with Sri Aurobindo. On waking up, however, I completely forgot the subject-matter of our talk. I still remember quite vividly that Sri Aurobindo sat majestically in the car with his bare upper part of the body shining beautifully. He was facing the side where in 1979 his relics were installed in a shrine.

Another thing is also very interesting. Although I was talking with Sri Aurobindo, I was not a part of the procession which was getting ready to start; I was a mere onlooker. And it happened exactly so when the relics were being taken from near the Ashram gate. My Oriya friend, Prapatti (a name given by

the Mother), was the main organiser. He fervently requested me to accompany the party. But as luck (or the Will of God) would have it, I was in Dr. Nripendra's nursing home at that time. Still I came in a rickshaw and stood among the onlookers. When I saw the bare upper part of Champaklal's body and his hands holding Sri Aurobindo's relics I remembered my dream seen twenty seven years earlier at Puri!

When my brother arrived and we were living together, one night I had another dream-experience. As the house was mostly left vacant and as it was very near the cremation ground, local people called it a haunted house. I too felt something eerie in the atmosphere of the house. My brother slept in the southern bed-room but I slept on the veranda in order to have plenty of sea-breeze. At night the veranda was aglow with none too happy a light coming from the leaping flames of the funeral pyres and the stench of burning corpses filled the air.

Every night before going to bed I used to read the books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as well as *Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (Nectar-words of Ramakrishna) in the light of a kerosene lamp. The Mother has said that if one has a nightmare and is under some hostile attack, one should not get afraid but call for Mother's help. Now, one night I was dreaming that I had been standing on the veranda with my brother when stones were being thrown at us from the direction of the sky above the sea. At once I remembered the Mother and while repeating the Mother's name looked towards the sky in order to discover the hidden miscreants. Soon, with a fiendish yell and piteous wailing an ugly amorphous figure appeared, tumbled down into the sea and vanished. Then I woke up. It was about midnight. There was not the slightest trace of fear in me. Around me I felt the Presence of the Divine Mother and slept again absolutely unworried.

Much later, here in the Ashram, I got to know Prapatti and soon we became good friends. We took breakfast together in the Dining Room almost regularly. At that time I spoke to him about our Puri House and also of my secret wish that it should belong to the Mother. He was enthusiastic. He said, "I know that house; the local people call it 'bhut-kothi' (haunted house)." Then I told him about my experience in that house. He remarked, "Perhaps there had been some evil force which was removed through the Grace of the Mother."

One day Prapatti lamented to me that in the Ashram there were so many Bengalis and people from other provinces but Oriyas almost nil. I replied, "I know Oriya people very well; once the floodgate is opened, perhaps they will outshine all others." I feel proud today that my prediction has been proved true. Prapatti and I were very good friends and remained so till the end of his life here in the Ashram.

My father was so angry with me that he did not talk to me for a few days when I returned to Calcutta. At last when he started talking, he poured out from his heart all the psychological persuasions that he was capable of in order to keep me out of my true path. He suggested that I could take to Ashram-life after I had

re/ reached the age of sixty. He conveniently forgot that Sri Aurobindo's Yoga was not for old age. It was not like going to Puri or Kashi (Varanasi) at a good old age seeking salvation after death or an easy passage to heaven. Finally, he threw down his trump card—"Who will look after me in my old age?" And he said this in spite of his having three more sons and four daughters and a few brothers and other relatives who were very devoted and helpful to him!

I did not tell him that I wanted to do Sri Aurobindo's Yoga not for my sake alone but to make him happy and to do good to the whole family. I knew that he would not understand. So I kept mum. I remembered how in my childhood I would always cling to him and would not leave him even when he had to go outside on business. This is a problem of the heart which the reason fails to solve. And he was an intellectual idealist who read *The Life Divine* thoroughly. His approach to Sri Aurobindo was intellectual. He was an intellectual disciple of Sri Aurobindo. On the other hand my approach was psychic. My psychic just threw itself at his feet in spite of the troubles of my outer being; defects, deficiencies and weaknesses of my instrumental parts. Also I read in one of the talks by the Mother wherein she says something like this: "If you love somebody and want to help him, you can do it better by praying to the Divine than by remaining with him physically." This helped me to take the final decision. In August 1953, when my father was at Santiniketan, I left for Pondicherry without informing him.

Thus I took the final plunge!

ABANI SINHA

ABOUT PAINTING THE MOTHER

SOME years after the passing of the Mother, a visitor friend of X mentioned that a painter in her city had painted many beautiful portraits of the Mother. X requested her to bring one for him. Next year the kind lady brought one. X was overjoyed and took it to the Ashram to show it to Nolini-da and told him how he got it. Nolini-da looked at the painting and returned it to X.

He became grave and said, "Once the Mother told me, 'Nobody can paint my portrait, *nobody should even try.*' "

X asked him, "Then what should I do with this painting?" He replied, "Put it in a drawer." X followed the instruction, and later returned it to the lady who had brought it for him.

S.K.

AMERICA AWAKENING

GREGORIAN “Chant” vies with Rock and Roll on the Pop charts. There are “Angels” on Broadway and a spiritual “Perestroika” receiving a Pulitzer Prize and the Tony Awards for drama. A television series about a new “Babylon” in space communicating with the wisdom of the stars has won the Emmy Award for special effects. At the top of the bestseller list is a book, “The Celestine Prophecy”, about psychic happenstance, compassion, love, and an end to greed. *Architecture Digest* is showing interest in a new city in Southern India devoted to a new standard of living, beautiful in its utter simplicity. A new feature film is being released about the early years of Lord Buddha.

A wonderful awakening is going on in the West. A large thoughtful segment of the United States seems to be searching seriously for a higher stage of evolution. In the East there is a traditional and well-known interest in spiritual realities. Their music is more psychic and more minimal. They are interested in Dharma, a deeper theory of successful human fulfilment. They are comfortable with a theory of evolution which will join heaven with this earth. They have been finding hints among the stars for thousands of years.

The town in India, which *Architectural Digest* is beginning to notice, tries to incorporate the traditional aspirations of India, so similar now to the new aspirations in America. The name of the town is Auroville, the City of Dawn. The concept for this city has sprung from the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in Pondicherry. It is involved with material man’s unspoken love affair with the spirit. It is about the descent of a new stage of evolution on the earth.

The blueprint for this new small city and the evolutionary approach to existence, is found in the epic poem by Sri Aurobindo called *Savitri*. The television company responsible for *Babylon-5* has shown a budding interest in making this epic into a television series. It is the story of a woman’s love for a man. The love here transcends all previous love affairs in intensity and spiritual depth. It goes beyond infatuation, beyond compassion, beyond human sharing, beyond the love of the angels, beyond death towards a whole new stage of evolution. Visual treatments have already been done in outline for 31 of the 49 cantos of the poem.

Perhaps the key to the great future of mankind is the union of East and West. It is encouraging, if this is true, that a powerful design magazine is noticing, and that the powerful medium of American television is noticing too.

AUROWILLY (WILLIAM NETTER)

ARCHETYPES OF LIBERATION

TEXT BY MEDHANANDA WITH INTRODUCTION BY YVONNE ARTAUD

Introductory Note

Sri Aurobindo, in *The Secret of the Veda*, makes certain statements about the psychological characteristics of the Vedic self-culture which apply equally to the psychology of Ancient Egypt. For example:

“The monotheism of the Veda includes in itself also the monistic, pantheistic and even polytheistic views of the cosmos... the idea of the One Being with the Devas expressing in numerous names and forms the many-sidedness of His unity.”

“The names of the gods in their very meaning recall that they are only epithets, significant names, descriptions, not personal appellations.”

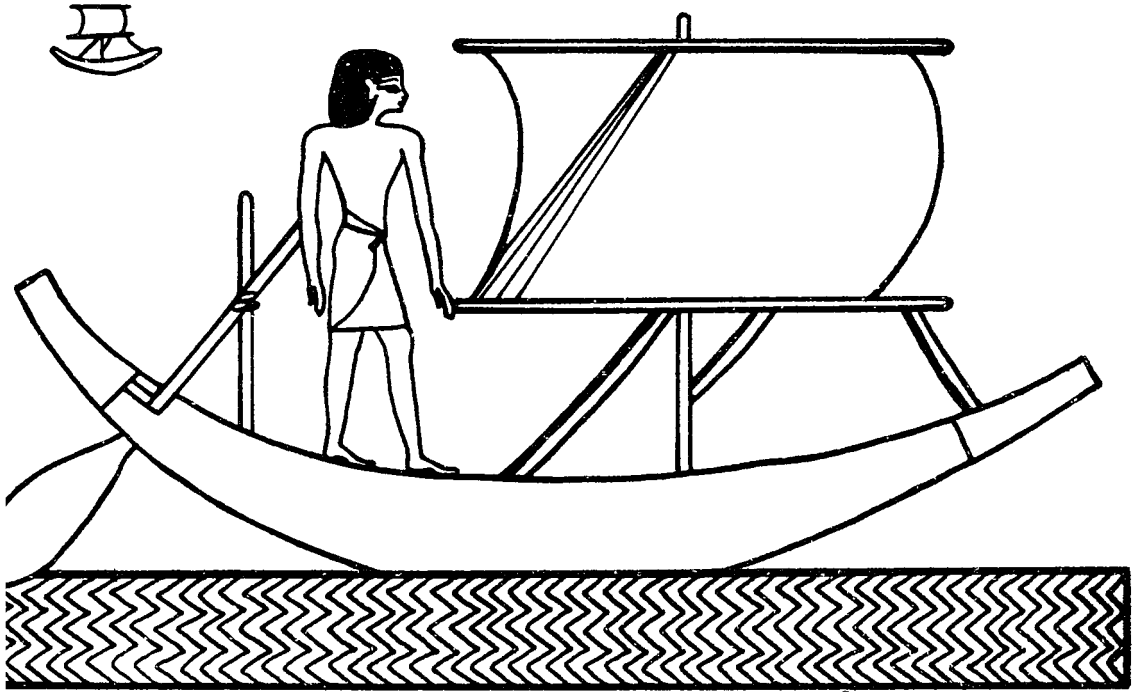
“Without exception they are described as . . . increasing the truth in [man], building up the divine worlds, leading him against all attacks to the great goal, the integral felicity, the perfect bliss.”

The gods are, in short, fundamental “psychological functions” or potentialities to be discovered and developed in ourselves—a process which Sri Aurobindo’s “Record of Yoga” demonstrates. In modern times, they are referred to as ‘archetypes’ and have thus lost some of the power to help us build ourselves which was experienced by our golden-age ancestors.

Ancient Egypt offers a vast range of psychological principles or archetypes. The 200 names of the pharaoh Ramses II are only a few of them. Self-knowledge starts from the recognition that we are many.

The story which follows comes from the unpublished work of Medhananda, *Archetypes of Liberation*. It is deeply rooted in the psychological knowledge of the Egyptian ‘rishis’, which has come down to us not in words but in symbolic images; its protagonist is a man of our modern world, with its unveiled inner poverty and uncertainty in the face of death. The big Bad Wolf who haunted our childhoods (in Egypt a friendly guiding principle in the form of a jackal, Anubis, “the opener of the way”) becomes, by the force of circumstance, his sole friend, revealing the existence of unsuspected allies, his own archetypes, whom he has to recognise and integrate as parts of his own being in order to become complete and truly himself.

Yvonne Artaud



From the book of those who go into the light

Can man exist without telling himself fairy stories?

MODERN man likes to see himself
 as a being of pure reasonableness and common sense.
 But this is just a fairy story he tells himself,
 and because it satisfies him he is convinced
 that he does not need any other fairies.
 However, only a little depth psychology
 or self-knowledge could teach him that his fairies—
 which he calls his intellectual education,
 his scientific methods, his cultural achievements—
 provide him with a very small life raft indeed,
 floating on an ocean
 of dark unknown subconscious or unconscious forces.
 Moreover it is sure to go to pieces
 in the storm which is darkening the horizon.
 The proud shipmaster, who is named 'Free Will',
 with his false gold braid,
 is really a joke:

there are no charts for navigation on the unknown
 (knowledge is another joke)
 and his so-brilliant mind starts suspecting
 that in fact we do not know where we are going.

I—the presumed captain of an adrift life raft—wonder:
 after all, who am I?

Suddenly a dark shadow appears, sitting beside me.
 Is it my own shadow?
 From where has he come?
 “Who are you?” I ask him.
 “I am the way out,” he says with a wolfish smile.
 “What do you mean?” I inquire,
 looking in vain for my old fairy companions,
 my logical thinking, my reason, my self-importance,
 who have disappeared, leaving me helpless, alone
 with this stranger.

“I am not a stranger,” he says laughing
 and his big teeth shine in the darkness.
 “I am always with you; we have never been separated.
 I am part of yourself.
 I am the only fairy you cannot get rid of.
 I am the Big Bad Wolf.
 I am your Death.”

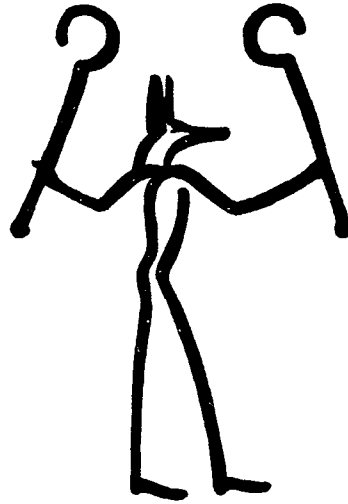
“What are you going to do?
 Where are you going to take me?”
 “To another raft, of course.
 This one is falling to pieces.”
 “Wait a moment! Will it be the same sea?”
 “Naturally,” he answers,
 “it will be the same for you:
 the same unconscious.
 The sea is part of you
 But as long as you are ninety-nine per cent
 unconscious of yourself,
 it will toss you helplessly around.”

“Is there no other way?
 Must I cling for ever and ever to a little raft,
 and when it goes to pieces
 be taken and carried by you to the next one,

in an unending merry-go-round?"

He looks at me with his big strangely shimmering eyes.

"There is another way," he says.



The opener of the way with two shepherd's crooks,
from a papyrus of Amenophis II.

"You must become aware of all the other fairy powers,
all the great eternal soul movements in you.

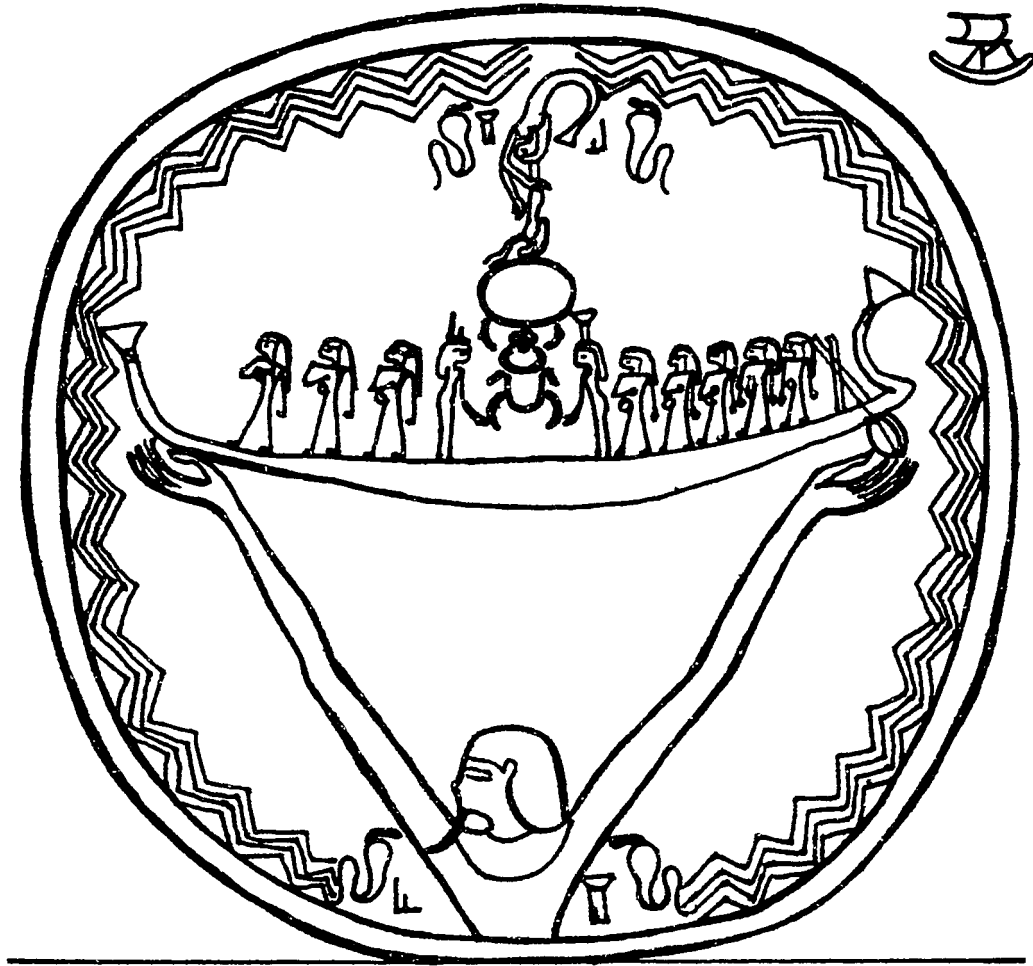
When you have done that,
then another way will open to you
besides the one you have followed up to now
from life raft to life raft."

"Can you show me that way?" I ask him.

"You are the only friend I have now," I confess.

The sea has become calm and the stars are shining
as I have never seen them before.

And around me
dozens of forms have become visible,



From the papyrus of Khonsu-mes

shimmering in the starlight.

The voice of my new friend says:

“These are all parts of yourself, be aware of them,
become friends with them.

Their fairy powers will help you
on the difficult way of self-awareness.”

As I look at my new companions,
the life raft lifts itself out of the waves,
slowly rising into a new ocean,
an ocean of stars, of self-awareness,
of being, consciousness and bliss.

ESSAYS ON THE MAHĀBHĀRATA (VIII)

(Continued from the issue of 24 November 1994)

The Mahābhārata's Synthesis of the Principles of Revenge and Forgiveness

“AN eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”, this has been the ancient Jewish principle of revenge which the modern State of Israel has followed in dealing with terrorists. On the other hand, Christ preached the principle of mercy and forgiveness all his life. Even on the cross he prayed to his heavenly father to forgive his tormentors. Christ, who was a Jew himself, thus instituted a new Law for humanity which had some impact on the Western mind. However, as we shall see, it was not altogether a *new* Law, because ‘forgiveness’ as a principle and guide-line is already well-known in the Mahābhārata, and often preached by Yudhishthira in particular. The question which we may raise is whether this principle—“if your enemy slaps you on the left cheek, offer him the right one”—is practicable in daily life. Does it not mean that we withdraw into some inner life of moral righteousness while outwardly we leave the field to the evil force? It is this problem with which the Pāndavas and Draupadī are faced in their exile after the second game of dice. In one of their animated discussions, which we will analyze here, Draupadī represents the ‘Jewish’ standpoint of revenge, whereas Yudhishthira shows himself to be the perfect ‘Christian’.

The reconciliation of these two seemingly irreconcilable positions is offered by Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavadgītā where he advises Arjuna to strike at the enemy as an instrument of the Divine whose will it is to destroy *adharmā*. “Even without you the warriors arrayed in the hostile armies shall not live... By Me have they been verily slain already. You be merely an outward cause.”⁴⁰ The warrior of the Divine who enters the battle in this spirit, will not act out of lower impulses such as anger and hatred, but will calmly execute the will of the Supreme. This high synthesis of the Gītā offers a solution to problems of life which can be sincerely followed. However, it can only be fully appreciated if we accept that the fighting of which the Gītā reports is not a mere symbolical battle and that an absolute rule of physical non-violence under all circumstances is not the true ideal. India's modern history provides the best example for the need of physical battle: the country would not have survived if there had not been men who believed in the virtue of defensive warfare.

Kṛṣṇa chose as his instrument the champion fighter of those times, the one who had the greatest fighting skill in every single discipline—and not Yudhishthira, the embodiment of *dharma*, the highest type of human being. It will help us to fully appreciate Kṛṣṇa's teaching in the Gītā if we follow closely the argument between Draupadī and Yudhishthira in chapters 28 to 37 of Book Three (Vana-Parvan)

Draupadī begins her argument for revengeful action with a strong invective against Duryodhana, against the Gang of Four which brought about the downfall of the Pāndavas and was responsible for her humiliation:

That crook (Duryodhana) with his gang has brought all this suffering on a man like you, used to your comforts and unworthy of hardships, and he rejoices, the fiend. There were four crooks there who did not shed a tear, when you were ousted to the woods, Bhārata, in your deerskin skirts! I counted Duryodhana, Karṇa, the evil Śakuni, and that rotten brother, dreadful Duḥśāsana! All the other kings, greatest of the Kurus, were overwhelmed with grief and the water fell from their eyes!⁴¹

Draupadī points out to Yudhiṣṭhira the great difference in his life-style now and then. And all this happened to a man who was always *dharmapara*, intent on the Law. Why do the righteous suffer while the evil persons enjoy life? This question is already hinted at but not yet openly formulated by Draupadī at this early stage of the discussion. While Yudhiṣṭhira has acquiesced in the situation, Draupadī tries hard to work up some anger in him. Obviously, this stay in the forest does not please her at all. She is a born princess and was quite at home in her role as a queen, much more so than Yudhiṣṭhira as a king. Yudhiṣṭhira always had a penchant for *śama*, for retirement and undisturbed contemplation. This provokes Draupadī a lot. In the following passage the one refrain of her speech is: “Why doesn’t your anger grow, Yudhiṣṭhira?” In her opinion the absence of *manyu* in her husband is a great defect, for a *kṣatriya* should never accept defeat as final. He has to prepare for a new battle and conquer his enemies. She tries desperately to hammer this thought into his unwilling mind. She tries to raise his emotions by reminding him of the misery that his brothers have to suffer for his sake.

Bhīmasena I see, unhappy as he lives in the forest, sunk in thought; why doesn’t your anger grow when the time is ripe?

Seeing the Pārtha gone to the woods, so used to comfort, so unused to hardship, your anger does not grow stronger, and it perplexes me, Bhārata! On his single chariot he defeated Gods and Men; now you see him banished to the forest—why doesn’t your anger flare up?⁴²

She then uses the same refrain with reference to Nakula and Sahadeva, and finally herself: “You have seen me gone to the forest, so why didn’t your anger soar?” If Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the Pāndavas and responsible for their fate, was able to watch their misery without being pricked by his conscience, then surely no anger was left in him, says Draupadī.

Anger and passion are qualities which in the system of the three *gunas* (*tamas*, *rajas*, *sattva*) belong to *rajas*. If a completely tamasic person lacks anger

altogether, he is like a stone or wall and it would be a progress for him to be able to feel anger and do something. On the other hand, if a man is capable of intense anger and yet does not act on impulse, but restrains himself, he is obviously on a higher level. According to Draupadī's comprehension, Yudhiṣṭhira has fallen into *tamas*. His inaction is in her eyes a lack of inner response towards an intolerable situation. She tries to prod him into action, raise him to the level of *rajas*. The lack of *kṣatriya*-spirit in him drives her mad. She gives him a lecture on the right conduct of a warrior:

... There is no baron [*kṣatriya*] known in the world without anger, without challenge; in you, a baron, I now see the opposite. A baron who does not show his authority when the moment comes, all creatures will despise forever after, Pārtha! Don't show patience to your enemies under any conditions, for with authority alone you can cut them down, no doubt of that! Even so, the baron who does not give in when it is time for forgiveness is hated by all creatures and perishes here and hereafter.⁴³

The three key terms in Draupadī's lecture are *manyu*, *tejas* and *kṣamā*. *Manyu* is the capacity of the *kṣatriya* to respond to a challenge, to strike back at the enemy rather than lie down inactively in a spirit of defeatism. *Tejas* (here translated as 'authority' by V. Buitenen) is the fiery energy which he brings out to retaliate.

Draupadī emphasizes that this energy must be directed against the enemy at a right moment. *Kṣamā* is forgiveness which can be a weakness as well as a strength. Not to strike back at an aggressor is wrong *kṣamā*, while there are also moments when the *kṣatriya* has to abandon anger and show clemency. This is a very convincing and practicable philosophy of timeless value. Draupadī further elaborates on these points by quoting a dialogue between Prahlāda and Bali Vairocana. Bali asked his grandfather Prahlāda:

What is better, father, to forgive or to seek revenge?⁴⁴

V. Buitenen's translation of *tejas* as 'revenge' is acceptable, even though 'retaliation' would be more appropriate. This interesting term of which Apte's *Student's Dictionary* lists 23 meanings cannot be easily translated, or we may say it is not easy to convey its full content in translation. The basic meanings are 'heat, glow; lustre, light; power, strength; courage'. If V. Buitenen chooses the meaning 'revenge', this choice is supported by Apte's explanation of the term as 'strength of character, not bearing insult or ill-treatment with impunity' (13). This is exactly what Draupadī expects of Yudhiṣṭhira.

In his answer to Bali's question Prahlāda lists all the possible consequences of a one-sided practice of forgiveness. It should be kept in mind that this story unfolded in an ancient society whose general conditions are not identical with

modern standards today. Nonetheless, we can see Prahlāda's psychological insight. A man who is always forgiving, he says, is despised by his servants and disrespected by other human beings. Since his servants know that he will not punish them, they will indulge in many vices and steal things from him, even they will openly abuse him and 'demand his wife'. If however, such a forgiving person gives them the least punishment, they immediately rebel against him. Thus he lives a miserable life.

If on the other hand a man always punishes others and thinks of revenge, he will be hated by everyone and lose the good-will of even his friends. People will avoid him and shrink from his company. And then, "as soon as they see an opening, they are sure to hurt him." Prahlāda draws the conclusion.

Therefore, one should neither always be domineering, nor always be gentle. He who is gentle at the right time and hard at the right time finds happiness in this world and the world hereafter.

In the next passage Prahlāda speaks on different cases which require punishment or forgiveness, respectively. A benefactor who has done some wrong should be forgiven due to his earlier merit, provided his wrongs are not too great. Also those should be forgiven who were not aware of doing wrong. But offenders who acted in full knowledge, are to be punished mercilessly even for a small wrong. Furthermore, "of any creature the first offence should be forgiven, but the second should be punished." An offender may also be forgiven in order to appease the public. So much about the virtues of *kṣamā* and *tejas*.

After having quoted Prahlāda, Draupadī returns to her proper subject, her desire to have Duryodhana and his people punished by the Pāṇavas. The insults of the Dhārtarāstras were many, so she points out, and therefore, they do not deserve mercy. It is time now to manifest *tejas*.

Draupadī has held a long and passionate pleading for anger (*manyu*) and retaliation or revenge (*tejas*). As we pointed out, she does not mean that anger which is a man's blind impulsive reaction to a painful provocation, but the effective retaliation of the *ksatriya* who has been hit by the enemy,—his determination not to let the adversary escape unpunished. It is a special kind of anger which she considers a virtue in the context of true *ksatriya*-hood. She is trying to push him to the level of *rajas*.

Yudhīsthira in his response rejects Draupadī's arguments, giving her in turn a long lecture on the evil consequences of anger. For him it is not a question of rising from *tamas* to *rajas*, but keeping his high station in *sattva* and not yielding to the temptation of falling into *rajas*. His basic message is that "the death of the creatures is rooted in anger". Only the man who controls his anger attains well-being, while he who yields to anger goes to Yama's realm. Neither the weak nor the strong person should allow himself to react with anger but they should both

be forgiving, even in distress; “for the forgiving and good is victory, thus hold the strict”. Moreover, “if authority (*tejas*) is to be maintained, anger (*krodha*) must be kept far away. Even it is better to fall from one’s own law (*dharma*) than falling prey to anger. The birth of creatures is “rooted in peace” (*sandhumūlam*). Yudhiṣṭhira’s arguments are well-chosen and in line with his meek nature. If he says “a man of wisdom should always forgive”, he speaks out his very philosophy. It is enlightening to quote at full length his praise of the virtue of *Kṣamā*:

“Patience is law and rite, *Vedas* and learning.
 He who knows patience thus can bear anything.
 Patience is brahman, the truth, the past and the future,
 Austerity and purity: patience upholds the world.
 Beyond the worlds of the brahman-wise and ascetic,
 Beyond those of the knowers of rites, go the patient to theirs.
 The might of the mighty is patience, the brahman of hermits.
 The truth of the truthful is patience, the gift and the glory.”

How could a man like me abandon that kind of patience in which the brahman, truth, sacrifices, and worlds are established; The sacrificers enjoy their worlds, the forgiving enjoy other ones. A man of wisdom should always forgive: for when he hears everything, he becomes *brahman*. This world is of the patient, of the patient is the next: here they come to be honoured, hereafter they go on the good journey.⁴⁵

This is really the essence of Yudhiṣṭhira’s philosophy. Insisting on his formula, *kṣamā dharmah*, he rejects Draupadī’s motto, “no *kṣatriya* without anger”, which has not moved his heart. Perhaps he does not quite understand what she means. In any case this motto does not fit into his philosophy. If in her rebuttal Draupadī says to Yudhiṣṭhira: “While you should carry on in the way of your father and grandfather, your mind has gone another way!”, she almost seems to say (we allow ourselves this anachronism): “How is it that you have become a Christian (or a Buddhist) abandoning the ancient law of the *kṣatriyas*?”

(*To be continued*)

WILFRIED HUCHZERMEYER

Notes

40 Mahābhārata, 11 32-33

41 Mahābhārata, 3 28 7-9

42 Mahābhārata, 3 28 20, 36-37

43 Mahābhārata, 3 28 34-37

44 Mahābhārata, 3 29 3

45 Mahābhārata, 3 30 36-42

A POEM AND A COMMENT

ISA VASYA*

[*Isa Vasyam Idam Sarvam*¹]

AWAKENED,
The mother of the Universe
Looked upon the vast spaces
Lying desolate.

Upon the clouds of timelessness
A void
An emptiness
A waste
Crying out for fullness
To be created whole
“Yā Dēvi sarva bhūteshu
Shakti rūpena samsthitā”
She smiled
Radiance lit the Universe.

Sparkling
A million dewdrops lit the azure nothingness.
She stretched out an arm as though beseeching.
In that hushed moment
Nature was born....

Slowly rising, unwinding herself
Gently with grace she laid out the earth
Trees grew, flowers blossomed,
Waters flowed, rivers streamed,
The earth was renewed and blessed
With each unravelling perfect
The beauty, yet incomplete
Till man appeared, primitive man.

Alone he stood, bewildered and forlorn,
Softly within his mind she poured awareness,
Knowledge, skill and strength.
Discovering all, he hunted and he fished,

* First published in *Mainstream* Annual Number 1992 Reprinted in *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, Jan 1993

¹ All this is for habitation by the Lord (Sri Aurobindo's translation)

Learning to live among all living beings.
 Yet loneliness and restlessness darkened his hours
 Till Devi herself willed into being
 The deepest gift of all existence
 The gift of love.

Together they dwell, Prakriti and Purusha.
 A wholeness of perfection.

Yet man accepts not happiness
 Did not Christ call out in agony
 When I give people light
 Why then do they choose darkness?

Even with plenty, greed is born
 The need for power to subjugate, destroy,
 Raping the earth, not heeding
 Earth mother's cries of pain,
 Ravaging her body, desecrating her soul.
 Devi watches silently as she herself is stripped,
 Disturbed yet compassionate her smile,
 She sees around her only wreckage.
 All gifts bestowed, she draws within herself
 Empties the land of all its wealth

Man realises too late
 She is the source—
 With terrible wrath
 Kills her who brought him all her love.
 Time rolls backward
 All memory lost
 Man is again alone
 It is the end of Brahma's yuga.

Devi once more within herself
 Draws back her outstretched arm
 Wonders,
 'When will I come again?'
 In silence the great mist
 Envelops her
 In silence.
 Silence...

COMMENT

Mrinalini Sarabhai's *Isa Vasya* is not the usual kind of verse we come across in magazines and journals. It is superior even to the work of talented writers who have made a name for themselves as modern Indo-Anglian poets. Wherein lies the superiority? It is the work of an artist with a vision, a profound spiritual vision. The theme of the poem rises far above the trivialities that concern most writers. Above all, the form and technique match the theme and the vision of the poem. Though the poem employs unrhymed free verse and is not cast in the form of an address it reminds us of the great Odes of the past. The original Pindaric Odes are said to have been composed for performances of dance. Though different in kind from the performances Pindar wrote for, sometimes *Isa vasya* comes very close to a dance in the correspondence of the varying lengths of lines etc. to the *abhinaya* of a dancer

The vision of the poem is the boundless love and compassion of the mother of the Universe. She creates the world and places man in it and blesses him with all gifts, the greatest of them being love. The mother gives an aspect of herself as his companion. (All women, says the *Devī Māhātmya*, from which the poet quotes in a different context, are aspects of the Divine Mother—

Strīyaḥ samastāḥ sakalā jagatsu.)¹

Man, filled with greed, not only destroys the world the mother has made but kills his companion. Even then the mother is compassionate towards him. But she is forced to withdraw all the wealth she has bestowed on him and ultimately she withdraws herself from the Universe. But she waits silently to come to the world again

The theme of the poem is the folly of man. He goes against the injunction of the *Isa Vasya Upanishad*:

Mā grdhaḥ kasya swiddhanam
(Lust not after any man's wealth.)

Man is asked to enjoy by renunciation and without greed. But the poet tells us:

Yet man accepts not happiness.
Did not Christ call out in agony
When I give people light
Why do they choose darkness?

¹ See Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol 17, pp 268-9

In the development of the theme Sarabhai fuses Hindu and Christian lore. By bringing the *Isa Vasya Upanishad* in a poem where the Devi, the mother of the Universe, is the protagonist, the poet blends the Tantric with the Vedantic conception. While depicting the creation of man she identifies Adam and Eve with Purusha and Prakriti. Adam and Eve are a part of not merely the Christian lore but the whole Semitic tradition that includes Judaism, Islam and Christianity. The poet's inclusive consciousness seeks to present a universal fact of life that transcends creeds and denominations.

Isa Vasya has three movements as in the Odes of the past.

The first movement brings before us the mother's creation of the world and man and her showering of all gifts on him including love. The second movement shows the birth of greed and man's destruction of everything including his companion, an aspect of the mother herself as noted at the start. The third reveals the mother's withdrawal from the world and her waiting to come again.

Let us analyse the three movements in detail and watch the unfolding of the theme and vision of the Ode.

We begin with the moment when the mother becomes alive to what is before her and looks upon the vast emptiness. Soon we see her standing tall and erect in all her infinity:

*Yā devi sarvabhūteṣu
Śakti rūpeṇa sarīsthitā*

(The Goddess who stands firm and erect in the midst of all the elements in the form of Force)

The sonorous and majestic Sanskrit vocables and rhythm breaking into the English add to the awe-inspiring quality of the supreme mother.

The lines, as indicated above, are from the *Devī Māhātmyam* (also called *Chandī* or *Saptasati*) Canto V. The first gesture of the statuesque figure of the mother is her smile which lights up the universe.

The lighting up is described in the brief stanza that follows with a very short line succeeded by a very long one,

Sparkling
A million dewdrops lit the azure emptiness.

The vast empty blue spaces being paved into a long milky way of stars small and big is shown as it were by the long line, whose length is emphasised by the shortness of the line that precedes it. "Sparkling" means, of course, twinkling or shining.

It is in the next three lines we come very close to the correspondence of the length of lines to the limb-movements of a dancer:

She stretched out an arm as though beseeching
 In that hushed moment
 Nature was born .

The first long line literally stretches itself out to correspond to the movement of the arm. It also indicates the infinity of the mother whose arm stretches out to boundless space. The second line is shorter and the third shorter yet. The gradual shortening of the lines is a gesture indicating the Infinite becoming finite in the birth of Nature.

The mother's gesture silences everything to make the birth of Nature possible. The lines bring out the dramatic quality of the great event.

The correspondence of the movement of the lines to the limb-movements of a dancer is not always obvious. Let us return, for a moment, to the second stanza to study the subtlety and skill with which it is shown. The very syntax, the incomplete sentence followed by another incomplete sentence from Sanskrit (the lines *Yā Devi...* form a clause, not a sentence) succeeded by two short sentences are splendid suggestions which conjure up a series of postures of a dancer conveying rapidly the awakened mother who, standing up firmly in the vastitudes of eternity and infinity and smiling and lighting up the universe, has looked upon the desolate vasts.

The stanza opens with rather a long line,

Upon the clouds of timelessness

Clouds veil, look vague and cause gloom Eternity (timelessness) on which the dark empty spaces hang looks like a dim and gloomy stretch of clouds. The three short lines

A void
 An emptiness
 A waste

reveal the insignificance of the vast spaces because of their vacuity. They cry to be filled up. Then we see the supreme mother's form rising before us standing firm and erect in the midst of all the elements. She smiles and her smile lights up the universe.

Even the opening stanza of the poem, in the light of what we have seen, is a dance-gesture suggesting by the symmetry of the lines—a long line, two short lines, another long line—the mother's opening of her eyes and looking on the vast nothingness.

The fifth, sixth and seventh stanzas of the poem form the second movement describing the creation of the world and man and her showering her gifts on him.

Slowly rising in her stature she lays down the earth gently with grace as though she is unwinding herself. Trees, flowers, waters (oceans), rivers unravel the beauty of the earth which becomes complete and perfect with the creation of man. The mother pours on man various gifts and endows him with the final gift—love. The gift implies the creation of a companion for man—woman. Man and woman are presented as Purusha and Prakriti.

The form and structure of stanza five suggests the vigorous footwork of the dancer—

Trees grew, flowers blossomed,
Waters flowed, rivers streamed...

The movement of the body is described in

Slowly rising, unwinding herself. .

The limb-movement is obvious in the line,

Gently with grace she laid out the earth...

Stanza six, concerned with the primitive man on whom the mother showers her gifts, suggests the appropriate *abhinaya*,

Discovering all, he hunted and fished,
Learning to live with all living beings...

The seventh stanza makes us see Purusha and Prakriti, Adam and Eve, the two in one.

Together they dwell, Prakriti and Purusha,
A wholeness of perfection.

One remembers the comment of Sri Aurobindo (Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library Edition, Vol. 12, p. 46):

The Man and the Woman, universal Adam and Eve, are really one and each is incomplete without the other, barren without the other, and inactive without the other.

The last movement of the Ode shows man's deliberate destruction of all that the mother has made and given him.

The eighth stanza beginning the last movement strikes the keynote with the

agonized cry of the Saviour of Man—who can save him, Christ himself could not do it:

When I give people light
Why then do they choose darkness?

The ninth stanza that shows man's rape of the earth and the mother's withdrawal of gifts suggests a brisk movement of the dancer's limbs.

Even with plenty, greed is born....

The supreme mother identifies herself with the earth mother who is stripped
Even then the mother of the universe does not lose her compassion—

Disturbed yet compassionate her smile,
She sees around her only wreckage.

But she has to draw back all gifts bestowed and has to empty the land of all its wealth.

The penultimate stanza sees man all alone because he kills his companion, herself a form of the mother, the source of everything that provokes his greed and the subsequent destruction. The Brahmayuga or the era of creation comes to an end.

The Devi, whom we see at the start awaking to the desolate spaces and creating a marvellous world, has to draw back the outstretched arm. Yet she wonders as to when she should come again. Her grace is abounding and love infinite. But for the present, silence envelops her.

The second line of the last stanza,

Draws back her outstretched arm .

much shorter than the first line of the fourth stanza which stretches itself out as it were, is a beautiful gesture of the act of withdrawal. There are many such gestures in the poem like the repetition of silence in the last two lines which make the whole vision "dance" before our eyes.

K. B. SITARAMAYYA

CHRISTALIS

by GEORGETTE COTY

(Continued from the issue of December 1994)

We Carry On

THE SUN was just coming up, the best time to set out on a fairly long walk during the hot summer days. Christopher and I were making our way towards the Children Centre.

Oh, Lihan Orley, I said to myself, take care of your boy. He is not all that strong yet, although quite well-developed for his six young years, thank God.

"We can rest under that tree, dear, if you feel tired," I said to him, having done almost half the distance. "I am sorry I took your pusher from you, but you no longer need it, do you?"

"No, I don't, Mother, I am big now and we can use it at the Hall for carrying things in. I don't mind at all." "That's good, Chris, you are a good boy. Let's sit down for a little while, shall we?"

"I don't really need to, Mummy. It's nice to walk at this early hour."

"Well then, we might as well get to the Centre before the heat begins. One, two, three! On we go; you to your work and I to mine. Agreed?"

"Agreed," said Christopher cheerfully.

The clouds had been gathering all day long, they had burst at last and when they did, our spirits rose and laughter was sweet in the children's throats. The rain came down in fat, cool drops and they ran to meet it with open arms. Out into the yard, down the street laughing, screaming, jumping around like little fairies revelling in the clearing. The joy of a child is such a simple thing—close to the surface, it's easy to open the door on it and they have a natural way to spread it all around

There they were, splashing, dancing in the little pool of rain, all of them dripping wet. The bigger ones invented quick games and the little ones imitated their every move. I could make out Christopher amongst them and his ringing laughter was balm to my heart.

Even this year we have taken in just over two hundred children whose parents had not yet been found. Had anyone asked me a few years ago what would be my first reaction, if we were threatened with some kind of disaster, I think I would have said then: "Save the children!"

When I volunteered to work with them, it was a natural choice, as it offered a solution for both Christopher and me. I could not bear to have him away from me. I felt that my presence would give him the assurance needed, until the blessed hands of time soothed the rough edges that seared the memory. And this

went for all the other children. For not only were they in need of the initial care we could give them, but much more: the love and individual attention. The reassurance that their broken lives would be mended and made whole again. All of us were one big family now, and they placed their trust in the few of us here. It showed in those lovely eyes and when they came up to us with their varied problems—small or large—we were mother and father to them all.

Right at the start of our community, we adopted a method to divert the children's mind from the fact that neither mummy nor daddy would call for them, when the day grew dark to take them home. This temporary shed is our home now, and we are all brothers and sisters, parents and children to one another. I decided to engage all of them, including the little toddlers, in all our daily activities. Among other things they had to collect whatever edible things could be found in our vegetable field and put them into their small baskets or boxes held by a ribbon round their little necks. The bigger ones would sort them out, clean them, and bring them into the kitchen to be cooked along with the rest of our finds. Growing food or looking for it in the nearby field was indeed the regular task of the day.

Play and occupation had to be carefully blended, for indeed there was much to be done and there was but a handful of us to do it. Most people were occupied with collecting any material that could be used for constructions. Makeshift hospitals, recovery rooms were of utmost importance—for bodies and minds needed care and healing. How marvellous is the enduring spirit of men! We were actually managing well and on a day like this, all seemed hopeful and good again.

It was during the preparation of our meal that little Miriam suddenly got up from the floor where she had been sitting, sorting the leaves and other bits around her. Carrying her half-empty box with her, she came close up to me. I could make out from the way she looked at me that only my full attention would do. Did I detect a shadow of anxiety in those young eyes? This was common nowadays and it was this we had to fight against.

"Lilian," she said, "you won't leave me, will you?"

"No, darling, of course I won't," I was quick to reassure her, after all, she already had the knowledge of an unbearable loss. A glimmer of joy returned now, but the light in her eyes was still overcast.

"And you will not let anyone hurt me, will you?" I dropped my work instantly and, with my arms outstretched, took her on my lap and cuddled her close to me.

"No, my darling, I would never let anyone hurt you ever!"

The light of unthreatened joy returned to her lovely eyes, together with a trust so pure in the promise just made to her, that it made me utter: "Dear God, don't let me disappoint her." Who would dare to break the trust which shines at you out of a child's eyes?

The happy noises of the children's games brought me out of my day-

dreaming, calling me back to our present needs.

“Rain! Water! Quick, for heaven’s sake hurry, we mustn’t waste a drop of it!” I ran into the kitchen, then to the washing shed and, like one possessed with the most brilliant thought, I shouted to everyone within hearing distance.

“Go and grab all the vessels you can find and collect the rainwater in them. Miriam darling, come with me, we will have such fun.”

My mind worked overtime—the children can take their baths, whilst we have the very showers of heaven turned on for us.

“Darlings, everybody, listen to what a wonderful game we can have right away. Take your clothes off, help the little ones with theirs. We’ll have the best shower we had in weeks! Hurry, let’s have fun, wash yourselves and your hair too,” I yelled, “and will you please put your clothes in one heap over there, so that we can wash them while we have this abundance of water.”

“My, we are going to look so fresh, like princes and princesses going to a royal ball. And we’ll dance and we’ll sing while we wash in the rain, in this happy, happy rain!”

Children need but the slightest provocation and they enter into the world of enchantment with the rhythm of ease and natural capacity. We were now inside a magic garden of joy under this marvellous summer rain. Splash, splash went our clothes, beating them against the smooth stones—a method we adopted with considerable success, since we had but little soap. With dripping hair and naked bodies glistening with moisture, our eyes shone with our hearts. The earth was sweet-smelling around us and the little puddles of warm mud and rain were like soft velvet under our feet.

We danced and we sang of rain and shine, of laughter and of joy, till we were too tired to take more of so much delight. My little ones, coming back from their revels, came skipping, dancing and hopping back into the Hall to dry their bodies, to put dry clothes on and to have our meal.

That night no one had to be urged to go to bed. Tired out, they slept peacefully and my heart told me that this joy would remain with us from now on. How sweet is life when it is simple with the pure, uncomplicated joy of the human heart.

We took turns each week staying at the children’s house for the night. Tonight was my turn to go home, so I set out with Christopher a little earlier than usual. Although the rain had stopped, it was still overcast and it took us the best part of an hour to reach home. Refreshed from the cool evening, we went lightly on our way.

“Mother,” Christopher turned to me, “do you love the other children as you love me?”

“Why, yes, darling, I am mother to you all. You are all my children, our children that is, and they are your brothers and sisters too. Isn’t it wonderful to belong to such a large family?”

“But I like being with you alone, all the same,” he said, “it’s nice for me to feel that you are close to me when I sleep. Sometimes I have strange dreams and when I am half awake I am not quite sure whether you are with me in the dream, or in the room. Then when I open my eyes and see you there, well then it doesn’t matter which it is, as long as we are always together. Do you feel this way, Mother, about me being with you?”

“Yes, dear, I must say that I do. It is wonderful for me to have you near and you are a great help to me in my work with the children too, so I am very fortunate ”

We walked on steadily now; it was getting darker and we had a fair way yet to get to our house. “Mother,” he said again, “do you sometimes feel that you don’t know whether you’ve dreamt a thing or not? I mean when you are asleep and yet awake. Do you know what I mean?”

“I think so, Chris, I think I do. Why do you ask?”

“Oh nothing really,” he said, going into himself, “I’ll tell you some other time ”

But I wonder if anyone can dream a thing which does not exist. Perhaps it does, some place, somewhere, only we don’t know how to go there. Will we know it one day, will we be so free? I would love to go to places where I haven’t been before. Then I would come back and tell the children about it. They would believe it and share with me what adults are so unwilling to accept—may be because they are afraid.

When I think of it, I was a child, living in a world of my own and I used to go to lovely places full of colours and sounds. I used to tell my mother about it, but she took no real interest and sent me off to play. So I learned to keep them to myself and decided that adults were too busy, or plain uninterested in things they hadn’t seen before. I often wondered why they did not want to learn about them from people who knew better. Namely of course me

Could it be that Christopher felt that way about me? True, the last few years had demanded all my attention for sheer survival. Had I neglected his inner world and failed to win his confidence? I will try to open him up, I decided. It is a very important thing to be a child. Its entire life is based on the dreams and aspirations of its young years. How are they to bloom, if they don’t receive the nourishment of our trust?

The sky cleared up and the stars were out by the time we reached home. Christopher was a little weary from the day’s excitement; I sent him off to bed. Tucking him in, I kissed him good night and said softly—“I too have lovely dreams sometimes. Can I tell you about them one day, that is, if you want to hear about them?”

Drowsy as he was, he sat up and put his arms round my neck, looking at me full of enthusiasm and seriousness—“You can always tell me, Mother, I will be very interested. Do your dreams have colours in them?” He didn’t wait for the

answer, but lay back onto his pillow and went off to see them for himself.

Wind-Messenger

The noise of rattling windows woke me from my sleep. “Are we in for a storm?” I wondered. More rain hopefully. I had best shut them firmly, this wind is strong and we do need our undisturbed sleep.

‘That wind, won’t it give me peace? The wind,. . . what does it say? I want to sleep.’

“Listen, listen!” said a voice, “Hear what I tell you and see...”

“What is that? Who talks?” I asked.

“It is me, the wind-messenger Keep quiet and listen to my news. It will make you happy.

“Hear this! The War Lord of the Mind, the one that had ruled since the beginning of time has abdicated! And now the King of Peace has ascended the throne and taken over the rule. Are you not glad?”

“Yes, I am, very glad,” I said.

“Good, now watch what I’ll show you:” said the voice of the wind-messenger I saw before me the majestic form of the King of Peace sitting on his throne. He was very tall, awe-inspiring, and grand-looking figures surrounded him

“You can see, can’t you? Now I open your mind’s door.” Sequences of events rolled by before me. I watched them intently and I understood their import. I observed that a harmonious ministerium was created and the Mind-Ministers were in unison with the new order and its aims.

I understood that Ambassadors were appointed and were sent forth to the far corners of the earth to represent the King. They were given the task to find out the needs of the people in the lands. The research was carried out, their findings were compiled, and brought before the King whose name was Peace

Upon the receipt of the reports much deliberation followed and it was recommended by the Ambassadors: “Since wars are largely about gains, acquisitions of territories and wealth—it is advisable and desirable to establish favourable deals or exchanges of products and commerce. This in the end promises to be more profitable, entail less expenses and bring good results. Above all other considerations, it is less painful and detrimental to the people than to make them fight. Furthermore, to set right the damages of war is extremely cost-consuming and the end-results yield only shifting and temporary gains.”

I was breathless with attention when I heard them conclude that a scientifically planned, intelligent exchange of commerce between nations is preferable to war. The King said:

“True, you have arrived at a commendable conclusion. We shall adopt your

recommendation For your good labour, you shall know the just reward of the King of Peace

“I shall give you land and suitable seeds to plant in your soil and when they bring you fruit and grain, your bearers shall distribute their harvests and seeds to all the people in the Lands.

“You have known wars for long; know me, your ruler now. As darkness was once in our midst, it has helped us better to know the Light.

“The offenders have gone from our kingdom and so too the doom they caused. Therefore I declare that the task now before us is Revival and faith unshakable in the ultimate good that God has willed.”

The King Peace rose to leave the Court and a crescendo of prayers and gratitude rose from all the people and golden rays of the Sun spread over the lands

*

The sound of the hymn-like voices was ringing in my ears, when I awoke Still dazed from the experience and wondering. Was it a dream.. was it real? I probed not my mind to answer it. All I knew was that love and peace was king in my heart.

The clattering of Christopher from the bathroom brought me to my senses. Reluctantly I opened my eyes. “Mummy,” he called, “should you not get up, we may be late.”

“Chris, come here quickly, you cannot imagine what a dream I had! Good thing you called me, we should get to the Centre quickly. I must tell it to our friends. You will hear about it there. Let me get ready so we can be off.”

The early morning’s activities were well in progress by the time we had arrived. The children began to drift into the Dining Hall chatting away, waiting for the bell to signal that breakfast was about to be served. Soon the beehive will begin doing its busy thing.

“Listen everybody.” I came storming into the Hall. “Come here all of you! Stop everything! I have a great thing to tell you.”

“Peace! Do you hear? Peace is King at last!” I slumped exhausted into the nearest chair. “I have seen him! He is King over all the lands.”

With that I began to relate my remarkable experience in all its details.

A stunned silence fell over everyone when I finished talking. Then all at once questions burst coming from all sides. Excitement ran like a fever through the place.

“How was it? Tell it again! Right from the start.”

Everyone was getting into the act “You saw the King? Describe him! What did he look like? Tell us, word for word, all that you remember.”

“Lillian, this is wonderful!” said someone—“But this was not a dream,”

—shouted another—“it was a revelation! A message given to us! Take it all down, someone, quick, before it gets lost.”

“Mother,” Christopher butted in—“I think we should make a play of it. then all the kids and everyone can know about it—don’t you think?”

“A great idea,” said someone, “he is right. That’s just what we should do. We will invite the other communities as well. This will be a very important experience for everyone. And we will distribute the script too. This revelation must be preserved.”

“You can be the Queen, Mummy,” said Christopher encouraged by the approval.

“But I haven’t seen the Queen, Chris. Come to think of it, she may have kept herself in the background, but I think she might be the Queen of Love.”

And this is what we did. Someone wrote the script; it was staged with the help of enthusiastic collaboration of the adults and children. And this is how the idea of making plays for our entertainment had begun

(To be continued)

FIRDOSI AND HIS SHAHNAMEH

*Adapted from an article by J.M. Bilimoria in the Parsi Daily Jam-e-Jamshed
of 28 August 1971*

THE eventful career of Sultan Mahmood of Ghazni has filled the pages of history of the eleventh century A.D., and it was during his reign that Firdosi, the poet of poets and the great master of all Persian poetic schools, through whose veins ran noble harmonies alternatively sweet and bitter, compiled his immortal *Book of Kings*, the *Shahnamah*. About this epic he has himself said:

*Her san kas ke Shahnameh khaani konad
Magar zan boowad, pehelavani konad.*

(This Shahnamah whoever reads,
Even if a woman, does heroic deeds.)

Firdosi was a native of Toos, a province in Iran, where his father was a gardener. Once the governor of Toos did some injustice to Firdosi's father. Firdosi went from Toos to Ghazni in order to complain against the governor and he got admittance into the court of Sultan Mahmood.

King Mahmood was mightily impressed by Firdosi's genius for poetry and asked him to record in poetic form the history of the Iranian kings right from the beginning of the Peshdadian dynasty down to the fall of the Sassanian rulers. Hence came about the composition of the *Shahnamah*.

Persian literature had spanned a period of eleven hundred years, and it was a multi-product of many minds. But it was denuded and mutilated by the passage of time and yet what was left of that vast literature was enough to inspire the Persian bard of Toos who, after long years of hard toil, was able to create a masterpiece of glorious traditions.

*Bası ranj bordam darin saal-e-see
Ajam zendeh kardum be-din-farsi.*

(I took enormous trouble for a thirty-years' span.
And with the Persian language revived the land of Iran.)

With legitimate pride in his creation he follows up this statement with:

*Bana-ha-e-aabad gardad kharaab
Ze baaran or az taabash-e-aaftaab,
Beyafgandam az mazn kaakh-e-booland
Ke az baad o baaran nayayad gazand.*

The English scholar and poet Warner has well translated these words:

The homes that are the dwellings of today
 Will sink 'neath shower and sunshine to decay,
 But storm and rain shall never mar what I
 Have built—the palace of my poetry.

At the commencement of the *Shahnamah*, in the opening couplets, Firdosi has praised Sultan Mahmood as a great and mighty king:

*Be-din namah mun dust kardum daraaz,
 Be-naam-e-shahenshah-e-gurdan faraaz
 Jehan afrin taa jehan aafreed
 Choonoo sheheriari nayamad padid,
 Yaki goft in shah-e-rum ast o hind,
 Ze kanauj taa peshe dariya-e-sind,
 Be iran o tunan ravaa bunde und,
 Be rai-o-be furmane oo zende und.*

(In the name of the exalted King Mahmood,
 I stretch my hand over this book
 Since the time the Creator made this world
 Such a monarch has never existed
 Someone may say that he is the ruler of Rum and of India,
 Of the territory between Kanauj and the Indus river.
 People obey his orders in Iran and Turan,
 And they live according to his judgment and order.)

Of course, with Firdosi there was not to be found the interwoven harmony of Shakespeare and Milton or the swiftness and fluency of Spenser and Sydney, yet there are to be found romantic adventures steeped in peculiar enchantments or heavenly images and those haunting measures whose beauty persists still even when overweighted with meanings and ornaments.

Firdosi has awakened in his *Shahnamah* the national consciousness and spirit by recording the memory of the glorious past with its magnificent monarchs, their principles of justice and generosity, the extent of their dominions and their lofty ideals which prevailed in the country. Moreover, Firdosi has sought inspiration from Iran of the old days and in the *Shahnamah* has revealed the genius of Persian literature through the grandeur of his expressions and his use of pure Persian words and phrases. As such he has been acclaimed a great pioneer and chaplain of the Persian National Movement

Sultan Mahmood had promised Firdosi a handsome reward for the *Shahnamah* at the rate of one "deram" per couplet. "Deram" was a Persian coin, and

it was of gold as well as silver, each having a different value of its own. Firdosı was all the time under the impression that the mighty and renowned Sultan would reward him only with "Derams" of gold. When the *Shahnamah* was completed, Firdosı was shocked to have been rewarded with silver "Derams", sixty thousand in number, for the *Shahnamah* contains sixty thousand couplets. Then he could visualise the slavish trait in the character of Mahmood and his mean nature. Mahmood belonged to a slave family. His father Sabaktagin was a slave of Alptagin, who in turn was a slave of the ruler of Khorasan. In great indignation Firdosı refused the Sultan's reward and sent it back accompanied by a satire on Mahmood, and fled away from Ghazni. The satire starts:

*Agar shah raa shah boodi pedar,
Be-sur bur nehadi maraa taaj-e-zar;
Agar maadar-e-shah banoo boodi,
Maraa seem o zar taa be-zanoo boodi;
Choon under tabaareesh bozorgı nabood,
Nayaarest naam-e-bozorgaan shanood,
Parastaar zadez nayayad be-kaar,
Agar oo shavad zaade sheryaar.*

(If the king's father had been a king,
He would have placed a crown of gold on my head.
If the king's mother had been a noble lady,
I would have been knee-deep in gold and silver.
Since there was no greatness in his nature,
He was unable to listen to the names of great people.
A slave's son is worthless,
Even if he becomes a Prince.)

Sultan Mahmood being illiterate could neither read nor write; hence he did not know the contents of the *Shahnamah*. He did not even care to know its contents. His Minister Ayaaz read through the whole of it and committed to memory some of its most worthy couplets and recited them before Mahmood on proper occasions. Mahmood was often extremely impressed by the meaning and poetic beauty of these couplets and once he asked Ayaaz where he had learnt them from. Ayaaz plainly replied that he had read them all in Firdosı's *Shahnamah*.

Mahmood was deeply moved and this made him realize his mistake of ill-treating Firdosı. He immediately arranged to send a fitting reward to the poet. By the time the fresh reward came from Mahmood, Firdosı had died. His only daughter refused that money and the amount was used for building a caravan-serai on the way from Nishpur to Marv

Firdosi spent the evening of his life in his native place Toos. His last days were darkened by the ill-treatment he had received from Sultan Mahmood. Nature also seemed to have gone against him. In his old age he lived in misery and poverty and went even to the extent of raising a hue and cry against Heaven and against Nature for his sufferings:

*Ela eye, bur avardeh charkh-e-boolund!
 Che darai, be-neeri maraa mustmund?
 Choon boodum javan bartaram dashti,
 Be-peeri maraa khaar be-gozashti
 Hami zurd gardad gool-e-kaamgar,
 Hami poor-nyan gardad az runj-e-khaar.
 Dootaai shud aan sarv-e-naazan be-baag,
 Haman tureh gusht aan faroozan cherag,
 Poor az barf shood kooh-saar-e-siah.
 Haami lashkar az shah beenud goonah*

(O You who have raised the lofty revolving dome,
 Why do you keep me miserable in my old age?
 When I was young you kept me better;
 In my old age you put me into misery.
 The hopeful rose has become pale
 And it is full of troubles because of thorns.
 The delicate cypress in the garden is bent down
 And the bright lamp has been extinguished.
 Now the black mountain is hoary with snow
 And the army finds fault with the king)

Notwithstanding his great poverty and misery, Firdosi became immortal, and his 100th birth-anniversary was observed gloriously in Iran as well as in India.

Correction

In the issue of December 1994, the name of the author of "A Tribute to Gangadharan" the letter B in the author's name "T. B Thulasiram" was a mistake for R

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

(Continued from the issue of December 1994)

48. THE ANKLET STORY

CITIZENS of Kaviri Poom Pattinam, the capital city of the Chozha empire, had gathered in the palatial house of Masattuvan, a merchant of considerable wealth. Invited to attend a marriage, they witnessed perhaps the grandest marriage ceremony in their lifetime.

Kovalan, the only son of the merchant and the sole heir to his father's wealth, was the hero of the ceremony. His bride was Kannaki, the daughter of Manakan, who engaged his time and energy in maritime commercial ventures. Hence it is no wonder that ostentation marked the wedding.

Extremely happy with the sumptuous dinner provided to them, the elders in the marriage hall showered their blessings on the young couple and the youngsters congratulated them.

The marriage was consummated.

Kannaki, being a virtuous, devoted and above all a beautiful wife, was liked and loved whole-heartedly by Kovalan. Endeared to each other, they lived in wedded felicity for some years.

Their conjugal bliss didn't last long. Perhaps someone gave them the evil eye? Or was it fate that willed it?

Kovalan, who had a penchant for music and dance, was always a welcome guest to the imperial palace. Since King Chozhan had great respect for the young man's critical talents, Kovalan's presence was a must in all the music-concerts and dance-recitals performed in the royal court.

It was on one such occasion that Kovalan chanced on an entrancing dancer of surpassing beauty. Her every movement on the stage during her dance-recital sent a love-dart into his jubilant heart. He grew madly passionate and searched for a way to satisfy a desire he had never felt before.

Is there anything on Earth that money can't accomplish? And for a moneyed man like Kovalan the Sun too would dance to his tune.

Kovalan's passionate love for Madhavi, the dancer, had shut his eyes to Kannaki. He lived quite happily with his chosen woman, who was also passionately attached to him. And their love bore fruit. Madhavi gave birth to a daughter, Manimekalai.

Fleet-footed Time made Kovalan realize that he had squandered away all his wealth. Penury drove him to suspicion. He suspected that Madhavi's love for him had cooled and that she was in search of pastures new.

Kovalan's strange behaviour triggered suspicions in Madhavi. Though a dancer by profession, she was as affectionate and devoted as any other chaste

wife. She suspected that Kovalan's passion for her had cooled and that he had another woman in mind

It was sheer misunderstanding that separated them.

Having lost all his riches and his paramour Madhavi, Kovalan found himself lonely. Loneliness drove him to seek refuge in the ever-loving hands of his dutiful wife, Kannaki.

Kannaki, who was longing for her husband's return and reunion, jumped with joy at the very sight of Kovalan.

Back home, Kovalan realized his past mistakes. Shame began to gnaw at his heart. The loss of all his wealth in this life of pleasure would make everyone in his native home town look down on him. And that would add insult to injury. Hence that same night, he left for Madurai, the capital city of the Pandya kingdom, with his wife Kannaki.

Resolving on a commercial career to get back his lost wealth, Kovalan asked himself: "How can a pauper like me ever think of trading? Who will finance me, and that too in an unfamiliar place?"

Noticing her husband sit in a thoughtful mood, Kannaki moved closer. She saw the sadness grow in him. His eyes misted and he turned his face away. With her fingertips she turned his chin back to her. She then placed one of her two costly golden anklets on his palm and smiled a smile that cheered him up.

Kovalan's face brightened. The weight of gold in his hand had lessened the heaviness of his heart. With quick steps he rushed to the market-place to sell the anklet and then set up a new trade.

It is a pity that fate willed differently.

"This is for sale," Kovalan said to a goldsmith.

The goldsmith took the anklet in his hands, twisted and turned it. As he examined it further, his eyes widened.

"Wait here in my shop and I'll be back in a few minutes. Keep your jewel safe," said the goldsmith handing the anklet back to Kovalan.

With great hopes, Kovalan waited. But he didn't know that he was waiting for his death.

The vile goldsmith who had recently made away with a similar anklet belonging to the queen, rushed to the king to inform him that he had found out the thief.

King Nedunchezhan listened as the devil in human form spoke. Without even inquiring into the truth of the matter, the king perhaps to please the queen grieving over her lost anklet ordered: "Kill the thief and bring the anklet."

The order was obeyed.

The news of the execution reached Kannaki through a shepherdess. With torrents of tears soaking her sari, Kannaki ran wailing in the streets leading to the scaffold.

She found Kovalan's body in a pool of blood. At her touch the corpse came to life for a second, to have a last glimpse of his beloved and bid her wait for his

reunion with her. Kannaki took the last words of her husband as a demand for justice.

She stormed the court gripping her widowed anklet with one hand and with the other she accused the king.

“A woman in tears is to be feared. Who are you, young lady?” asked the king.

“I am Kannaki, wife of Kovalan whom you have murdered for no fault of his own ”

The king guffawed. “No law on earth could ever sanction the killing of an innocent. Your husband was a thief ”

“Stop it... You call my husband a thief! What did he steal?”

“My wife’s anklet... He was caught while attempting to sell the stolen anklet.”

“Are you sure that the anklet my husband had in his hand belongs to your queen?”

“Yes, of course .. And that’s why I have punished your husband with death.”

“What does your queen’s anklet contain, O sinful monarch?”

“Pearls.”

“But mine contains rubies Test for yourself if you are endowed with a heart, O cruel king!”

The king sent one of his attendants to fetch the anklet taken from Kovalan.

The attendant returned carrying the anklet on a platter No sooner did he enter the court than Kannaki darted towards him and took the anklet in her hand. Wasting no time she dashed it against the floor

A freed ruby like a dart whizzed and hit the king on his nose

Broken-hearted the king fell down dead, saying: “I am at fault I am the thief. Cursed be me, for I have punished an innocent ” His queen, Koperundevi, was too shocked to breathe again.

The death of the royal couple didn’t allay Kannaki’s thirst for revenge. To wreak vengeance further, she moved out of the court Invoking all the holy sages, she said: “Cursed be this city which has cruelly wronged my innocent husband!”

The city of Madurai turned to ashes

49. IN MEMORY OF A CHASTE WOMAN

The sun had just set. The Chera king Chenguttuvan retired to his palace after a tedious day in his court

Once inside the palace, his face brightened at the sight of his brother turned saint, Elango. Months had passed since they had met each other.

As the brothers were involved in a casual talk, they heard a few male voices

seeking audience with the king and the stentorian voice of the guard at the palace-gate trying to drive them away.

King Chenguttuvan sprang from his seat, rushed to the balcony to see what was going on.

He saw a few hunters from nearby hills cringing before the guard. One among the hunters, who saw the king leaning against the balustrade and looking at them, nudged the others and with a move of his head motioned them to look up.

They looked at the king and then in a chorus shouted: "We have come to report a miracle we have witnessed in the hills. Please give us audience, your majesty!"

"Show them in," said the king to his guard.

Inside the palace, the hunters bowed before the king and the saint.

"It was some time before dusk," began a hunter. "We were gathering the birds our nets had trapped. Amidst the chirpings of the helpless birds, we could hear the moaning sound of a woman. We looked around and saw a young woman at a distance plodding her way towards a *venkai* (East Indian Kino) tree. We rose to our feet. Her left breast was bleeding profusely and before we could collect all the birds she collapsed under the *venkai* tree.

"We hurried with our work and then began running towards the young woman.... But an undecipherable sound from the sky called a halt to our feet. We looked up and saw a flying object descending. It slowed down before it alighted near the *venkai* tree. The flying object was beautifully decorated with flowers of different sizes and hues, none of which we had seen anywhere in this vast kingdom

"Outstepped a young man. There was a heavenly glow on his face. We heard him say to the unconscious woman: 'Arise, Kannaki, arise... I am here... your husband, Kovalan.' The lady got up fresh and energetic. She smiled like a full moon at her husband. To our surprise we saw the bloodstain on her sari evaporate. Perhaps the wound had healed itself in the presence of the flying object. As Kovalan stretched out his hand towards Kannaki, she held it tightly and together they stepped into that heavenly vehicle, which took off immediately and disappeared into the clouds."

The king who had already heard of the pathetic story of Kovalan and Kannaki through his poet-friend, Sathanar, said in a gleeful tone: "Blessed is our land for the chaste lady chose it to reach the heavens "

"Blessed still more would it be if a temple were built for her and opened to worship," said Venmal, the queen who had kept her ears open to the hunter.

"Done," said the king and marched with his battalion to the Himalayas to choose the best of stones and give it a sacred bath in the River Ganges before it was chiselled into a statue.

On his way to his destination, an obstacle came in the form of two northern kings Kanagan and Vijayan, who had looked down on the southerners and their

land. In the battle that ensued, King Chenguttuvan emerged victorious.

And for slighting the greatness of the southerners he punished the dissident kings by forcing them to carry the chosen stone on their heads all the way to his kingdom.

The blessed stone took the shape of a statue in the hands of skilled sculptors and was moved into the sanctum sanctorum of the temple built for Kannakı.

While King Chenguttavan pedestalled Kannakı, the very incarnation of chastity, and made her a Goddess to be worshipped, his brother, Saint Elango Adikal, immortalised her in his epic *Silapathikaram*.

50. THOUGHTLESS ACTION SPELLS DOOM

An illiterate brahmin woman was found wailing and moaning in the streets of Kavıri Poom Pattinam. She was young With a child in one hand huddled close to her body and a cadjan leaf in the other, she was heard crying: "Oh, who will help me? Is there anyone here who will give money for this cadjan leaf?"

The passers-by took her for a madcap. Some pitied her and some jeered at her

Kovalan, who was busily engaged in his business, took pity on her and sent one of his servants to fetch her.

"What is troubling you, young lady?" asked Kovalan in an affectionate tone.

"Will you help me? Will you give money for this cadjan leaf? Tell me," came the reply.

"I'll see... But first read what is written on it."

"Oh, Sir! I am an illiterate.. This was given to me by my husband when he deserted me. Before he left he thrust it into my hands and said: 'Go and seek redemption for your sin. Go and find an educated man who is also kind-hearted. He may help you' "

Kovalan pulled the cadjan leaf from the woman's hand and read aloud:

NO ACTION SHOULD PRECEDE THOUGHT.

THINK BEFORE YOU ACT.

THOUGHTLESS ACTION SPELLS DOOM

LIKE THIS BRAHMIN LADY AND THE MONGOOSE

He thought awhile and then asked: "What has a mongoose to do with you?"

The brahmin woman began to sob at the very mention of the word 'mongoose'. "That is my story, Sir," she said amidst tears

"Go ahead."

"I was married to a brahmin scholar who spent much of his time in reading and writing. We had no children One day my husband presented me with a

mongoose and told me to look after the animal as I would our child. I obeyed. The mongoose grew up.

“The arrival of the mongoose brought good luck into our family. I became pregnant and this child I am carrying in my arms now was born a few months ago

“I continued to treat the mongoose *on a par* with my child. And the animal too never behaved like an animal. Perhaps it was my husband who transformed it.

“But the tragedy struck a couple of days back. Running short of drinking water, I took a pot to go to the tank a little distance away from my house. My child was fast asleep in the cradle and so I left the mongoose to guard the child.

“When I returned home from the tank balancing the pot of water on my head, I was shocked to see the mongoose sitting on the threshold of the house. Shocked because there was blood all over its face and teeth. I jumped to a conclusion. ‘Oh! You are after all an animal. And you have proved it now... How dare you kill my child?’ I yelled at the animal and dropped the pot of water on it.

“The mongoose was crushed to death. I rushed into the house with a racing heart to know the fate of my child. There were bloodstains all over the floor. My heart was heavy. When I reached the cradle I found my child still asleep. Not a bruise was seen anywhere on the child.

“Heaving a sigh of relief, I looked around. I saw the carcass of a cobra torn to shreds lying in a pool of blood.

“I understood.. What a fool was I to crush a guardian angel to death? The mongoose had saved my child from an impending disaster. Oh, Sir! A little patience in me would have averted my committing a sin.

“My husband came. He saw the crushed carcass of the mongoose and the shreds of the broken pot all doused with water. He sought for an explanation. I confessed.

“My husband fretted and fumed. He then raved: ‘This animal had behaved like a human being. But you!... This animal was like a child to us. You are a heartless woman. I hate to live with you.’

“And now, Sir! Will you help?” asked the brahmin woman, her face drenched with tears.

“By all means! But what are your plans in washing away your sin?” asked Kovalan.

“By giving alms to the poor and the needy.”

“Good!” said the noble-hearted Kovalan and sanctioned her enough gold. Weeks later he succeeded in tracing the brahmin scholar, gave him good advice and finally reconciled him with his penitent wife.

(More legends on the way)

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Seventy-sixth Seminar

20 February 1994

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

Speech by Arvind Akki

WE are conducting this seminar to commemorate the 116th birthday of the Mother. When someone asked the Mother: "How should we be on Sri Aurobindo's birthday?", she answered in just two words: "Sincere and progressive."¹ Today, when we think of the Mother's birthday we feel that the same answer is the most appropriate. This is because when we speak of the Mother we cannot but think of Sri Aurobindo. As she herself once said, both of them are "one and the same Person"² with an identical consciousness

The best way we can utilise this auspicious occasion is to make a reassessment of ourselves and ask: How far have we been worthy of the teachings of the Mother and worthy to be her children?

Today, all over the world more and more people are turning towards the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. But most of us know very little of the Mother's earlier life except what she chose to reveal to us. For she never gave importance to the details of her life. In her own words:

"Do not ask questions about the details of the material existence of this body; they are in themselves of no interest and must not attract attention.

"Throughout all this life, knowingly or unknowingly, I have been what the Lord wanted me to be, I have done what the Lord wanted me to do. That alone matters."³

The Mother's was a multi-faceted personality. She was among other things an occultist, a musician and an accomplished artist. Her original sketches and paintings are scattered in several nations. Once a disciple insisted that such masterpieces should not be lost to humanity. The Mother very gently whispered, "You know, we live in eternity."⁴ Her answer is a lesson to all of us of that perfect divine detachment in life. After all, the possession of material things is not the ultimate goal of life; to attain the Divine is the only meaning and truth of life.

The teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are both personal and universal. They are personal because one feels that the Mother is speaking directly to us with so much compassion and love. She was so human that even at times we had all forgotten that she was our Divine Mother. We cannot expect so much care and concern even from our own physical mother. Here I am reminded of a question put by a disciple in 1957: "Why did you come like us? Why did you not come as you truly are?" The Mother answered, "Because if I did not come like you, I could never be close to you and I would not be able to tell you: 'Become what I am'." She and Sri Aurobindo are also universal because they transcend all divisions of religions, nations, creeds, politics and even of time and space. Whatever be our inquiry, the answers to all our questions are found in them. Once the Mother said, "If one reads Sri Aurobindo carefully one finds the answers to all that one wants to know."⁶ The teachings of both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have a mantric force and power. Here are the most eloquent and inspiring words of the Mother on Sri Aurobindo, "What Sri Aurobindo represents in the world's history is not a teaching, not even a revelation; it is a decisive action direct from the Supreme."⁷ And as regards her own teaching the Mother cautions us, "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."⁸

For all of us who are brought up here, it is indeed very difficult to pinpoint the particular inspirations for progress that we have received from the Mother. There are quite a number of things that have become so much a part of us that we cannot even pick and choose from them. For me personally, the teachings and lives of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are a great source of inspiration in several ways. Whenever I face problems in my life, whenever I am seeking answers to my questions, I always find the right answers and guidance and all the help that is required. Innumerable devotees, children of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and even those who are not their followers, have found solutions to their problems and answers to their questions. I will mention one instance from my own experience.

I had a certain carelessness and negligence in the use of material things. When I read the following quotation of the Mother on material objects it struck me at once that I should be more organised and take care of material things. Here it is in the words of the Mother:

"Not to take care of material things which one uses is a sign of inconstancy and ignorance.

"You have no right to use any material object whatsoever if you do not take care of it

"You must take care of it not because you are attached to it, but because it manifests something of the Divine Consciousness."⁹

What should be our attitude in handling of material things? In the words of the Master, "It is very true that physical things have a consciousness within them which feels and responds to care and is sensitive to careless touch and rough handling. To know or feel that and learn to be careful of them is a great progress of consciousness."¹⁰

In the early years the Mother used to visit Ashram departments. In one instance when the Mother was going to visit a department, the person in-charge suddenly realised that soon the Mother was going to come. So he quickly tied up all things that he considered to be useless and concealed them in a corner. Surprisingly, the Mother, when she came, straight away went there and later she explained that she heard the call of those things and that they had complained to her of how they were ill-treated.

In the teacher's room in our school there is a big clock. It may surprise you to hear that it stopped working exactly at 7.25 p.m. on 17 November 1973, when the Mother gave up her body. This happening is a reminder to us of how the material things have something of the Divine's consciousness and touch.

I do not know how many of us know the true significance of the Mother's blessings and the importance and value of her blessings-packets. All of us have our own personal prayers, aspirations and insistent demands to the Divine that things should be carried out in the manner we want and like.

Do we know better than the Divine what is bad and good for us? If he does not fulfil our prayers, then we either lose faith or direct our prayers to another God or deity. But this is not the right spirit of prayer. It is actually bargaining with the Divine which is altogether a wrong attitude. We usually live in our limited mind and ignorance.

I too had my own demands on the Mother as all of us had some time or other. After I read what the Mother has said about her blessings, my attitude towards prayers and aspirations has changed to a certain extent and is still changing. The Mother not only reveals to us the true significance of her blessings but cautions us as well. She says:

"My blessings are very dangerous. They cannot be for this one or for that one or against this person or against that thing. It is for. . . or, well, I will put it in a mystic way:

"It is for the Will of the Lord to be done, with full force and power. So it is not necessary that there should always be a success. There might be a failure also, if such is the Will of the Lord. And the Will is for the progress, I mean the inner progress. So whatever will happen will be for the best."¹¹

In her *Prayers and Meditations* the Mother has taught us how we human beings should learn to pray and aspire for the Divine. Here I quote one of the most beautiful prayers which will really inspire us:

“Like a flame that burns in silence, like a perfume that rises straight upward without wavering, my love goes to Thee; and like the child who does not reason and has no care, I trust myself to Thee that Thy Will may be done, that Thy Light may manifest, Thy Peace radiate, Thy Love cover the world. When Thou wilt I shall be in Thee, Thyself, and there shall be no more any distinction, I await that blessed hour without impatience of any kind, letting myself flow irresistibly towards it as a peaceful stream flows towards the boundless ocean.

“Thy Peace is in me, and in that Peace I see Thee alone present in everything, with the calm of Eternity.”¹²

When the Mother was with us in her physical body, we used to go to her on our birthdays and on some other occasions. We all have received blessings-packets from her. Today we go to Sri Aurobindo’s Room on our birthdays and sit for meditation. We receive a blessings-packet. Some of us who do not know the significance and value of the blessings-packet, treat it as though it is something casual or misplace or lose it. But we should remember what the Mother says about it:

“There are some petals, flower petals, inside, but they are charged with force, and if you keep them upon you, the contact with me is kept. So if you refer inside, you can establish the contact and have even an answer.”¹³

Whenever I go out of Pondicherry, invariably I carry with me the Mother’s blessings-packet. It has protected me on many occasions. Many devotees and disciples have countless stories to narrate of how her blessings-packets have protected them in danger and helped and guided them in many circumstances and situations. Let us then use them properly so that we are led to the right path and direction.

In 1937, the Mother wrote down a dozen things that she wanted to bring down. They are so inspiring that I am sure every person in the world will love to have them manifested during their lives. She says:

“What I want to bring about in the material world, upon the earth.

- 1 Perfect Consciousness.
- 2 Integral Knowledge, omniscience.
- 3 Power invincible, irresistible, ineluctable; omnipotence
- 4 Health, perfect, constant, unshakable; perpetually renewed energy.
5. Eternal youth, constant growth, uninterrupted progress
6. Perfect beauty, complex and total harmony.
7. Inexhaustible unparalleled riches, control over all the wealth of this world.

8. The gift of healing and giving happiness.
9. Immunity from all accidents, invulnerability against all adverse attacks.
10. Perfect power of expression in all fields and all activities
11. The gift of tongues, the power of making oneself understood perfectly by all
12. And all else necessary for the accomplishment of Thy work.”¹⁴

Today, the world is undergoing a very serious crisis. In a troubled world of present circumstances, we feel that we are lost and we do not know where to turn for help. But we should never forget that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are constantly in our midst. Their help and guidance are inexhaustible. Let us turn towards them and pray and aspire in all sincerity that their will be done in us.

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