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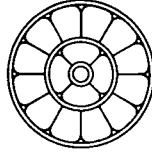
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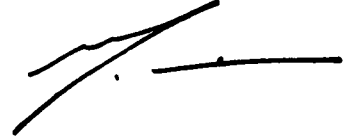


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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THE MOTHER'S THREE WISHES

I WISH

1. personally to be eternally the perfect expression of the Supreme Divine.
2. that the supramental victory, manifestation and transformation should take place at once.
3. that all suffering should disappear for ever from the world's present and future.

THE MOTHER

(Collected Works of the Mother, Centenary Edition, Volume 13, p 42)

AN INTERVIEW WITH NIRODBARAN

INTRODUCTION

It was a beautiful evening in 1987. Sitting in the delightful warmth of Shri Nirodbaran's room downstairs in the Ashram building in Pondicherry, I had a long talk with him on topics ranging over many areas. Nirodbaran talked mostly in Bengali, occasionally in English. The interview was pre-arranged with his kind permission and recorded on a tape-recorder. An early version of the interview appeared in Bengali on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday in 1993 in a collection of beautiful essays (in Bengali) offered to Nirodbaran as a small token of gratitude, love and appreciation of his various qualities, by a few of his friends and admirers. This collection entitled 'Nirodbaran: Sadhak O Kabir' was edited by Shri Arabinda Basu and Shri Ramen Sengupta. Grateful acknowledgement is here made to the editors of the volume. Since I came to learn from numerous readers that they had found the interview very interesting and quite useful in many respects, I am naturally convinced that it should be published in English so that it may reach a wider audience. Accordingly, it has been translated into English and revised and slightly enlarged to include a few points not covered earlier in the Bengali version. Readers would see how much I had taxed the patience of Nirodbaran and tried to draw him out on a variety of topics—the delicious story of his flowering into a poet in the hands of the Master; the ever-fascinating tale of his role as a scribe; iridescent memories of his intimate link with the Master in connection with the composition of the poetic marvel, *Savitri*; his crisp observations throwing light on the methods followed by Sri Aurobindo in the composition of the epic; his illuminating comments on *Savitri* from both the technical and the spiritual standpoint; insightful remarks about some disciples of Sri Aurobindo: Jyotirmoyee, Nishikanta and Nolini and a few celebrated ones whose names we cannot publish; his beautiful experiences proving beyond any shade of doubt the living presence of the spirit of Sri Aurobindo; some pregnant hints on the present difficulties and the prerequisites of Sadhana, giving us an inside-view of Yoga; a few rich clues for us to be able to make progress on the path; and above all, about "so sweet and strange and sublime a miracle"—our dearest Mother!

SUPRIYO BHATTACHARYA

TEXT OF THE INTERVIEW

(In the body of the text, I have inserted, wherever necessary, useful information, references or observations within brackets.)

Question: I would like to begin by asking you how you started writing

poems in English with Sri Aurobindo's inspiration, how Sri Aurobindo corrected your poems—I would first like to hear about these things.

Answer: I do not know why I felt like writing poems in English. Perhaps it occurred to me that, as I could not write very well in Bengali, I might try my hand at writing poems in English; for, in that case, Sri Aurobindo could give me inspiration more easily, because he himself wrote in English and English was his mother-tongue. My contact with him would be consequently deeper. Thus I started. I began to write; at first, I did not know anything of rhythm or metre—Sri Aurobindo guided me, showing where my rhythm had been wrong, where it had been correct, where the substance had been all right, but the rhythm was faulty, where inspiration had not flowed properly and so on. He made me learn in this way. I did not consult books, nor did I read poems.

Q: After you had learnt in this way, you wrote much better poems at a later stage; did you then try to write with a conscious will to compose better poems, or was it the case that you were simply inspired and could write with a natural ease?

A: I too asked Sri Aurobindo about this many times. He used to say: "Before you begin to write, all that you should do is to will and aspire; aspire for what you want, and will that your poems may be better, that you may write with greater perfection." You will see, whatever I have written, I did not understand many of them; I could understand only those poems of mine which were very simple, but not those which came from deeper levels. As a result, I could not then very well see which ones were better; so I argued with Sri Aurobindo and said to him: "Do you say this is a good poem?" He replied in jest: "Good Lord! you could not see that you have written such a fine poem?" That's why I did not quite enjoy writing them; I may say that I was a passive instrument—it was as if the Ustad was playing on the Sitar, but the Sitar could not feel anything.

To take an example: once Sri Aurobindo made this comment on a particular line of my poem: "This is a magnificent line!" I argued with him: "Is this a magnificent line? What magnificence do you see in it?" So, this is how I wrote my poems. I kept silent and the lines would come; when no lines came, I again waited in silence, and kept praying—then the lines seemed to flow; this is the technique I followed in my composition, one might say, in my voyage through poetry. Gradually it so happened that the instrument became almost perfect. There were no flaws, each poem was perfect from beginning to end; I did minor corrections. At this stage, I said to Sri Aurobindo: "Then, wherein lies my credit in this composition?" He said: "Your credit is that you have been a perfect instrument!"

But sometimes it so happened that, in the course of composition, a line had come, but Sri Aurobindo pointed out to me: "This line is faulty." I asked: "Why is it faulty?" He explained to me saying, "Somewhere in the consciousness your mind has interfered." I myself did not understand all this—I just wrote on. At a particular time I would sit with pencil and paper; perhaps I kept waiting for an

hour—no line came; sometimes it would come; but I had a feeling within that it had not come from true inspiration: I could only feel that this word or that line was not the right one—it was like that. All of you who would like to write will have to follow more or less the same way—ask for inspiration from Sri Aurobindo, pray for his help. This applies to every sphere—writing, teaching, delivering lectures, or for that matter any kind of work. But it is you who have to gradually realize what perfection you have attained and what more you have still to achieve.

Here is an important principle: to write or speak with a silent mind is a help to the Sadhana. Before you begin to write, you think of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo; so, they work in the depths of your being; thus, it is a Yoga; how many times have I wanted to give up writing and told Sri Aurobindo that, since the poems were not quite up to the mark, I had better stop such writing. But Sri Aurobindo persisted and encouraged me saying: “No, it keeps you in contact with the Force.”

Q: I suppose, many in the Ashram had such experiences?

A: Of course. Not only in poetry, in any type of work they feel the Force, feel the presence—that’s why I would say that, his presence is now much more living, far more concrete than when he was alive; but you cannot consciously perceive it all the time; you may not be able to realize that he is here; only now and then he makes his presence felt, as if to assure you: “I am here.” When you go on having such experiences, a faith grows in you, you feel strong and develop the trust that he and the Mother are indeed present, and nothing wrong will happen. Sometimes it may go wrong, or it may take time, but ultimately the Mother is there, Sri Aurobindo is there. All our work is going on here on that basis.

Q: Would you please say something about Jyotirmoyee and Nishikanta? You had a very close contact with them and cultivated poetry together.

A: I sent the poems written by Jyotirmoyee to Sri Aurobindo. She wrote poems much the same way I wrote

Q: Did Jyotirmoyee write poems before she came to the Ashram?

A: Nothing much, but she had a love for literature. Besides, Sri Aurobindo said that she had an idealistic tendency. She was a brilliant student, knew Bengali very well; she had studied Sanskrit—I had not studied it; in this way, she had some preparation. She was not very conversant with rhythm—I knew it better than she. But she had an opening, so that, without consciously understanding it, she had written some wonderful poems.

Q. But, perhaps Nishikanta had some gift for poetry before he came here. Is that so?

A: Yes, Nishikanta was a genius. He was a true poet, persons like me were not poets in that sense. He was at Santiniketan in the Ashram founded by Rabindranath, there he wrote poems; he was indeed a true poet.

Q: He was a painter too.

A: Yes, he was a very good painter. He was really an artist even before he came here; he was a pupil of Nandalal Bose. He wrote poems too at Santiniketan, but these were not of a high order; after he came here, he wrote wonderful poems.

Q: I would like to know one thing in this context: Sometimes it was found in the Ashram that some well-known poet or artist was drawn to Sri Aurobindo, spent some time in the Ashram, then all of a sudden got into a huff and left the Ashram. Why did it happen?

A: Such things in fact take place in the course of Sadhana. I once asked Sri Aurobindo about this in a letter. "What disciples we are of what Master! I wish you had chosen or called some better stuff..." In reply Sri Aurobindo wrote to me: "As to the disciples, I agree! Yes, but would the better stuff, supposing it to exist, be typical of humanity? To deal with a few exceptional types would hardly solve the problem. And would they consent to follow my path?—that is another question. And if they were put to the test, would not the common humanity suddenly reveal itself?—that is still another question." (See *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, Nirodbaran, First Combined Edition: 1969, p. 69.)

That is, Sri Aurobindo means that if the 'better stuff' (like the famous artists or poets, as you have said) were put to the test, especially if the subconscious part of their being was touched, would they not react like ordinary human beings? The subconscious is indeed the same in everyone—it is full of turbidities and obscurities, it is, in fact, the depot of all the contents of the lower nature like passion, anger etc. Those who are advanced Sadhaks usually suppress these things, or these things generally do not well up; but when Sri Aurobindo touches those obscure parts, there is no saying how the Sadhak would react. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga would not be fulfilled or realised unless the subconscious is totally transformed. Therefore, we have to go through this. (It reminded me of a line of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, which runs like this: "None can reach heaven, who has not passed through hell.")

When you first come on this path and open yourself to Sri Aurobindo, you come with the push from your Psychic Being and your Sadhana is initially to bring the Psychic to the front. But you should not stop short at this; you have got to transform your subconscious. So, whenever the Mother and Sri Aurobindo began to put pressure on the subconscious of those famous artists or poets whom you mention, they could not bear the pressure, and suddenly they left the Ashram.

Q: But, was there contact any more between Sri Aurobindo and those persons?

A: The contact remained in spite of all. About one such poet who left the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo said, "I will not leave him." I asked Sri Aurobindo: "You promised that you would not leave him; well?" Sri Aurobindo replied: "I

have not left him.” And this applies not merely to that person, but to all. Those who came here, accepted him even for once, then left him because they could not live the yogic life,—he has not forsaken any of them. A Guru never does that—a Guru remains a Guru for ever.

(To be continued)

WHAT IT IMPLIES

WHEN peace seems a distant star
 Its brightness only accepted
 But not enjoyed,
 It implies:
 A spawning of desires,
 A jostling of interests,
 A booming of ego-stuff,
 A spoiling of concentration.

When dark centrifugal forces work
 And things wear a ghastly look
 When the captain of life's ship
 Amidst the storm declares:
 “Save yourselves, friends,
 Or say your prayers”,
 It means:
 One may be a fool
 To condemn the ship, the captain or the storm—
 Neither should one plead for escape
 In a last desperate trance.
 Wisdom is it to thank the Divine
 For the dear importunate call
 And the rare chance to surrender one's all,
 To plunge within, total and whole,
 Risk everything to find the soul.

SEIKH ABDUL KASAM

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

I FOUND your letter brimming with the true You—the idealist of the piano who longs, *à la* Shelley, to be in touch with

A world far from ours
Where music and moonlight and feeling
Are one.

But surely Astrid is not just the idealist of the piano and not just Shelleyanly haunted by dream-distances. You are also an Aurobindonian to whom the key has been given to find the oneness of music and moonlight and feeling in a secret self of your own being. In that mystery awaits a reflection of the supreme Bliss-plane, the *Ananda-loka* of our ancient scriptures: this reflection is the true soul in us that has derived from that plane, a consciousness deeper than all the levels of being which we are commonly able to intuit as our personal identity—deeper than the life-force we experience within the body we carry as ours, than even the mind-energy meeting the life-force and forming our emotions or drawing still further inward to the high air of visionary idea. And yet in a genuine sense the inmost soul itself suggests hidden tracts still to be traversed, still distant. The far-away hovers before us because the authentic psyche is not fully realised by us and is itself an evolving approach to the Perfect, the Plenary. But, whatever its state, let us fight free of an agelong obsession due to the religio-spiritual temper that has worked on the earth till now. This temper has always posited the final fulfilment of human aspiration in a Beyond. But for us Aurobindonians the fabulous future is a terrestrial state towards which the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have travelled, promising us the power of a divine dust which shall go beyond the wonders of all the unearthly Beyonds.

Yes, for us the ultimate Heaven has to be here; yet, paradoxical as it may look, we cannot move in its direction without first being “distance-haunted”—for, though we do not strive to escape into some transcendent ether, there is the sense of hours, days, months, years to be crossed, the distance of time before Astrid is forever astride the Vedic White Horse turned always “Dawnward” and Amal Kiran (a name which means, according to its giver Sri Aurobindo, “A Clear Ray”) moves to get inseparably *amalgamated* with the Golden Purusha of the Upanishad—

A ray returning to its parent Sun.

Now to more mundane topics. Your visit to Paris brings up my own

recollections of that city. The Paris I knew has most probably ceased to exist, except for the perennial Eiffel Tower, from the top of which I have most memorably looked down on the ordinary world. I was only five and a half years old when I happened to be in what has been called the Modern Athens. Maybe because of the tiny Athenian hidden within me, Paris rather than London where I stayed much longer fired my imagination with an ideal. After visiting the Lafayette Galleries, I was found by my father at night muttering to myself the name of that place like a Mantra. No wonder—since the moment my eyes had fallen on artists—mostly bearded and in Beret caps—at the top of ladders reaching to high-hung paintings—artists either copying the masterpieces or commissioned to touch up fading colours—I visualised my own future as a dedication to the painter's life. I have not become a painter of the kind I had thought of, but perhaps word-painting, making poetic pictures, fulfils the ideal in its own manner, especially as the poet in me has always sought to climb the ladder of consciousness to catch sight of a Truth and Beauty above the mind and seize the vibrant name of every glowing form of them. As a direct painter I may imagine myself consummated in the few years after 1927 during which the Mother had picked me out, after a look at my hands, to be the first official artist in the Ashram and to paint for her the flowers she gave each morning to us at blessings-time. Week after week she used to examine my work and comment on it. I had also the honour to teach the rudiments of drawing to two or three budding artists who far outshone me later. For my own life-work, I had once the idea of doing the paintings of all my poems. I went no further than experiments with a couple of them: "Creators" and "Two Birds". The Mother found both of them carrying an inner atmosphere.

Thanks for the three picture-cards you chose for me at the Louvre. One of them—reproducing Leonardo's portrait of Mona Lisa—reminds me of what I once told the Mother. I marked how strikingly Mona Lisa's fingers resembled hers when she let her hand rest in a certain posture. The Mother observed: "Sometimes even physical ways are carried over from one life to another." I may add that on one occasion when I was present she remembered a numismatist telling her that her profile resembled Cleopatra's on a medallion. In one of her past lives she was present in Cleopatra. According to Sri Aurobindo, the historical Cleopatra "was a remarkable woman, a great queen, a skilful ruler and politician, not merely the erotic intriguer people make of her". (10.9 1983)

*

The news you have to give me is rather sad, not only your wife getting a twist and a catch but also you undergoing what is commonly called a "crick" which turns every yawn into a moan. But if the moan becomes a multi-toned variation on the theme of "MA", your big-built body will be a musical instrument on a highly

refined level, fit to be taken up by a divine Pablo Casals as his 'cello! Please don't think me frivolous at your expense. If I strike you as such, understand it as what our engineer Chandulal meant when in an unconsciously ingenious character-reading he described the American sadhika Janet McPheeters as "Frivolous in the face but serious in the back." Janet was quite intrigued about the second part of the pronouncement.

The question you have asked about our Mother's sufferings is an acute one. ("Acute" is the right word, it seems, in such a context) Sri Aurobindo has explained that she and he, being representatives of the evolutionary labour of all the world, had to undergo difficulties which we can have no idea of. Each of us has his special individual problems: they had to take into themselves the problems possible to all the varying individuals in the world and realistically pass through them in order to be able to give the assurance that they could be solved. Pain is one of the problems and I can very well believe that the Mother's pains in those last years of her life caught up the agony of all time for such a period. It was significant that her suffering was in one of her legs: the whole part of the body below the "chakra" Muladhar at the base of the spine is symbolic of the most exterior physical being, the possible locus of the sheer bodily anguish. The involuntary screams that used to escape her—most heart-rending sounds to those who happened to be in the Ashram courtyard—came as if through the centuries: their intensity seemed to be cumulative, a culmination of all the ravages visited on the human form in the history of life's evolutionary travail. But, side by side with that intensity, there was the fact that her consciousness remained high-uptifted and it was only the body that was suffering so terribly and that ultimately the hopeless-appearing state of the leg in which there were paralysis and blockage of circulation improved. A step was taken on the way to the conquest of bodily anguish as well as an example being set that something in one can be above the awful pain. (29.11.1983)

*

Pais's book on Einstein, *Subtle is the Lord...* is at last in my hands. Thank you with my heart as well as mind for the magnificent gift. Perhaps I should add "with my soul" because if one could see Sri Aurobindo *sub specie scientiae* (to adapt a famous phrase of Spinoza's) one would best use Einsteinian language to bring out the Aurobindonian vision and work.

SUPER-SCIENTIST

Einstein of the super-science of the soul,
He found the Immutable's space of trance a field
Grooved with almighty thought-transcending arcs—

Figures of a single Truth bent everywhere
 On linking the ultimate Suns to our mortal sod....
 A rapt geometer in the deepest heart
 Saw the long line of human hungering
 Towards infinite freedom from the drag of clay
 As no straight movement on and ever on,
 Leaving the body's woe a vanishing cry,
 But a huge curve that reaches farthest light
 And comes back kindled to the darkling dust....
 O mystic energy of re-entrant love,
 Springing immense into the Immortal's bliss
 Yet keeping earth's small poignancy your goal!

Even the Einsteinian credo (a part of which forms the title of Pais's book), "Subtle is the Lord, but malicious he is not", suggesting that God does not delight in bewildering man and that the multi-mysterious cosmos is ultimately comprehensible as well as that there is a relationship between the universal intelligence implicit in the ultimate physical laws and the systematising activity of the scientific mentality in search of truth—even the Einsteinian credo may be turned into Aurobindonian sense.

According to Sri Aurobindo, "God is complex, not simple" and, as the same poet who penned "Super-scientist" has written,

There is no end to God-horizonry....
 For the Divine is no fixed paradise
 But truth beyond great truth...

All that has been spiritually gauged so far falls short of the real purpose of the world. This purpose resides only in the creative and transformative recesses of the level of divine consciousness which Sri Aurobindo calls Supermind and of which no more than shadowy hints and vague glints have been caught at rare moments in the past. In the paradoxical speech of the Upanishads, "subtler than subtlety, smaller than smallness, larger than largeness" is the supreme Self; but, unlike the Upanishadic view, the vision of Sri Aurobindo is not that this Self exceeds our mind completely: the human mentality is a ray of this Self's highest dynamic aspect, the Supermind, however refracted or deflected the ray may be at present. Nor is this mentality the sole secret image of the Supramental: the Supramental is the archetype, the original perfect model, of everything down here. The vital force too is a godhead in disguise, even matter a masked infinite Mother of all Name and Form (*nāmarūpa*)—and to evolve these distant reflexes of the Spirit through fruit-bearing life after life, through seed-sowing death after death the soul of man has come from the Transcendent into the Cosmic. Fulfilling each evolving term and not leaving it to hang in a mid-air of half hope

half despair—such work has drawn the soul from its home above.

The best perspectives in the spiritual history of mankind have missed the soul's *raison d'être* in its earthly sojourn. The Zoroastrian-Christian-Islamic outlook has its face set towards the Beyond for a rectification of the myriad miseries and endless inequalities on the terrestrial scene. The Indian metaphysical eye beholds either Maya (Illusion) or Lila (Play). In the one revelation our planet and its fellow-travellers through space and time have no final reality—"this beautiful and perilous world", as a line in *Savitri* puts it, fades to either total nullity or to thinnest triviality against the background of a single, changeless, eternal, unfeatured Selfhood ever free from the urge to loose forth a manifold universe. In the other revelation the embodied soul carries on in birth and birth a hide-and-seek with a Personal Divine, an alternation of happiness and sorrow, a never-terminating series of lives with intervals on another plane, with no crowning achievement on earth, no surpassing of the mixed human status into a life divine. Either of these two spiritual messages lacks the sense of consummation for the embodied soul: the embodied soul fails to be fully justified. In the World-Play vision (Lila) no less than in the World-Illusion view (Maya) God's Godliness seems unfinished and in the last scrutiny a streak of arbitrariness is shown in the deity, as if He were not disposed to attach enough value to His creation or give sufficient regard to His creatures. One can even read a trace of omnipotent caprice, perhaps even a mighty and majestic malice. The trace can be removed only if we accept Sri Aurobindo's insight into the aim of existence—a complete divinisation of all the parts of earth's being in the long run by a Supermind that is divinity holding the truths of all things manifested and working towards making a wonderful heaven of earth through the power of an ideal earth contained in heaven. Then the Lord will be proved more subtle than ever conceived and at the same time devoid of the least malice inasmuch as everything in the spatio-temporal universe will be perfected in that very milieu by the practical application of the transcendent unified theory which is the Supermind-knowledge of the One-in-all and the All-in-one functioning with the logic of the Infinite. (28.12.1988)

*

Your letter is full of both warmth and wisdom or, better still, it comes filled with a wise warmth. I prefer this combination of adjective and noun to the alternative possibility: warm wisdom. For the main thing I want to emphasise is not the wisdom that warms up with its own message but the warmth that waits for the light within it to come up and reveal the reasons of the heart which the mind cannot know, as Pascal has long ago characterised them. It is these reasons raised to the *n*th degree that you reveal when you write of your conviction that, whatever the outward appearance, the Mother has won a victory and when you

remark apropos of the mystery to be faced and the enigma to be solved about the Mother's passing: "My personal feeling is that in this case 'facing' should mean leaving the mystery intact, for in doing so we allow its inherent power to open the way towards a greater depth of experience; equally, solving the enigma should entail a labour of love by the heart, not an exercise of the mind. It may well be that by *not* presenting us with a clear-cut explanation the Mother has given us an inestimable treasure, for now we are thrown into the mysterious and enigmatic works of the Spirit where answers can only be found by living them."

I can find no finer words to meet the situation. The only comment I can make to carry further the same luminous line of your wise warmth is to dwell a little on my own praise of you with the locution. "no finer words". It is in the form of words that your wise warmth has communicated itself and suggested the presence of that which no words can communicate. So I should imagine that our course in regard to the Mother's passing is not altogether to renounce speech but to make speech go delicately to a certain depth and distance and then let the hearer catch the ring of the Hamletian rounding off: "The rest is silence." The fault with words mostly is what William Watson hinted about the sublime subject which philosophy and theology seek to explore with their mental verbiage: "The Mystery we make darker with a name." But we must not forget also that "In the beginning was the Word"—and our aim should be to turn all our speech into an attempt to transmit something of the vast OM that is the heartbeat of the Eternal moving out of His inscrutability into time. In short, all our utterances should have a touch of the Mantra—the Mantra whose very form no less than content, whose precise vibration as well as description is conveyed to us when Sri Aurobindo writes about supreme poetry with that supremely poetic line:

Sight's sound-waves breaking from the soul's great deeps.

What more shall I say after such mighty verse? Perhaps I can only quote the Master again, now from his young days, all the more appropriately for the use by him of your very name:

Here where summer's hands have crowned
Silence in the fields of sound,
Here felicity should be.
Hearken, Edith, to the sea. .

Let me end, picturing you brooding on some "multitudinous" Shakespearian North Sea within your being, while I strain my eyes across the Bay of Bengal from Pondicherry to catch the truth the Aurobindonian poet in me has visioned:

We can but know brief light and fickle foam
Until through space and time we sail to win

Vespers and dawns and noons of God on some
Gigantic rapture rolling from within.

(24.2.1974)

*

You have expressed your despair that great dreams that are native to the soul should meet with chill resistance in the earth-atmosphere and cannot come into their own for all their persistence in the depths of our being. You have rightly divined that “the sum of doubts by our own close ancestors” tends to douse the lovely flames of skyward aspiration. Yes, we have to outgrow the agelong habits of our race, we have to get free of the atavism that is always at work in us. The push from the past is to be replaced by a pull from the future. But first we have to realise what exactly this pull is like. When we put it in proper focus we shall understand why and how that “sum of doubts” acts upon us and keeps its action going. The doubts come, of course, from the materialistically coloured mind, the mind interested in animal needs, obsessed by tangible immediacies and, in its finest moments, attuning itself to the Virgilian cry:

Haunted by tears is the world and our hearts by the touch of things mortal.

Surely we have to rise above both the grossness and the glamour of the terrestrial scene. But what is the reason for its drag on us and for its noble melancholy no less than its crude exultation? As I see it, the reason lies at the same time in the grip of unregenerate earth and in the erroneous view we have taken of heaven’s call.

The grip from below has indeed to be loosened, but not before we have grasped its *raison d’être*. The basis of its existence has always been seen in our inevitable beginning and our continuous development in terms of living dust. There we are right, but the mistake comes in when we believe that the dust has no destiny beyond what we have perceived and conceived so far. And the mistake keeps its hold because we have wrongly envisaged heaven as well as earth. The call from above has been misheard as much as the grip from below has been misfelt. That call has been interpreted as a command to move away from earth, even as that grip has been accepted as the enemy of all upward movement. But then don’t we distort the whole vision of the evolutionary process? This process shows dust as not only becoming more and more organised, more and more complexified (as Teilhard de Chardin would say): it shows it also as becoming increasingly subtilised, increasingly refined to make possible a rising gradation of consciousness, a growing scale of psychism. The scale, the gradation logically points in the direction of a fulfilment of the mind’s urge towards perfect knowledge, the life-force’s leap towards complete power, the body’s yearning for total health and endless longevity. In short, the full *élan* of our organic being is

towards a divine existence on earth, a heaven unfolded here and now rather than a *post-mortem* beatification and a flight into some heaven, this and not alone the primitive insistence of hungering clay has rendered so unrelenting “the sum of doubts by our own close ancestors”. Only if the religious extremism of the past gives way to the integral, life-accepting, world-justifying, evolution-illuminating Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, the great dreams of which you speak with such soul-poignancy will walk the roads of time crowned and consummated by the light of the Eternal flowing out of an earth-enamoured Supermind. (20 5.1977)

*

What you have said about my writing is sheer nectar to me—not only because I am highly complimented but also because the compliment comes from an imaginative mind of deep sensitivity and because the complimentary phrases revolve round the images at once of fire and jewel, spark and facet. Do you remember Walter Pater’s famous expression. “To burn always with this hard gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life”? He was writing in the mid-flush of the Aesthetic Movement in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. But I can turn his expression to my own uses. And I would begin by coining a counter proposal: “To shine always with a fluent, flamelike gemminess.” For, indeed, the fire and the jewel partake of each other’s nature and seem but two aspects of one and the same ecstasy of being—a magic life which commingles the bright out-quivering of the limitless Shakti with the luminous ingathering of the fathomless Ishwara. In the fire it is the jewel-body that has let loose its soul and in the jewel it is the fire-soul that has precipitated its body. Both are a single light doubly manifested, and without the double manifestation the light would lack completeness. We have to be both a thrilled tranquillity and a poised passion. In the very moment of peace a great ardour must seem caught, just as in the very centre of the dynamic act a mighty calm must be in command. Then alone a true creation can take place—whether in the immediate stuff of our psychological existence or in the visionary substance of poetry, music, sculpture, architecture and whatever else the human spirit projects into a significant form.

To put the matter in a formula of subtler synthesis: every true creation is at the same time heart and art. There has to be simultaneously the play of inner intensity and the work of outer chiselling—the cry of the freed fire with its shower of sparks, the silence of the jewel with its facets of packed splendour—the rapture-rush on the one hand and the clear-cut, cool-shaped repose on the other. If, in my writings, you have felt and seen some eloquent signs of this bi-une phenomenon, I cannot ask for finer insight on your part or truer critical praise. (4 8.1977)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

WHAT Abani Sinha has written about Nishikanto (*Mother India*, July 1995) has made us unhappy. We know Nishikanto to have been a multi-faceted personality—a poet of a magnum size, a painter of fine talent and a very able storyteller. Many of his stories were imaginary, fabricated on the spot and catered to his listeners according to their capability of following him. He said at times: “How many of them will understand me properly if I present myself correctly? Therefore I say these things, so that they may at least feel happy and enjoy themselves.”

We remember that on another occasion Nishikanto said: “You see, they know a lot about my eating. But how many of them knew me when I was not eating!” In fact, while writing incessantly or painting, the time to be given for eating was considered by him trifling. Such fits of work would at times continue up to three days. People around him got tired reminding him of the necessity of food. But he would take food only on finishing his task.

It is a fact that Nishikanto loved to eat and at times he ate a lot. But much of the stories about his eating is colourful exaggeration, often spread by himself. These stories are really captivating. But to get the proper taste of them is not easy.

What’s done is done, but it would be good if *Mother India* carried our statement.

AMARHARI GANGOPADHYAY

TRANSFIGURING FRIENDSHIP

My friendship with you is like a wine
Of golden fruit with no trace of red.
I long to toss aside baser things
 And flow to a new way of being.

You seem to reveal a new earth,
 Yet how ancient it is!
Oh, to walk barefoot on that earth
 And sink inside its warmth
Until I feel that familiar gaze,
With the sun deep like amber,
 Reflected in everything around.

I ask myself, "Can this be true?",
Yet I am not an empty shell,
Many-hued dawns flow in my veins,
 But not for a momentary life to store.

How I pray that what flows,
May flow to the eternal ocean
 Which smiles upon us,
Where it holds everything,
 Wave upon white wave,
And returns to the shore of the earth again,
 Bestowing immortality.

HERTHA

BOULE-VERSÉE

IN summer heat
Here I sit
On the flat earth
Under an uncoloured bowl of sky

And suddenly...

You know those toys?

A tiny landscape
 house
 tree
 dog
 child
in a glass ball:
You tip the ball
 and suddenly it's snowing.

It's like that.

But imagine instead
 an elephant
 a shrine
 a boy up a palm-tree
 a strip of sand
 a strip of sea...

It's like that:
In tropical July
Someone has given the bowl a shake
And suddenly snow is falling.

White flakes everywhere,
Silent feathers falling,
Coolly drifting down and around,
Swirling a little,
Twirling like dancers at a ball.

As the flakes fall
They melt through my skin

And keep on falling
Filling the hollows around the heart
Soothing sharp edges
Coolly smoothing
A thick white blanket of silence everywhere.

It's like that.

In summer heat
Someone has shaken the sphere I sit in
And suddenly it's snowing.

SHRADDHAVAN

LIMITATIONS OF GURU-DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP IN INTEGRAL YOGA—II

(Continued from the issue of February 1995)

As stated in the preceding part of this article, most of the sadhaks of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, following the usual traditional religious practice, adopt the Guru-disciple relationship with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, even though both of them have very definitely said that it is not adequate for the Integral Yoga which aims at the supramental realisation, even though if some sadhaks want it, they are not prohibited from adopting it until they are able to overcome its limitations. The basic reason for this is explained by Sri Aurobindo in the following letter already quoted before:

“The relation of the Guru and disciple is only one of the possible relations which one can have with the Divine, and in this yoga which aims at a supramental realisation, it is not usual to give it this name; rather, the Divine is regarded as the Source, the living Sun of Light and Knowledge and Consciousness and spiritual realisation, and all that one receives is felt as coming from there and the whole being remoulded by the Divine Hand. This is a greater and more intimate relation than that of the human Guru and disciple, which is more of a limited mental ideal. Nevertheless, if the mind still needs the more familiar mental conception, it can be kept so long as it is needed; only do not let the soul be bound by it and do not let it limit the inflow of other relations with the Divine and larger forms of experience.”¹

Because of the inadequacy of the familiar religious Guru-disciple relationship, the Mother prefers to have the deeper, wider and more intimate mother-child relation with the sadhaks which is her spontaneous and natural attitude towards all human beings. However, if the sadhaks want to call her their Guru, as most of them actually do, she agrees to accept that relation, even though it shuts them off from the vastly more fruitful mother-child relation. In the preceding part of this article this has been fully explained.

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Likewise, does Sri Aurobindo have preference for any other type of relation than that of the Guru with his disciples, though he too would not refuse it because, despite his dislike for its narrow and limited nature, it has, as he himself admits, an “inexorable truth” behind it? His own words for his strong dislike for being called a Guru are very trenchantly stated in the following extract from a correspondence with a sadhak:

“I had the same... violent objection to Guru-giri, but you see I was obliged by the irony of things or rather by the inexorable truth behind them to become a Guru and preach Guruvada. Such is Fate.”²

There is here the same poignant irony of things as in the case of the Mother, because both of them were compelled by it to adopt a relation with the sadhaks which was quite against their own natural spontaneous inclination. For, as mentioned before, almost all the sadhaks of their yoga habitually call them their Gurus. And the special reason for this dislike is that they are not the usual type of human Gurus, but are Avatars, Incarnations in a human body of the Supramental Divine, with whom the sadhak's relation cannot be confined within the narrow mental bounds of the traditional conception of the Guru.

The other names which the sadhaks habitually give to their relation with Sri Aurobindo, simultaneously with Guru, are “Lord” and “Master”, and sometimes “Father”. Does Sri Aurobindo like them? Does he prefer these relations to that of the Guru? He evidently does not do so in its religious sense, as he himself has said in the following extract from his correspondence with a disciple in which he mentions his reasons for his dislike in his own peculiar humorous vein:

“DISCIPLE: You refuse to be a Guru and decline to be a father, though ladies especially think of you as father and call you so. If they come to know of your refusal, I'll have to run with smelling salts from one lady to another.

“SRI AUROBINDO: Father is too domestic and Semitic—Abba!³ Father! I feel as if I had suddenly become a twin-brother of the Lord Jehovah. Besides, there are suggestions of a paternal smile and a hand uplifted to smite which do not suit me.

“Let the ladies ‘father’ me if smelling salts are the only alternative, but let it not be generalised.”⁴

Here also we can see that, as in the case of ‘Guru’, though he personally does not wholly like to be called “Master-Lord-Father” because of their historical association with the Hebrew God, Jehovah, yet if some sadhaks or sadhikas want to call him so he does not prevent it. Only he does not encourage it and would like it to be dropped and substituted by a greater, deeper and more intimate relation.

But then what is the name of that relation which he prefers and would like to form with the sadhaks? Here again we have his own answer to this question:

“DISCIPLE: But what is the relation you won't decline? Is it something besides the recognised ones in spiritual history?

“SRI AUROBINDO: I don't know. I always prefer something new to the old labels. I will see the supramental and find something.”⁵

This answer of Sri Aurobindo, that he prefers some “new” name, indicates the central reason not only for his dislike of the traditional religious and spiritual names but also points to the characteristic difference between his Supramental Yoga and the other old spiritual paths. He has always maintained that “Our Yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure.”⁶ He has also said that “We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future.”⁷ He does not claim that his Supramental Yoga is absolutely “new” but he certainly affirms that it brings a radically new element which was not present in the old yogic systems. So, for the Supramental Divine too, he does not like the old names—Guru, Master, Lord, Father—but would prefer some new name, though if any sadhak likes to use them he would not refuse. For the Divine always condescends to relate himself to the sadhak in whatever way that is suitable to him, as in the recognised Indian conception of the Ishta Devata. But the sadhak of the Supramental Yoga is expected to transcend his limited likes and dislikes and heighten, widen and enlarge his consciousness to enable it to receive all the other relations which bring a deeper, more intimate and all-embracing relation with the Divine. This is the main reason why Sri Aurobindo did not like being called Master or Lord by his disciples. But he especially did not like them because, as said before, of its historic association with the concept of God of the ancient Jewish religion. The God of the Jews was Jehovah whom they considered to be the almighty Master, Legislator, Judge, and their relation with him was deeply fraught with the sentiment of fear which generates the feeling of self-distrust and of one’s unworthiness to approach the Almighty Creator. And fear, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the greatest obstacle to the devotee’s approach to God. Especially in the Supramental Yoga, which seeks utmost intimacy and perfect union with God, the sentiment of fear creates the greatest obstacle because of its natural tendency to emphasise distance and separation. As Sri Aurobindo explains:

“The Jews who brought it forward most prominently and from whom it overspread a great part of the world, could believe in a God of righteousness who was exclusive, arbitrary, wrathful, jealous, often cruel and even wantonly sanguinary. Even now it is possible for some to believe in a Creator who has made heaven and hell, an eternal heaven and an eternal hell, the two poles of his creation, and has even according to some religions predestined the souls he has created, not only to sin and punishment, but to an eternal damnation.”⁸

Sri Aurobindo considers this Jewish or Semitic idea to be very crude and belonging to man’s primitive, lower, external nature because,

“... even apart from these extravagances of a childish religious belief, the idea of the almighty Judge, Legislator, King, is a crude and imperfect idea of the Divine,

when taken by itself, because it takes an inferior and an external truth for the main truth and it tends to prevent a higher approach to a more intimate reality. It exaggerates the importance of the sense of sin and thereby prolongs and increases the soul's fear and self-distrust and weakness . . . It makes hell and heaven and not the Divine himself the object of the human soul in its religious living. These crudities have served their turn in the slow education by the human mind, but they are of no utility to the Yogin who knows that whatever truth they may represent belongs rather to the external relations of the developing human soul with the external law of the universe than any intimate truth of the inner relations of the human soul with the Divine; but it is these which are the proper field of Yoga.”⁹

The Semitic idea of God associated with the feeling of fear and self-distrust, though of ancient origin, is so deeply ingrained in the collective subconscious of humanity that even today it largely conditions the religious mind in its approach to God. And its strong influence persists even when one enters the path of Yoga and seeks relation with him as the Master or the Lord.

It is partly for this historical reason that Sri Aurobindo dislikes being called “Master” by his disciples because the aim of the Integral Yoga is perfect union with the Divine and its imperative need is to seek ever more closeness and intimacy with Him, while the sentiment of fear produces exactly the opposite result. For, as Sri Aurobindo says: “The Divine even as the Master does not punish anybody, does not threaten, does not force obedience”¹⁰ Love is the real key to the perfect union with the Divine and “perfect love is inconsistent with the admission of the motive of fear. Closeness of the human soul to the Divine is the object, and fear sets always a barrier and a distance.”¹¹

Along with fear the other feelings usually associated in the relation with the Divine as the Master or the Lord are awe and reverence which have a very high place in traditional religions. But, according to Sri Aurobindo, “even awe and reverence for the divine Power are a sign of distance and division and they disappear in the intimacy of the union of love”¹²

But, like the relation of the Guru, this relation of the Master, however inadequate for the Integral Yoga, is in its essential nature of great value, and if Sri Aurobindo has no preference for it it is because of the sentiments of fear, etc., which it evokes and which are deeply embedded in the mind and heart of most of the followers of traditional religions and even yogic systems. But even if it is kept free from these sentiments, Sri Aurobindo still does not encourage it because it is only one possible relation with the Divine and, if exclusively followed, it prevents opening out to other varieties of relations, and in the Supramental Yoga the sadhak is expected to open out to all the many-sided relations with the Divine.

In one of his most fascinating Aphorisms Sri Aurobindo has described the

seven varieties of relations with the Divine or God which are yet to be combined in a single many-hued relation:

“Discipleship to God the Teacher, sonship to God the Father, tenderness of God the Mother, clasp of the hand of the divine Friend, laughter and sport with our Comrade and boy Playfellow, blissful servitude to God the Master, rapturous love of our divine Paramour, these are the seven beatitudes of life in the human body. Canst thou unite all these in a single supreme & rainbow-hued relation? Then hast thou no need of any heaven and thou exceedest the emancipation of the Adwaitin.”¹³

But even all these relations belong to the religious stage of the spiritual evolution and in the Supramental Yoga, the sadhak is expected to go beyond the limited religious union to the integral union with the Divine.

But what then is that “new” name of the relation with him to find which Sri Aurobindo promised to “see the supramental” to the sadhak who asked for it? Did he see the supramental for it and find it? It would be most enthralling to know what it is, but he has left no trace of it anywhere. It may be because even if he looked for it and found it, he did not reveal it because to receive his new Supramental Name of the relation, like his supramental Truth-Consciousness itself, needs a certain preparation on the part of the sadhak to make himself fit to receive it. And, perhaps, he did not find the requisite fitness in any of the sadhaks.

But we can safely say that whatever be the name of that relation, it cannot be exclusive like the relations of Guru and Master which debar all others. Because the Supramental is Infinite and to name anything is to define and limit it. But the Supramental though it is essentially Infinite and therefore the Indefinable One, yet in its manifestation it becomes many finites which are yet one with the Infinite, for the Supermind is the creator of Many from the One without separating them from the One. So there will be innumerable supramental names of the relation with the Supramental Divine, though transcending them all there will be One Supreme Name from which they will have all been projected like innumerable rays emanating from the Supramental Sun which is their source. Surely some day he will reveal that Supreme Name, if we sincerely ask him for it, for he never refused to respond to any sincere asking. The only condition needed to receive it, is to make ourselves ready for it which, in reality, means that we must prepare ourselves to receive his Supramental Truth-Consciousness for which he and the Mother have given innumerable calls.

(Concluded)

KISHOR GANDHI

(With acknowledgments to *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 51st Number, 1995.)

Notes and References

- 1 *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 23), pp 614-15
- 2 *On Himself* (Cent Ed , Vol 26), p. 356
- 3 Hebrew term for father
- 4 *Nirodbaran's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo* (The Complete Set), Volume One, p 126
- 5 *Ibid*
- 6 *On Himself* (Cent Ed , Vol 26), p 109
- 7 *Essays on the Gita* (Cent Ed , Vol 13), p 8.
- 8 *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 21), pp 538-39
- 9 *Ibid* , p. 539
- 10 *Ibid* , p 541
- 11 *Ibid*
- 12 *Ibid*
- 13 *Essays Divine and Human*, First Edition, 1994, p 504

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of 15 August 1995)

IN our previous chapter we dealt with the “Open Letter” of Sri Aurobindo of 31st July, the battle with the bureaucracy, the Kumartuli speech, the launching of the *Dharma*, the Hoogly Conference, the Sylhet Conference. All these were pointers to the new directions of Sri Aurobindo’s thought. He was scouring the confused ocean of public life with a freedom and resilience and determination all his own. He was a thinker, poet, teacher, artist in life, revolutionary leader, tactician and practical politician, Apostle of the Future and Man of God all rolled into one—as if the Great Spirit that ruled the world was trying to cast Sri Aurobindo into the mould of leader of India and the world, the Avatar of the coming age. The *Karmayogin* was still Sri Aurobindo’s medium for the expression of his views and for the projection of his prophetic vision of the Future.

Since the two parties, the Moderates and the Nationalists, could not come together, Sri Aurobindo began to consider the future course of action—whether to revive the National movement, or associate himself with the Home Rule movement initiated by Annie Besant. The first would inevitably attract more repression and the second one would mean falling back from the ideal of independence. He also saw the possibility of organising an intense passive resistance in the manner afterwards adopted by Gandhiji. He saw, however, that he himself was not to be the leader of such a movement. Both by speeches and writings Sri Aurobindo kept up an unceasing public activity. He had totally awakened to a new consciousness in him beyond the highest mental ranges and in this new status his politics and spirituality had fused; spirituality explained politics and politics fulfilled itself in spirituality. India was to become politically free because, first and foremost, she had her spiritual destiny to fulfil. It was God’s will that she should recover her spiritual strength, repossess her national soul, not only for her own sake, but more for the sake of all humanity.

From the beginning of the new year, the *Karmayogin* was even able to bring out a cheaper edition at one anna a copy with no risk of financial loss. Soon the rumour-mongering started again to deport some revolutionaries during the next few days. The *Karmayogin* wrote in its issue dated 8 January an article under the caption “The Menace of Deportation”:

“Once more rumours of deportation are rife, proceeding this time from those pillars of authority, the police. It seems that these gentlemen have bruited it abroad that twenty-four men prominent and unprominent are within the next six or seven days to be deported from Bengal, and so successfully has the noise of the coming *coup d’état* been circulated that the rumour of it comes to us from a distant corner of Behar. It appears that the name of Sri Aurobindo Ghose crowns the police list of those who are to be spirited away to the bureaucratic

Bastilles. The offence for which this inclusion is made is, apparently, that he criticises the Government, by which we presume it is meant that he publicly opposes the Reforms. It is difficult to judge how much value is to be attached to the rumour, but we presume that at least a proposal has been made. If we are not mistaken, this will make the third time that the deportation of the Nationalist leader has been proposed by the persistence of the police. The third time is supposed to be lucky, and let us hope it will be the last. The Government ought to make up its mind one way or the other, and the country should know whether they will or will not tolerate opposition within the law; and this will decide it. Meanwhile, why does the thunderbolt linger? Or is there again a hitch in London?"¹

The public killing of Shams-ul-Alam, the Deputy Superintendent of the Intelligence Department, threw the authorities into a panic, the Anglo-Indian papers became hysterical, the leaders merely condemned terrorism without caring or daring to look at the poison-tree that bore such fruit and the only result was that normal legal Nationalist political activity became impossible. Sri Aurobindo who had been thinking in the Open Letter of 25 December about a reorganisation of Nationalist activity in terms of clarity, orderliness, careful deliberation and disciplined and well-planned political action, was compelled in the article "The Necessity of the Situation" of February 5, 1910 to revise his views:

"... A triangular contest between violent revolution, peaceful Nationalist endeavour and bureaucratic reaction is an impossible position and would make chaos more chaotic. Any action at the present moment would be ill-advised and possibly disastrous. The Government demands co-operation from the Moderates, silence from the Nationalists. Let us satisfy them and let there be no action on our part which can be stigmatised as embarrassing the authorities in their struggle with Terrorism. The self-restraint of our party after the conviction of Mr. Tilak was rewarded by the breakdown of Moderatism after it had had undisputed control of the press and platform for almost a year. A similar self-restraint will be equally fruitful now. Revolution paralyses our efforts to deal peacefully but effectively with Repression; Repression refuses to allow us to cut the ground from under the feet of Revolution. Both demand a clear field for their conflict. Let us therefore stand aside, sure that Time will work for us in the future as it has done in the past, and that, if we bear faithfully the burden of the ideal God has laid upon us, our hour may be delayed, but not denied to us for ever."²

Sri Aurobindo further wrote.

"The Nationalism we advocate is a thing difficult to grasp and follow, needing continual intellectual exposition to keep its hold on the mind, continual inspiration and encouragement to combat the impatience natural to humanity; its methods are comparatively new in politics and can only justify themselves to

human conservatism by distinguished and sustained success. The preaching of the new revolutionary party is familiar to human imagination, supported by the records of some of the most inspiring episodes in history, in consonance with the impatience, violence and passion for concrete results which revolutionary epochs generate.”³

From the Government point of view the situation clearly called for drastic action. There was Sri Aurobindo, in their eyes Public Enemy Number One. Sri Aurobindo used to visit the office of *Karmayogin* and *Dharma* at Shyam Pukur lane in the Shambazar area of Calcutta to attend to the editorial work of the *Karmayogin*. He used to come at about four or five in the afternoon. He returned from there to College Square by nine-thirty or ten in the evening. One evening around eight, probably on the 15th February 1910, Sri Aurobindo went to the office as usual. Work was over and he sat down with a few young associates in an automatic writing *séance*.

Suresh Chakravarty (Moni) was one of the young men who were present on the occasion. We shall quote some of his reminiscences of Sri Aurobindo written in Bengali. The translation from Bengali into English runs:

“Sri Aurobindo was doing some automatic writing and reading it aloud to some of us young people. If anyone were to suppose that this being the writing of spirits, the thing was entirely serious from the beginning to the end, he would be making mistakes. All spirits are not serious people; there were some who loved humour and mirth. Hence those *séances* were sometimes grave with solemn voices and sometimes bubbling with laughter and fun. The spirit-writings were going on at full speed when there came into the room our friend and associate Rambabu, Ramchandra Mazumdar .. He was on the staff of the *Karmayogin* and *Dharma*.

“As he entered the room, he informed Sri Aurobindo in a rather anxious voice that they had again issued a fresh warrant against h.m. The information was from a reliable source, had been conveyed to him by a high police official. This was not something very unexpected. For some time past there had been a rumour that the Government would not rest until they had Sri Aurobindo in their grasp again. Nevertheless, the whole atmosphere of the room immediately changed as the news came. In place of the bubbling mirth there prevailed a deep silence, like sudden darkness after a strong illumination. All of us waited with anxious hearts. Sri Aurobindo seemed to think for a few seconds. Then he said, ‘I shall go to Chandernagore.’ Rambabu said, ‘Just now?’ Sri Aurobindo replied, ‘Just now, this very moment.’ You need not however suppose that these were the actual words used. I am trying merely to convey the manner of their conversation and outline the events that followed.

“Sri Aurobindo stood up and left the house accompanied by Rambabu. A little behind them followed Biren and I came out next and followed the three. We thus formed a small procession, not a festive one but a silent procession, with

Sri Aurobindo and Rambabu at the head, Biren following them from a little behind and keeping them within view, and last of all myself a little farther behind Biren keeping him in my view. This silent procession of four, apparently disjoined but linked together by subtle bonds, went along a northerly route.

“As long as Sri Aurobindo remained in that house it used to be watched by the men of the CID. Just a few days ago, simply in order to escape the attention of the police officials, our *séances* of automatic writing had to be removed from a room overlooking the lane to an inner apartment. But we found that on that particular evening, when Sri Aurobindo and Rambabu came out of the house and the two of us followed in succession, there was not a trace of any policeman anywhere about the house.

“... we walked on in silence for some fifteen or twenty minutes and finally landed at one of the river *ghats*. As I have said, I was a newcomer to Calcutta—it was not yet three months since I had arrived—and I was therefore not very acquainted with the city. Hence I cannot say for certain which particular *ghat* it was; it might have been the Bagbazar *ghat* for all I know. On arriving at the *ghat*, Rambabu hailed one of the boatmen and said, ‘Hey, would you take a fare?’ These words of Rambabu and his voice still ring in my ears. The conversation that took place next between the boatman and our Rambabu was in a low voice. Sri Aurobindo now got into the boat and Biren and I followed. Rambabu took his leave. The boat sailed off. As it sailed up the river and reached midstream, it was clear that it happened to be a moonlit night...”⁴

About his departure from Calcutta to Chandernagore Sri Aurobindo later said: “I was in the *Karmayogin* office when I received the word, on information given by a high-placed police official, that the office would be searched the next day and myself arrested. (The office was in fact searched but no warrant was produced against me; I heard nothing more of it till the case was started against the paper later on, but by then I had already left Chandernagore for Pondicherry.) While I was listening to animated comments from those around on the approaching event, I suddenly received a command from above, in a voice well known to me, in three words: ‘Go to Chandernagore.’ In ten minutes or so I was in the boat for Chandernagore. Ramachandra Majumder guided me to the ghat and hailed a boat and I entered into it at once along with my relative Biren Ghose and Moni (Suresh Chandra Chakravarti) who accompanied me to Chandernagore...”⁵

While Sri Aurobindo left the *Karmayogin* office he sent word to Sister Nivedita requesting her to take charge of the *Karmayogin* in his absence.

When Sri Aurobindo reached Chandernagore it was still night. Biren and Suresh got out and proceeded to find Charu Chandra Roy who had been one of those arrested in the Alipore case. They asked him to make arrangements for Sri Aurobindo’s stay. As Charu Chandra was hesitating, one Sisir Ghosh took them to Motilal Roy, an eminent man of the place. He readily agreed to accommodate

Sri Aurobindo and went to welcome him. He had the boat brought near the place where he lived. As soon as Sri Aurobindo disembarked he took him to his house.

The two young men quietly returned to Calcutta the next morning in order to avert possible suspicion. Motilal was asked to keep the arrival secret, which he did.

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References

1. *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Vol 2, pp 345-46
2. *Ibid* , p 392
3. *Ibid.*, p 384
4. *Reminiscences*, by Nolini Kanta Gupta and K. Amrita, pp 134-136, 138
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KARMA YOGA

A MEANS FOR PROGRESS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

‘A THING that does not progress, necessarily declines and perishes’, says the Mother. One may easily observe from one’s surroundings that even plants reflect a state of progress when they glitter with greenness and colourful flowers, alluring everybody’s attention. A morose heart can be revitalised easily by a beautiful bouquet consisting of multi-hued fragrant flowers. But when the plants lose their potency to grow further, leaves become pale, buds do not bloom and show signs of the end of life and the end of progress for it. This is equally true for human beings. Though the body decays with age for all living beings, the sign of progress of consciousness is reflected even in a worn-out body. Even in an old body, when a man creates something, writes a poem, paints a picture, applies a bit of new idea, makes efforts to pass on experiences to youngsters, he progresses. The sign of his progress of consciousness is the sparkling of his eyes. When the zeal for progress is lost, one loses the meaning of life. Behind this zeal for progress, will-power is the driving force. When one loses his will-power, life is subjugated by the dark forces of inertia. Whether one feels it or not, there is an element in all living beings which carries the seed of progress. This very element makes him move further, inspires him and gives him strength to make a new effort however small it may be. Through all these efforts one realises something which acts in him to make him feel a continuation of progress within himself *i.e.*, progress of consciousness.

One comes across yogis in static postures sitting in meditation. What are they trying to do in such postures after all? They are making efforts to progress through meditation. There are many other ways of progress also. But what about busy modern men who do not even find time to sit properly for meditation in a static posture? Can’t they progress towards divinity in their crowded walks of life? Is not the Divine gracious to them? Yes, of course, if not more than elsewhere. It is the Divine who arranges the possibilities of progress for man. If now the world is busy in activities, man can progress through work as well as through other means of Sadhana—‘Karmayoga’, as the Yogis call it. But to progress through work, it should be done in an attitude of worship. Not like doing duty but in the form of offering. Like doing pooja—as perfectly and as peacefully as possible. Regarding this the Mother says that one can progress through meditation, but ten times more through work, provided it is done in the right spirit. Sri Aurobindo says one should not commit the error of thinking that one should become the Prime Minister or a millionaire to be able to practise Karmayoga. Even ordinary office work or household work can be a means of Karmayoga.

But how can real progress be made or felt? Is it through conflicts and

contradictions and tensions? Not necessarily. To make real progress one has to be steady in consciousness and retain a constant and cheerful equanimity. The Gita says—“योगस्थ कुरु कर्माणि”. Perhaps for modern man no other alternative is left than to resort to the practice of this art to keep pace with the irresistible progress of consciousness. Here is a very fine illustration from the book *Champaklal's Treasures*:

MOTHER HAS COME FOR WORK

One day during the later years, Mother had not been well physically. After her sparse breakfast, she asked me: Champaklal, what shall I do? Rest or work?

Champaklal: Work, Mother.

Mother: Why?

Champaklal: You have come for work, Mother.

Mother: All right, call the people.

She said it so readily and sweetly. I rushed out and called you all who were waiting on the terrace. And she went through the whole programme as if nothing was the matter with her health.

On the above incident one may say that she should have cancelled all the appointments and taken rest. But the other side of the truth is that the material world is the world of Karma. And for the manifestation of the Divine one has to work selflessly like the Mother with full devotion and dedication. So the best mantra for an ideal Karmayogi could be—“Think of the Divine, live for the Divine and act for the Divine.” Then one may feel as if one has boarded a vehicle running with incessant speed on the way to infinite progress.

SITANGSHU CHAKRABORTY

MUSINGS ON *PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS*

Surrender and Faith

SURRENDER and faith are the twin notes most often heard in the divine Epiphany of the Mother's *Prayers and Meditations*. So powerful are these refrains that for a moment, in the glow of the reassurance born out of her perfect surrender to the Omnipotent Lord, all conflicts seem to us to be resolved. In the ambience of these prayers one comes to believe that problems cannot exist, therefore do not exist. When a Supreme Power is looking after the world, can there be anything wrong with it? However, what is wrong is our perception of things, our expectation that things should fit in with our moral or immoral scheme of things. Not only do the saintly reproach the Lord, the robber and the murderer also hold Him equally responsible when their nefarious designs are thwarted.

The creation is the responsibility of its Creator; therefore let us leave it to His wisdom. Our field of action is within ourselves. One cannot change others but one can surely, by the Divine's help, change oneself. And each changed Self, elevated and sublimated, can become a Philosopher's Stone, a small sun to kindle others in its orbit. On December 3, 1912 the Mother wrote in her diary,

Last night I had the experience of the effectivity of confident surrender to Thy guidance; when it is needful that something should be known, one knows it, and the more passive the mind to Thy illumination, the clearer and the more adequate is its expression.

Confident surrender then is the key to get an unerring guidance from the Divine. There is another key too: the passivity of mind. Our mind is like a machine that cannot stop. It bombards us by a constant stream of disquieting thoughts and dangerous suggestions. It is a very unreliable guide and may totally mislead us. Its currents of thoughts are always an admixture of the subliminal and the sublime. The greatest hurdle it places in the way of our communion with the Truth is preoccupation with the incessant stream of its noisy, self-assertive visitors. Their endless din effectively bars the entry of the True Guidance. If somehow the mind falls silent, then only can we enter the world of Reality. In that rare hush, infallible suggestions are given, the path is shown but alas the Divine is a shy visitor and His messages are like faint whispers which, more often than not, remain unheard, and are missed in the noisy thought-bazaar.

Here again comes the question of trust. Things are what they are and if the Divine is Omnipotent, he will act in spite of our mind's infirmities, and in spite of the knots that are caused in the smooth line of communication by the mind's self-assertion and interference. The Mother writes,

I listened to Thee as Thou spokest in me, and I would have liked to write down what Thou saidst so that the formula in all its precision might not be lost,—for now I should not be able to repeat what was said. Then I thought that this care for conservation was again an insulting lack of confidence towards Thee, for Thou canst make of me all that I need to be, and in the measure in which my attitude allows Thee to act on me and in me, Thy omnipotence has no limits.

This then is the crux of the matter,—a total confidence that the Lord can and will do all that is necessary and possible. The Divine has no limits and each miracle is a possibility. It is only our doubting imbecility which puts a road-block on the way of the Divine Power and Grace. Doubt and disbelief are a manifestation of ill-will and annul what our higher parts achieve by reliance on the Lord. Our minds are like ignorant patients who give wrong instructions to the supreme Healer. If we would have the Divine mould us then let us abandon the veto of the mind. If that is done, the Lord will get a chance to do some cosmic surgery on our ego-scarred physical mind.

We may not be successful in sitting tight on our mind but even the realisation that it is an impotent advisor and the act of asking it to shut up will help a lot. But ultimately the Lord will act overcoming all obstacles. The Mother further writes,

To know that at each instant what must be surely is, as perfectly as is possible, for all those who know how to see Thee in everything and everywhere! No more fear, no more uneasiness, no more anguish; nothing but a perfect Serenity, an absolute Confidence, a supreme unwavering Peace.

Like a vivifying breath, the Lord permeates all his Creation and each moment brings out the best that is possible under the conditions. After all, we, who bemoan our petty misfortunes, or world-disorders, a belching volcano or two, a flood or an earthquake, do not realise that He holds the stars on their courses so that they do not collide and annihilate all life on this small globe; that He keeps the sun shining, the moon glowing, the oceans surging, the life coursing in plant, animal and man. He is guiding and guarding us at each step and carrying forward the Creation towards new Summits. A thousand years back our ancestors, who lived imprisoned in oil-lamp-lit homes and took years to travel a thousand miles, could not have imagined the great mastery over nature-processes that man has acquired today, the release into infinity made possible by space travel. If they would try to see and evaluate from a universal poise, even the skeptics and bemoaners would have to accede that the Lord has not done at all badly.

And if the Helmsman, who has steered the Spaceship-Earth safely for the past billions of years among the unimaginable expanses of Time and Space, is still at the helm why should we worry? In supreme confidence is supreme peace.

*

The Refuge

A tired head laid on some bosom of Light, a tiny face turned upwards trustfully towards some Being of Love, a total refuge in two arms that are a Sanctuary against all attacks, a nestling in a Divine Heart warm with the velvety softness of sweet caring—these are the emotions the soul feels when it turns sincerely and exclusively towards the Lord

At each moment, in everything, always and ultimately, He is our refuge, our sole support. Unluckily we discover and realise this truth late in life, after our eyes are opened by many a betrayal and countless misfortunes and when all else has failed us. We clutch at the props of love and friendship, wealth and popularity, youth and health, but all these fall away like autumn leaves, leaving us naked and shivering in the arena of life, in full view of mocking spectators.

This is the unsavoury reality of life.

Most people find this reality too harsh to face. They live in illusions and are satisfied with the make-believe of worldly love and fidelity. People are so horrified at the prospect of their realities turning out to be falsehoods, of discovering that they are dupes of their emotions, of finding that they have reposed faith without justification, that they make their lives bearable by nursing their illusions. They are afraid of discovering that all their glittering gold is black iron; that they are nothing and there is no true support or love anywhere except in the Divine.

The Lord removes the veil from the eyes of only a few. For these life becomes a nightmare, at every moment they have to face the Ides of March and at each step find themselves exclaiming, "You too, Brutus?" When we are granted the supreme Grace of being totally disillusioned and something in us still has the strength for higher effort, then we shift or are catapulted onto the highway of Truth. Then the prayer of the Mother written on December 7, 1912 becomes living for 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.

When this new orientation takes hold of our imagination and our emotions, then an ineffable sweetness permeates our life. Divine Peace, Purity and Light flood our being. When we walk on the road, even the chance fellow-travellers, on whom our glance rests casually with love, suddenly relax and smile for no reason. We flow into the Lord. Many other souls merge into us and thus the purified Ganges of our being rushes with boundless love and enthusiasm towards the all-receiving *boundless ocean*, the Ultimate Refuge.

Then our way of seeing changes and all around we discover our Lover. Then comes the great realisation of which the Mother speaks,

Thy Peace is in me, and in that Peace I see Thee alone present in everything, with the calm of eternity

A chapter of futile efforts, poignant sorrows and false élans ends. We emerge into a sweet ocean of Peace and Love. We enter the Truth.

*

A Total Trust

Most of us human beings are children at heart. We believe in magic and hope for miracles. Fairy lands and eldorados are never far from our thoughts and in some inward moments we all hope the Gods may come and transform us into immortal beings and our earth into a happy heaven. We are not far from the Truth in our hopes. Even now heavens await us at each turn, and buds of hope are ready to bloom. What then paints grey the gold of our lives?

The damage is done by our preconceived notions of joy and pleasure which we equate with happiness. We pass our lives chasing the acquisitions which supposedly would bring us pleasure. But is what we call pleasure truly pleasure? Let us take the two most widely chased-after pleasures by humans —food and sex. These, if indulged in constantly and in excess, lead to exhaustion, disease and death. Then how can the joy we take in them be true? It is Nature which has made these two acts pleasurable to human beings to carry onwards the Creation. Evolved souls find food just a dull necessity and sex repulsive.

Due to these preconceived notions of what we want, we miss the delight which is granted to us at every moment and at each step. The Divine has made Herself visible as a robe of light and beauty, surrounding us with a million facets of starry heavens, fathomless oceans, bewitching flowers, sweetly singing birds and innocent child-faces. We have become so artificial that we forget to take

delight in the easily available and await some further enhancement of wealth or further acquisitions and accumulations to make us happy. But even if we were to acquire the riches of the “three worlds”, contentment and delight would elude us. Actually a shepherd or an ascetic may be happier than a king or a business tycoon. A servant girl may hum to herself, while working, out of the sheer joy of living, even though getting only half-a-square meal a day, while her mistress, loaded with jewellery, may be sick with ennui or worse, with jealousy or thanklessness.

In fact the main cause of our sorrows is a lack of confidence in the Divine. If we could and would try to understand that the Lord looks after us, cares for us and, knowing what is best for us, leads us to the goal—if we could remember this when life meets us with a cruel face, we would have the courage to smile at life whatever our woes. Let us remember Her with confidence and she will hold our hand to make it easy to navigate through the shoals and reefs which are aplenty in this vast and oceanic Creation in which we are trying to sail.

On the path of Life some keep their sights fixed on the dirt of the road, others fix their thoughts on dawns and sunsets and happy meetings and successful outcomes, even at midnight. It is given to us to make charming the rough-hewn face of life. The pains can be lessened, even sweetened, if we would not forever cling to them.

The Mother explained the secret of such an attitude in her prayer of December 10, 1912,

O Supreme Master, Eternal Teacher, it has been once more granted me to verify the unequalled effectivity of a full confidence in Thy leading. Thy Light was manifested through my mouth yesterday and it met no resistance in me; the instrument was willing, supple, keen of edge.

It is Thou who art the doer in each thing and each being, and he who is near enough to Thee to see Thee in all actions without exception, will know how to transform each act into a benediction.

These words are a Mantra, a Shastra, a revelation. The Mother postulates that there is an *unequalled effectivity in a full confidence in Thy leading*. This then is the secret to the world of miracles. If we accept with all our being that the Lord is leading us then our way of looking at things would radically change and we would be able to seize at the correct significance of things and events and would have a much better chance of taking the correct route with an understanding of the Divine purpose in things and events. And in such a beatific atmosphere, sweet with the presence of the Lord, the inevitable thorns would lacerate less, hurt less. Then not only the flowers but the thorns too would reflect our supreme Lover’s beauty. Pain would not touch us because we would meet Her everywhere.

And then our acts would turn into benedictions. We would live divinely in the Divine. The Mother continues,

To abide always in Thee is the one thing that matters, always and ever more and more in Thee, beyond illusions and the deceptions of the senses, not drawing back from action, refusing it, rejecting it—a struggle useless and pernicious—but living Thee alone in the act whatever it may be, ever and always Thee; then the illusion is dispelled, the falsehoods of the senses vanish, the bond of consequences is broken, all is transformed into a manifestation of the glory of Thy Eternal Presence.

So let it be. Amen.

If we could imagine that the Divine is all around us and in us then this thought might change into a dynamic realisation and then we would be freed from the distorting medium of our senses. Like the Gita, the Mother does not advocate renunciation of action or withdrawal from the busy fields of life. This withdrawal, this effort at cessation of action, she calls *useless and pernicious*. Pernicious, because in a way it is a denial of the very purpose of the Lord's Creation and useless because it does not solve anything and we would be forced in another life or another age to face what we shunned and escaped in this life.

But if, instead of the negative, we take the positive attitude and even if at first we have to force ourselves mentally into adopting this viewpoint or stand, even then, some day it will seem the most natural and true phenomenon to our consciousness. And the chains of Karma will fall off by themselves.

All will become Love and God. Then an Infinite being in time will walk and act in the Infinities of the Timeless.

*

Just to Wait

Why this hurry, O my heart? why this despair? Does the Divine not know each of your thoughts, feelings and aspirations? If She is Omnipresent and Omniscient she does. If she is aware of the problems in you, your shortcomings as well as your soaring aspirations and intense adoration, then should that not be enough for you? Must you always beat your head against the walls of Time? Why so passionate? After all a game is a game and while one should play it with sincerity and gusto, one is allowed to withdraw if it becomes unrewarding, frustrating and self-defeating. In the huge arena of Life the spectators' galleries are almost empty, people are so taken up by the simulated Game of Life that almost everyone has jumped into the fray and there is hardly one left to watch and enjoy the countless actors' most interesting roles. O my soul, are you not

tired of being a gladiator for ever who wrestles unarmed the ferocious lions of destiny? Why not climb the steps and be the One for whom Life is staging a million plays. You cannot be an actor for ever, why not ask the supreme Director to let you rest for a while, let you learn by observation, let you be an apprentice who retires to recoup and rejuvenate?

A constant action leads to a frustrating failure. Stop to take stock. After all, your great labours come to naught and agitation leaves you weak and exhausted. There is a time and season for everything. The Hindi poet-saint Kabir says that the gardener may water a tree a hundred times but it will bear fruit only in its season. The secret of winning a race is in not spending all the energy in the first few laps.

My heart, you must conserve your energy for, and concentrate on, that last throw which would teach you to renounce all effort for the fruit of action and sink in happy expectation at the Mother's feet. One may force one's kisses on the beloved but the beloved cannot be forced to kiss back. It is not in your power to force the Beloved to reciprocate and grant you the true ananda of Love, the rasa of the Union. You have to await her pleasure. In the meanwhile it is given to you to clean and beautify your garden—the garden of your personality, your physical, vital and mental personalities—where she will come one day to meet you. But be vigilant, she may come at the most unexpected moment; like Khalif Haroun Al Rashid she may come in some impenetrable disguise and if she finds you impure she may go back to her inaccessible regions. And woe to you if that happens because centuries may pass before her chariot returns.

On December 11, 1912 the Mother wrote in her *Prayers and Meditations*,

I await, without haste, without inquietude, the tearing of another veil, the Union made more complete. I know that the veil is formed of a whole mass of small imperfections, of attachments without number . . . How shall all these disappear? Slowly, as the result of countless small efforts and a vigilance not faltering even for a moment, or suddenly, through a great illumination of Thy All-Puissant Love? I know not, I do not even put to myself the question, I wait, keeping watch as best I can, in the certitude that nothing exists save Thy Will, that Thou alone art the doer and I am the instrument; and when the instrument is ready for a completer manifestation, the manifestation will quite naturally take place.

Already there is heard from behind the veil the wordless symphony of gladness that reveals Thy sublime Presence

Even the efforts to exceed oneself may one day become superfluous. Let us learn to wait and, having learnt this most difficult art, let us await her Will in happy expectancy because the eternal Beloved may play at being capricious but she is not.

O heart, be ready and listen for her soft footfall.

(To be continued)

SHYAM KUMARI

THE LOST EDEN

THERE was a time before Eden
When all life was in the sea;
And its mighty magic and its undulations
Still move in cells and memory.

I wandered in its opalescent gardens,
With fans of coral, sea-weed ribboned 'round,
And the soft sighing of the rising and falling waters
Was the only sound.

I walked with the first fish
Into a tidal basin out on land
Where the gnarled rock and twisted masses
Of the mountains rose above us like a fisted hand.

We moved into fresh water pools
Of algae and water weed;
And then the venture to *dry* land.
I know its secret. I was the first seed!

I lived in the kingdom
Of the giant beasts, lumbering, tall.
In the pride of their invincible majesty
I saw them fall

Prey to the agile
Lesser beast,
When the feasters
Became the feast!

Then came the greatest of all adventures,
 For which earth life began:
 The slow and inevitable
 Rise of man to *Man!*

We lived in Eden,
 Blissful, innocent days
 When Nature revealed her opulence,
 The bounty of her ways.

We knew the soothing sounds
 And silences of natural things,
 The peace and providence
 That Nature brings.

Living, Laughing, Loving,
 All were one,
 And a sweet and restful sleep
 When day was done—

Why, from our blissful Eden
 Did YOU make us go?
So you could know, and knowing
Decide the way your soul would grow.

But Eden, Eden! Why
 Did *you* go from me?
 While my soul grows and learns
 Its needed lessons, *I* need *your* innocence, simplicity.

Eden isn't lost.
 It is waiting in the wings!
 Listen for its silence,
 Until the silence sings...

When you stand beneath, become
 The perfumed essence of a flowering tree;
 Dip deep into the nectarous throat
 Of a lily, with the butterfly and bee;

When the joyous thrill of waking birds
 Sweetens the early morning air,

And you forget for one delicious moment
Who you are or where;

When you run laughing between
The raindrops of a sudden shower,
Become for an enchanted moment
The aspiration of an opening flower;

When you are flushed to roseate
Radiance in the setting sun;
Walk the uncharted paths between the stars
After the day is done;

There is no longer time or place,
Only identity, a total seeing,
And one becomes again the essence
Of incenteric being.

No. Eden is *not* lost...
It is waiting for recall...
And when you have *Knowing and Eden*,
You have it all...!

ELIZABETH STILLER

FLOATING IDEAS

Eternal 'Hope'

'DESIRE' never loses 'Hope'. Desire always hopes, come what may. 'Hope' is the 'Will' of 'Desire', 'Hope' is the 'Aspiration' of 'Desire'

Man is always penetrated by 'hopes' of desires. When man gives up 'hopes' he actually brushes them out by reason—a mental play of non-response to desire by will of the mind that has concluded things to be hopeless. Either by that or by mental and vital frustrations that slam the door on 'hopes'.

But independent of all these, no one can reason with desire, and so it 'hopes' and 'hopes'. Even if by all means the fulfilment of desire is a gone case, still it 'hopes'. It does so because 'hope' is the life-force of desire and in a strange way its soul.

If desire is transformed into desire for the divine truth only, 'hope' is transformed into aspiration.

'Hope' is omnipresent in all creation. Without the play of 'hope' creative processes would cease their operations.

'Hope' in its original truth is a 'Certitude'—Certitude that surmounts all opposition. 'Hope' is the love ingrained in all adventures.

'Hope', to tell the highest truth, is 'Harmony' that has filtered through all the layers and buffers of creation taking the stamp and trait of all that it passes through, and becomes a part of a million forces where it has forgotten its own origin of harmony.

Because 'hope' is ingrained in all play of forces, all forces have the potentiality of becoming 'Harmony'.

*

'Greed' Vs 'Need'

'Greed' only succeeds while 'Need' knowing no need to progress and satisfied in itself becomes negativity and gets incorporated as such in the first letter 'N' of the word 'Need'.

If we were only to feed our 'needs', the things decreed will never be freed, and earth would be sucking its thumb with the 'creed' of 'needs'. Variety play of good deeds and bad deeds would remain unreleased, and having no 'need' to progress, earth's evolution would remain buried in the doctrine of 'needs'—indeed nothing else would ever lead.

Creation would remain stagnant on earth with men sticking only to 'needs'; no progress would breed without incentive of 'greed'.

It is 'greed' that gives colour to life-play. It is 'greed' that introduces the

principle of evolution in every aspect of life. Dynamism of life springs from 'greed' and not from 'need'. We would have been a primitive civilisation for eternity if 'greed' had been absent.

Do not let the dogmatism of 'needs' kick out 'greed'. What makes 'greed' look bad is the involvement of high voltage ego. If 'ego' was separated and eliminated from greed, greed would be transformed into its original truth of "aspiration towards endless progression"

Get rid of the ego from 'greed' and the inherent seed of aspiration in 'greed' would flower out—greed would then cease to be morbid and would not forbid the spiritual truth, but would become part of it.

Distinct questions arise out of what is written above:

What sort of 'greed' am I talking about?

'Greed' for food and material wealth or a 'greedy' hunger for beauty, knowledge and harmony?

Am I lifting 'greed' up or pushing it down?

Well, certainly I am lifting 'greed' up.

Greed for food inspired the creation of varieties of tasty dishes—the dishes that once lay latent in the infinite truths of Sri Aurobindo's unmanifest state. Douce Mère in Her role of creator chose these truths and actualised them in matter as tasty dishes. In truth each distinct taste of these dishes is a taste of Sri Aurobindo's Truth. Douce Mère created them for His delight. Sri Aurobindo in the past has enjoyed all these tasty foods through our animal nature but now he is imposing a test on us as to whether we offer this taste to our ego or to His presence in our heart. If offered to His delight, food eaten would not once again return to inconscience, and then His reign on earth would begin in this aspect of our life.

All limits that 'need' imposed on life were broken by 'greed' in order to increase the scope for more dramatisation of Sri Aurobindo's Truths by the Mother from his ever unmanifest mystery.

To condemn greed therefore would be like giving a dog a bad name and hanging it.

Greed for wealth brought developments of varieties of trade, and induced industrial development. The so-called simplicity of 'needs' would have blocked the growth of civilisations beyond a certain point.

All civilisations that came and went were 'greed'-based. Mind and the higher vital being brought refinement into them.

The civilisations of the future will convert 'greed' into aspirations for more and endless spiritual growth, not stagnating at any one point of realisation.

'Greedy' hunger for beauty, knowledge and harmony were never subjected to condemnation and so need no debate.

What is most objectionable is the conventional objection to 'greed' as something always bad. Ego that was the helper in teaming up with 'greed', is now

a 'bar' in spiritual evolution, and so must disappear in order that greed may become pure and be transformed into aspiration for endless spiritual riches.

As we cannot change the meaning of the word 'greed', in the absence of any other word that could express my contentions better, we may select another word that is more apt, and I do not find any other word except the word 'desire'.

*

Whose choice is it, anyway?

People say: "Nothing in life *'has to happen'*. There always is a choice."

The above fiction has been so beautifully blended in creation that we always feel we have the choice to accept or reject a possibility.

But on analysis we find that most of humanity who are confined to karmic compulsion do not make choices on their own but are the tools of dictates of destiny. Soul has no choice except to choose from its karmic contents and there too karmic priorities time-wise are firm in not disturbing the time schedules. Soul therefore is forced into the limits of karmas, and its choices are limited. Many times a soul makes a 'choice' because it wants to get rid of bad karmas. By accepting this destiny's decree it chooses to purify itself so that obstructive karmas may clear a way for spiritual development.

On the other hand a mental and vital choice finds fulfilment only if it is so destined.

Spiritually we all could choose the Mother and Sri Aurobindo because it was their choice that we do so. "He who chooses the Infinite has been chosen by the Infinite." Our 'choice' was therefore their command.

It therefore settles down to only one truth that it is Douce Mère in Her embodiment and in Her role as creator, who alone makes 'choices'. She chooses Sri Aurobindo's Truths from His ever unmanifest mystery in order that she may dramatise them as creations for His delight. These truths get unfolded in time at the right time, and the right time is what the Mother chooses it to be.

The soul can only and truly make a choice when it surrenders completely to the Mother and, when it is so surrendered, it accepts only the choices of the Mother. The only successful choice the soul can ever make is its decision to totally surrender to the Mother.

All souls desire to evolve fast. That always is the inherent choice of souls. But if they were allowed to evolve fast, there would be no 'variety-play' on earth. It would be the fast-forward of a video tape which would distort the moving images and suspend the sound. Radiation of Bliss in that case would be nil.

Creation is the game played by the Mother. This game, these enactments and dramatisations of Sri Aurobindo's Truths become most interesting for Him because the Mother as a creator is all eternal youth, and the creations are Her

youthful indiscretions with His Truths—indiscretions which are never irresponsible, for they are always blissful. She makes the choices and Sri Aurobindo graciously accepts them. He leaves all choices to Her.

I therefore redraft my first para which reads: “Nothing in life *‘has to happen’*. There always is a choice.”

The Mother is ‘life’ and all ‘life’ is Her ‘choice’. She issues Her Will in ‘life’ which too is Her ‘choice’, and all the resistance to Her Will too are Her ‘choice’: choice of the Divine Mother. All other choices are fictions because the choosers are Her puppets. Most of all, all is the Mother, nothing exists except Her and nothing exists apart from Her. Therefore only one choice truly exists—The ‘choice’ of the Divine Mother!

JAGAT KAPADIA

TALKATIVE INDIANS

WHEN DR Hargobind Khorana, the Nobel laureate, went to Stockholm in 1968 to receive his prize, he declined to make a speech at a function in the Indian embassy. A senior member of the Swedish diplomatic service came running to him to say. "You are the first Indian I've met who doesn't want to make a speech".

Is loquaciousness, in public and in private, a national failing? There can be no doubt that it is. One has only to compare the bedlam at Indian airports and railway stations with the almost deathly silence in European terminals to realise this.

Thomas Carlyle fell foul of "shooting Niagaras", but an unsympathetic critic has pointed out that he preached the virtues of silence in thirty-seven loud volumes. The general wisdom of mankind is that silence is golden. There is an Indian proverb which says that in silence is absence of contention. If a man is silent in reply to a question, his silence is taken to indicate consent.

It is perhaps because the sages of old realised that talkativeness is a national defect that they laid down silence as a part of the religious discipline. A talkative saint is an anachronism. He will soon begin to lose followers.

As a general rule, loquaciousness is common among tropical peoples. Without pursuing this sociological concept to its conclusion, it is a fact that the eastern man talks oftener and more loudly than the western. In the west the ideal is the strong, silent man. In the east, only sages and saints are expected to keep their counsel. The others are free to hold forth.

All Indian cities and towns are noisy. Uninhibited in street and home, the people see no necessity to keep down their voice. Most of them are villagers themselves, come to town, or descendants of former villagers. There is no need in the village to restrain one's voice. There is ample space around and sometimes the human voice is as a friend. It is not easy to shed these habits when one migrates to a city.

Loquaciousness, once frowned upon as a social solecism, is now in favour. A new spirit reigns in the west. The old formal stuffy ethos is gone, replaced by a sense of freedom from restraint and conventions which its enemies call the "hippy" outlook and its friends release and rejuvenation. In the latter view, talkativeness should be welcomed. It helps a man liberate himself, instead of bottling up his feelings.

It is, however, undoubted, regardless of what Swedish diplomats might or might not say, that there is far too much noise in our lives. The latest diabolical addition to the volume is the amplifier which broadcasts jejune song and inane speech for hours together, far into the night. The people most addicted to this pastime are the slum dwellers. It is not for the middle class to complain, for they exist on sufferance in "democratic socialism."

As for public speeches, it should be confessed that they are a national vice. Indian politics is mostly speeches, and very little action. How the masses love to be orated at! Public speeches are the soporific of Indian politics.

(The Sunday Standard, Madras, October 29, 1974, p. 6)

THE TURNING POINT

ABDUCTION of Sita from the Panchavati hermitage must be considered as an event of singular importance in Valmiki's Ramayana. It marks a sudden turning point in the otherwise smooth and steady flow of its narrative with episode following episode in quick and natural succession. The royal exiles are living on the bank of the Godavari and not too long hence would they be going back, after fourteen years, to their loving and opulent Ayodhya. But "destiny is written in double terms" and the inevitable happens in the closing period of their dwelling in the Dandaka forest. Rishi Agastya had recommended the young Ayodhyans to stay at the beautiful Panchavati where the river carries sweet waters in all the seasons, and where there are flowering trees and shrubs, and plenty of fruits and roots, and charming delightful birds and animals, peacocks dancing and happy simple herds of deer roaming freely without fear and without guile. Sita, while plucking flowers one morning, notices a very unusual stag and is at once attracted by its graceful appearance. It has bright silver-gold flanks and the tips of its horns shine like rarest sapphire, a very bewitching creature moving about the hermitage, prancing blithesomely through the luxurious bushes. The credulous watcher is instantly struck by this alluring wonder and even wants to own it, little realising that it is a deceptive form assumed by Maricha in Ravana's plan to forcibly take her away to his distant country.

The hoax played by the ogre works successfully when the illusory, or *māyāvī*, stag robs her of the faculty of inner perception and discernment, *chadmanā hrtcetānā*. She persuades her husband to catch it and bring it to the hermitage so that it might be taken to Ayodhya and kept in the palace-garden; she even tells him that if he should fail to seize it alive he could kill it, for its beautiful skin freckled with gold-bright spots could be used as a seat at the time of worshipping the deities. Sita is completely under the spell and succumbs to the treachery of the phantom deer. But Laxmana warns about the fraudulence of the ogre Maricha who has the power to "assume a pleasing shape" at will and deceive people. That is how he had killed several Rishis in the forest and now he is here with the intent of playing similar mischief with them. Rama, however, turns the same argument around and tells Laxmana that if it is such a conjured-up figure adopted by the ogre, then surely this creature of illusion ought to be destroyed. He immediately sets forth with his bow and arrow to make short work of it. The deer eludes him for a long time and takes him far away from the hermitage. Eventually Ravana carries Sita off to his inaccessible city beyond the sea, in Lanka, and keeps her in the Ashokavana. Rama's lamentation on finding that Sita is not present in the hermitage, his coming to Kishkindha and his pact with Sugriva, the search of Sita by Hanuman in Lanka, Rama's vanquishing and killing of the demon-king Ravana in the deep and fierce occult battle—all these then follow in a pauseless and breathtaking sequel, bringing the epic to its close

in crowning glory at Ayodhya.

If only Sita had not succumbed to the lure of the phantom deer! But then there would not have been the turning point. Not that it comes abruptly or jerkily in the narrative's easy spontaneous flow, nor does the poet make any artistic blunder or inflict aesthetic violence in introducing or describing it. Yet the abduction-episode stands out in an altogether different manner with its own shades and tones, loaded with the mystery of the ominous supramundane. True, in the epic there is nothing unnecessary or merely decorative, nothing unfunctional, and there are rapid transitions throughout, taking it forward almost with the surge of a natural stream rushing towards its beckoning sea of destiny. The poet is single-minded in his pursuit and sets aside all that would cause distraction and spoil the tight unity of the account: accomplished artist as he is, he would not risk the loss of propriety by superfluous and extraneous irrelevances. The action is, in spite of countless happenings and details, single and entire with a beginning and a middle and a close. There is perfect inevitability everywhere and the whole is sufficiently sound to receive and to hold the high inspiration that makes the epic such a work of exceptional beauty, well-proportioned and harmonious and satisfyingly delightful. In a certain sense every episode in it is a turning point and yet the *deus ex machina*, or rather machination of the devil, proves to be the most decisive in shaping the future course of events. Remove the abduction-drama and all that precedes and all that is to follow will simply collapse; the story will then become insipid and fail to appeal in the assertive and deeper sense craving for life's action and play in the midst of possibilities. Indeed, from the point of view of a gripping story something of the kind was very necessary at this juncture, something sharp and penetrating to pierce into the issue for its culminating resolution. It is a crucial event in the development of the poem and the author has introduced it well, and creatively, exploiting fully the dramatic content present in it. The occult nuances and significances may have their own importance, but purely as an aspect of the artistic device what we notice in it is that it immediately gives to the narrative the needed strength to thrust itself convincingly in its movement forward. It releases great sustaining energy into its flow. It is as though the act of Time with its villainy has a tremendous force to accomplish through such a mechanism the impossible. We may as well maintain that, if the dramatic is the most creative voice of poetry, then it is at the turning point that we see in the epic its mighty power for setting vast actions into motion. Everything is at once brought to the sharp focal issue and sorted out in a most decisive way, instead of being frittered in routinised and inconsequential trivialities. The imponderable "If only it didn't happen" has no place in the economy of things and in the efficacy of a secret mind's plan whose infallibility is detailed out by the dynamism of Fate with full vigour of the unexpected.

In Milton's *Paradise Lost* Eve's dream of eating the forbidden fruit of knowledge, which has a "pleasant savoury smell", marks a similar turning point:

O Fruit Divine,
 Sweet of thy self, but much more sweet thus cropt,
 Forbidd'n here, it seems, as onely fit
 For Gods, yet able to make Gods of Men:
 And why not Gods of Men, since good, the more
 Communicated, more abundant growes,
 The Author not impair'd, but honoured more?
 Here, happie Creature, fair Angelic Eve,
 Partake thou also; happie though thou art,
 Happier thou mayst be, worthier canst not be:
 Taste this, and be henceforth among the Gods
 Thy self a Goddess, not to earth confin'd,
 But sometimes in the Air, as wee, sometimes
 Ascend to Heav'n, by merit thine, and see
 What life the Gods live there, and such live thou.

The seed of Temptation is already cast and events have simply to unroll in the course of their inevitable sequence. In making Satan "Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve" and whisper the "prophetic dream", exciting her organs of fancy, Milton has hit upon an "epic machinery" to let the poem quickly move forward. The incident, functionally operative and organically satisfying, although smacking of contemporary psychology, is an ingenious artistry providing a perfect prologue to the final exit of the fallen couple; leaving Eden hand in hand and shedding a few "natural" tears, Adam and Eve are on their solitary way out into this wide desolate world. Man was not "found obedient" in spite of the heaven-sent warning and suffer he must now for ever. But it looks as though the Paradisal complacency would never have been shaken up in the absence of the Devil's devilry; at the same time, even so much as to meet the ends of the epic's need, the Temptation-mechanism had to be there to produce something very definite and positive; while pushing the march of Man towards some grand apocalyptic Good, poetry found a powerful life-breath in it. But more important than that, theologically, is the act of supreme Grace in redeeming Man's sin by accepting even death on the Cross.

If we are to compare these two epic scenes, Sita's abduction and Eve's falling to temptation, it is obvious that the dramatic content in Valmiki's phantom deer is far more gripping than in Milton's uncouth toad where the conclusion is almost foreknown; there doesn't appear to be any real denouement in the latter. Perhaps it was therefore quite sensible of Milton to discard his own earlier proposal to write *Adam Unparadised* as a drama on the theme of the Fall of Man. Certainly, with the present weakness of the plot, this would have fallen through irreparably, without making any impression on us. Not that Valmiki's Sita is any better in this particular respect, but in the Ramayana there are far

more complex possibilities with varied and richer characterised emotions having multiple degrees of imaginative impacts. With this psychological charge the epic's language and poetry also becomes substantial, its form assuming a sharp and well-limbed solidity. We pass into a poetic experience which, with its inspired and revelatory expression, transposes even the dreadful to the joyously quivering as if the soul of aesthetic beauty suddenly emerged out and leapt to seize everywhere the felicitously wondrous. Such is the quality of spiritual poetry which, even with the secularity of its subject, always retains the touch of the deeply esoteric. Mental poetry cannot do that. In that sense Milton's poem is not wholly for poem's sake, but is an argument in justification of something extra-poetic, beyond the consideration of aesthetic and creative art. Spiritual poetry does not necessarily mean poetry with spiritual contents: it is essentially a genuine response of the inner perceptive spirit to things within and without crying to take full body of the expressive word. It is primarily neither a question of substance nor that of style, but distinctively of the source and nature of inspiration carrying in its *enthousiasmos* everything else. Its acuteness of the plot can induce an intense flow of the Muse's gift, then by that same token it also rises to some rare sublime peaks of inexpressibility itself. Valmiki at once soars to that grandiose altitude of the sky which intellectualised Milton, even if he were aware of it, would find too difficult to climb.

In no good poem will the turning point appear as a jointed insertion or something with heavy leather seams. In fact, in the thunder and torrent of ceaseless Iliadic action it may not even be discernible. Take the Homeric example with intense physical activity yet with an invisible hand governing the destiny of men and countries. The Achean ships have besieged the City of Troy and the battle remains undecided even after nine years. Achilles is sulking and refuses to participate because his beautiful captive girl Briseis has been forcibly taken by Agamemnon who commands the Greek army in the War. Hector is on the rampage and, as master of rout, destroys the enemy trenches and even sets one of the ships on fire. The fight is fierce and the day's honour goes to him; the Trojans are on the winning track. But the clamour from the armies reaches the upper air and assaults the lamp of the sky. There is disconsolation in the Achean camp and the chiefs approach and request Achilles to take up arms and push back the tide of the battle's losing fortune. But Achilles does not relent. Instead, however, he permits his boon friend Patroclus to join against the onslaught of the rushing Dardanians led by Hector. Putting on the great armour of Achilles, Patroclus plunges into the battle and kills Sarpedon after a pitched encounter with him; but he goes too far and is in turn killed by Hector under the walls of the besieged City. This death brings Achilles into irrepressible life and the Trojans are on the retreat; eventually Hector, the tamer of horses, gets killed at the hands of Achilles for whom the glory was reserved. He treats the fallen warrior's body with total disrespect, in fact savagely, to avenge the death of his close

friend. Priam pays a heavy ransom to receive his son's mutilated corpse from the victor. The Iliadic action finally culminates with a noble funeral to the hero. The story runs like a single thread throughout and there are no knots in it and there is no apparent turning point to baffle us. And yet Patroclus's death is crucial in the entire course of events. Destiny had left Achilles free to return home and live a long life, but this particular death dragged him into the War and brought the deep imponderables of life into full play. On the Homeric battlefield destiny is written in multiple terms and the immortals are involved in it inextricably. Had it been a story of only a brutal fight between two forces it would have failed to inspire generations of people in spite of varied and profound events with heroic action everywhere in it. What counts is action of each individual proclaiming greatness of the human spirit to triumph over the adverse circumstance of death as well. We have to recognise that Homer's poem is not a report of the war giving an event-by-event account, but a grandly conceived and remarkably executed effort highlighting the interplay of men and gods in life. If Hector was helped by Apollo in killing Patroclus, so too was Achilles by Athena. Human action alone would not have made the epic sufficiently heroic and it is in the double concern that there lies the originality and creative genius of the poet, making finally the human spirit and the gods themselves a part of inscrutable working of the supreme destiny. Destiny therefore is really the creator of the turning point, deciding and achieving all that has to be decided and achieved.

If this is so, then we may agree with C. M. Gayley that "the epic in general, ancient or modern, may be described as a dispassionate recital in dignified rhythmic narrative of a momentous theme of action fulfilled by heroic characters and supernatural agencies under the control of sovereign destiny". All the elements stipulated by the author of the *Principles of Poetry* are certainly present in Homer; but his poem cannot be passed or failed on the basis of any checklist which can at best be only a first admission or qualifying test that a work of art should satisfy. Thus "dignified rhythmic narrative", "momentous theme of action", "heroic characters", "supernatural agencies" with the "control of sovereign destiny" would just amount to a limb-by-limb description of the poem without giving any organic idea of its soul of beauty, of its heart of delight, mind of wide-ranging and expressive perception, or else a body of harmonised contents and substance alive with some luminously breathing vitality. But when these elements do get quintessenced into a coherent and single poetic occurrence, we begin to see the significance and meaning of a certain point or moment which gathers in its throbbing and ecstatic fold the mystifying wonder of the literary composition. It is as if the whole radiance of the sky is collected in the shining mass of the sun and given to us as a source of some fiery exhilaration and joy issuing out from it forever.

Such a sun is sadly absent in the Shakuntala-tale of the Mahabharata. The tale is too thin and frail, artistically wanting, to keep us absorbed in it. In the

huge green sprawling Ashrama of Rishi Kanva Dushyanta meets Shakuntala and instantly falls in love with her. He is not willing to wait even for two hours for the Rishi's return and proposes to get married the Gandharva way with the beautiful virgin. Shakuntala makes it conditional that the son born of their union should be the heir apparent to succeed the King. Obviously the King agrees to it and, after establishing his seed in her, returns to the palace. Before that he promises Shakuntala that he would send a royal escort to take her to the capital. But he fails to do so, fearing the wrath of the Rishi for having got married in haste during his brief absence. A boy is born to Shakuntala and more than fifteen years pass by without any word from the King. Kanva sends, along with some of his disciples, the mother and the child to their rightful place. Dushyanta remembers everything but refuses to accept Shakuntala; instead he insults her and tells her to quit the palace at once. She is shattered but proclaims that finally her son will become the sovereign of the land. Even as she prepares to leave, there is heard a heavenly voice declaring the truth of her utterance and counselling the King to keep his promise. Everybody in the court persuades the King to accept the injunction coming in the nature of a superior testimony. Dushyanta finds relieving solace in the turn of events and welcomes Shakuntala with precious gifts. She is made the Queen and their son installed as the Crown-Prince. Dushyanta rationalises his behaviour by explaining to Shakuntala that their marriage had taken place without any witnesses and the legality of the heir could have been challenged by the ministers and the public. He regrets his harsh words and pleads to be forgiven, asserting further that she had been his dear always.

The story as given appears to be an interpolation in the Mahabharata rather than the composition of Vyasa. There is in it neither the finesse nor the meritorious literary-poetic quality to be credited to an author of exceptional calibre, neither the power of the man nor the power of the moment, as Matthew Arnold would have it, to make it a master-work. All that we have here are, in simple plain words, the sexual misconduct of a king disowning the responsibility of his own act and a narration structurally weak and logically incoherent. It has hardly any touch of nobility, of a strong delightful sensuousness natural to the theme. It may be a good and faithful historical record, but as a piece of literature it is poor in quality. Kalidasa, on the other hand, as a supreme craftsman, gives a totally new twist and elevates the otherwise drab stuff to an exquisitely dramatic-romantic episode by providing a wonderful turning point. The poet's creative genius as a story-teller and a plot-builder lies in the invention of the delicately carved signet-ring which alone holds the avowal of the lovers' secret union. Shakuntala loses it while worshipping at a holy ford on her way to the capital and with its disappearance Dushyanta loses the memory of his relationship with the Ashrama-girl. He disclaims her; but when the fisherman of Shakravatara discovers it and it is presented to the King everything comes back to his mind. The veil is lifted and the memory restored. Recognition of Shakuntala is

complete and that is *abhijñānasakuntalam*. Then very shortly after that the two meet again and join together. This is also the dramatic and the Aristotelian recognition, *Anagorisis*, bringing a resolution to the dramatic muddle that came as a rude shock, even misfortune, in the sweetness of youthful romanticism. Kalidasa has introduced the element of fate's inexorability at the most apt juncture and neatly tied around it the sequels in both the times. If such a fateful or *alaukik* agency is invoked he also assures us a gripping supernatural plausibility in the thematic development. That is indeed the true high point of a very successful composition aided by inspiration and intuitive discernment.

In contrast to the Shakuntala-tale the Mahabharata-Savitri is a sweet little gem of matchless splendour. In it are the language and myth heightened to something great and revealing and the power of the unexpected comes out in a most fulfilling manner. King Ashwapati's daughter Savitri has chosen the forest-dwelling prince as her life's companion, but then arrives suddenly the sage Narad at the palace and makes known the short lifespan of Satyavan after the marriage. With it a totally new and fateful direction is given to the sequence of events. Not even a vague poetic hint was available until then and life seemed to run a customary natural placid course. A simple and straightforward choice was made in the profound discovery of love's joy; but, apparently, it had to be firmed up in the face of an unusual contingency and calamity yet unknown to the concerned. Savitri no doubt lives steadfastly in the strength of her character and has full conviction of her destiny, in the manner of a resolute heroine of a Greek tragedy; but more than a Grecian hero or heroine she knows from within that there are greater powers than Fate or Necessity and that the Law of the Truth is ultimately bound to prevail. Instead of a conflict between the individual and the universal, between man and moment, there is a positive sense of a superior harmony shaping and moulding even the minutest details of life. The narrative moves on to a point of climax where even the foretold death becomes a participator in the sure concordance of the Dharma of the most High.

In Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* there may not be the austere Vyasa's formidability; but what we have is superb élan of the multi-reaching luminous epic—lyrically rushing with assuredness of the calm spirit-of-delight. A breath of another brightness is blown into the creative ardour, giving to the heart of the toil and to the body of the want the embalming sweetness and joy of sunlit worlds approaching towards us from far distance. There is a certain element of tautness when the poem does arrive at the visit of Narad to Ashwapati, but it is enchantingly loosened by a happy hymn of the Name of Vishnu. If the Word of Fate carried by him is sharp and piercing, if its blow harsh and unbearable and sudden, that Satyavan must die the same day after one year returning, then it is also some benign and sagacious intuition in action that prompts the sage from Paradise to deliver it to the one who has now acquired new strength in the discovery of love. Savitri has met Satyavan and now a turning point must appear,

not only for the story to move quickly forward but also to resolve the issue of death's entanglement in the affairs of love. Narad brings the heaven-decreed Event closer with the haste of a lightning suddenness and fixes it with an irreversible decisiveness. His entire action is well-timed and finely tuned, like the perfection of a dependable precision clockwork. More than Man it is the Moment in which all shall be won or all shall be lost for Man. Such is the glorious uncertainty of the turning point in the epic given to us by Sri Aurobindo. Narad displays a noble sense of responsibility in this heart-shattering mission of conveying Satyavan's impending death to Savitri. Indeed, only the truly great in God can measure up to its demand and its rigour. The sage's is the calm might of impersonality which functions in the full dynamism of a detached but luminous will. The collaboration of such an operative luminous will in Savitri's work at a most opportune hour is something exceptionally grand and far-reaching in its consequences. We owe it to Narad

The occult background for this multiply significant turning point is transcendently vast. Ashwapati, the undaunted Traveller in Time, moved through innumerable worlds in spirit's freedom and greatness, saw Life, the fair and beautiful princess stationed in nether regions; she is lying helpless and deformed and hostile; in the bouge of darkness she gave birth to the children of evil and falsehood and sin; her tenebrous tongue lapped the Traveller's body, even so he bore the attack and carefully guarded his flickering soul in folded hands; then, to find the cause of this unprecedented failure, he travelled through the planes of Mind; entered domains after high spiritual domains; experienced absolute stillness; passed through the superconscient states; realised the All-in-One and One-in-All; witnessed in the gleaming realms of Knowledge a new and marvellous creation, ready and waiting to be born on the earth; from the world to be he divined the world that is; he is on the summit of the flaming hierarchy. The Raj-Yogi is now certain that this new and marvellous creation can take birth here only if the Divine Mother herself condescends to incarnate. He surrenders to her and prays to accomplish the destined miracle of Transformation; she has to unlock the doors of Fate and vanquish Time and Death. Only so could this sorrow-ridden life turn into happiness. Ashwapati's prayer is a master-act, seeking to change the whole basis of this material existence. Thus alone could the fair princess be married to jubilant love's prince.

In the seasons of Time the Goddess takes birth as Ashwapati's daughter; grows into beautiful and fiery maidenhood; is soon on her swift wheels to discover her lover and lord. She finds him even as her soul at once recognises their deep identity unimpaired by time and circumstance. But the supreme action has to be precipitated. Rama has been exiled but the real work of the Avatar can begin only with the abduction of Sita. The battle of Kurukshetra has to be fought for the establishment of the Law of the Right and that can happen only after the game of dice. It is as if a divine pretext is needed to strike at the

Adversary. For Savitri's action to commence Satyavan must die.

Satyavan is the representative human soul in the vanguard of the terrestrial evolution and his progress in deathlessness can become possible only by meeting Death. What had until now been a mechanism of growth through the dark and terrifying regions of Ignorance is no longer needed and must be dispensed with; the role of Death as a means towards Immortality is to be terminated. And that is precisely the task of Savitri. Indeed, Satyavan is the permanent Avatar of supreme Love taking his position in the Inconscience and it is he whom she is going to meet, on a physical plane, in the deep forest. He is her most excellent Lord and for his sake no sacrifice she considers too great. However, in the human drama she must remember her role and her mission, and not lose sight of it in the joy of union her love is no doubt heaven-born, but she must see that it is not buffeted or blown off by the wild winds of Time. Her will must be steeled and she must do the Yoga of Transformation. The turning point, provided by Narad's visit, is intimately linked up with these profound and supernatural contents of the Savitri-myth. Narad not only issues a warning that one day Savitri may have to stand alone and face the danger of the world's doom and hers; but much more than the negative is the definite involvement of great powers, of universal and supracosmic forces, in matters earthly. It is as though the ends of tragedy are picked up for the *grand finale* in the All-Might's victory over Death. It is as though this vast drama is being enacted with human participants on the stage of mortality to change it from within. The turning point then becomes the most absorbing denouement providing a triple resolution on human, spiritual, and occultly transcendental levels. With it the ancient presagement is seen to come true in the sage's announcement.

If the capacity to ponder over literary work is to enlarge our appreciation of it to a much wider and subtler degree, then the occasions that baffle us with their imponderables themselves provide newer entries to experience. They would take us to hidden depths where a mystery lies concealed in a yet deeper mystery, each revelation bringing with it a far more profound revelation. Unexpected dimensions of life open out, like vistas that constantly stretch on and on till they touch the occult and finally merge into it. With that, then, something begins to flow in the reverse direction, as if a sea were pressing itself into the source, and with it the waters of poetry in their energising currents begin to flood our darkish soil, bestowing rewards of a rich and shining harvest. The force of such a stream creates its own landscapes, its own situations in perfect accord and detail for the multi-ranging harmony to find an expressive play in the complex of *affaires de terre*. There is a fulfilment—on levels imaginative, intuitive, revelatory. Inspiration immediately sees substance and moulds it most compellingly to its supreme purpose; expression, sense, and sound become one with it. When this happens all aesthetic theorising halts and if at all comes only to convince us about symmetrical beauty of the composition with criticism slipping into a professional

exercise. But the turning point will always elude these attempts and persuade us to accept only the superiority of a luminous thrust carrying in it the entire dynamism of a creative process. That is the real merit for which poetry could then be, so to say, evaluated and perceived. Matthew Arnold invented the touchstone of exceptional specimen lines to discover the highest poetical quality of a work; in a similar manner, and with similar restrictions, we could perhaps consider the turning point in an epic to provide us with a certain idea of its class and excellence.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

CHRISTALIS

by

GEORGETTE COTY

(Continued from the issue of September 1995)

Music and Performing Arts

It was my birthday, and Christopher and I celebrated it quietly at home. As a rule we avoided such celebrations, not only since most of the children did not know their dates of birth, but mainly because it seemed best to avoid arousing nostalgia for the ones who would be missed on such days of remembrance.

What we did celebrate jointly every year, however, was the anniversary of the opening of our Children's Centre. This was an important, growing little world of its own, which first began with a makeshift living and sleeping arrangement, a kitchen and storeroom with an adjacent dining and playing room. It had grown since to the scale of a small village.

We had a school now with a number of classrooms for different age-groups and activities. A library, and quite a spacious study-room, which was always full and could be converted for different purposes. There was now a small sick-bay and recovery place and, most importantly, a proper hall for entertainment, which was also used during the day for learning crafts. Here we had singing and dance performances, plays, and our own small band of musicians entertained us.

From the time they were first started, these activities were found to be most therapeutic and productive. It was a joint effort, and our very own family affair. It proved extremely helpful in assisting newcomers over the initial difficulties of adjustment. Many a talented little artist grew out of this effort, and through it we became known throughout the surrounding communities. Friends would come to share with the children in their spare time—limited though it was—their own skills and whatever they could impart to them.

Now we had a proper stage, straw-mats and rag-rugs made of leftover old clothes spread on the floor for the audience. Dance and song performances with musical accompaniments were the best-loved by the little ones, and my Christopher, past his eighth year now, composed children's plays, made up from the rich store of his inner memories no doubt. Imaginative backdrops were made by the children out of anything they could find. Many busy young hands were engaged in this activity, and we in turn created the costumes for the plays.

This year we planned to make an open-air performance, and you would find the kids out there, pounding broken bricks and pebbles mixed with mud into a raised platform for a stage.

Spring was upon us once again, nature had nursed its own growing things back to life, and we were a happy lot by and large. Five milch cows, and six goats, were our source of wealth now, and a chicken-yard with a proud rooster to wake up everyone without a clock. So milk, cheese and eggs were a rich contribution to our diet. And of course our healthy vegetable plots gave us a good yield. Apart from this, all farming and dairy activities were taken up by other communities and all their products were shared according to their numbers and needs.

But tonight the two of us planned a little birthday party all to ourselves. I had managed to scrape a few luxuries together and made a sweet pudding, decorated with strawberries from our own garden. I laid out all the bits of goodies saved from my meals for the occasion, only to find that Christopher had done the same. So here we were, looking at our richly laid table, laughing at our own ingenuity. Christopher potted about his desk and with a secretive smile on his face he approached me, flowers in one hand and a scroll of paper tied with a pretty ribbon in the other.

“Happy birthday, darling Mummy! Flowers to love you with and I made this for you I hope you will like it. Won’t you please open it?”

“Oh my, a gift for me? And all these gorgeous flowers too?” I held them to my face. “You know how much I love flowers. From where did you pick so many of them?”—Then to show my excitement, “Quick! I must open this, did you write something nice?” He just kept his mysterious smile and said nothing, whilst I untied the string.

My heart missed a beat. Here was a delightful water colour of a flowered meadow filled with children, sitting before an old man who looked at them smiling. Above the painting he had written: “Story-telling garden”, and below it—“For my sweet Mother on her birthday, with love from her son, Christopher.”

I held the picture before me, but it took me a while before I could find my speech, tears were rolling down my cheeks.

“My lovely son, if I live to be a hundred, never will I find anything as precious as this. If only you knew how much this means to me! Darling, I thank you so very, very much for this most beautiful gift! And your work is wonderful, you will be a fine artist when you grow up, I am sure.”

“Do you like it truly?”—he asked eagerly—“More than I can tell you, darling, much more.” How could I tell him that I knew of its source?

We embraced a bit tearfully, a bit laughingly. Our hearts’ happiness did not need many words. Within us there lived another reality of joy—whose source was known to me and still waiting to be found by my boy.

His teasing words brought me back from my reverie. “My dearest birthday Mummy, shan’t we have some of those goodies? They are looking at me and I am eyeing them too.”

“But, Christopher, I am so overcome! It’s your own fault, that painting you gave me did it all! Yes, you are right, they are looking at me too. Come, let us enjoy this princely feast. See, I made a strawberry drink too, what do you say to that?”

“Only that I am famished,” he said, “but wait, let me put these flowers into a jar, they are thirsty too. Shall we keep them on the table to share this happy day with us, Mummy?”

“Dearest, you are thinking of everything, and I am helpless with excitement. But I pray that everyone on earth should have as much and much more—of love and good things too. Now let us dig in and drink a toast to it!”

We feasted and we sang little songs of spring, flowers and birds and happy children growing into clever and good people to make us a beautiful world full of happiness—till, tired out, we were told by the stars it was time to go to rest because they too had their own tales to tell whilst we slept. We needed but little prompting, sleep was mother’s arms to us all and this was such a happy day to sleep upon.

I was used to it by now and when the sound of the tinkling bells reached me in my sleep, I sat up drowsily and waited. His light grew before me and sleepily I managed to say: “So happy to see you, Christalis, I was hoping you would come, but I fell asleep.”

“A good thing too,” he said, “your body needs its rest. But come, Halio, let me embrace you and wish you well on your day of birth. As Christopher, so I too have something special for you to celebrate the occasion. Birthdays are very important events, believe me. Even the Gods envy men for having the opportunity to gain the precious experience of an earth-life. That is a great teacher ”

I could see myself rising out of my body, which lay back to sleep again, when Christalis touched it. And how strange it was that I was now another person, not the one that lay there unaware.

We had moved on with exceeding rapidity. This body was not held down by the pull of the earth, it was free to travel wherever it wanted to go.

“True,” came Christalis’s prompt reply, “but it is best and safest to do that in the company of a trusted guide, until you are familiar with the way and with your destination. Also in command of your capacities to deal with situations and beings you may encounter in worlds unknown to you. Not so, Halio?”

“Yes, Christalis, that is so, I have already learnt that.”

“I am glad to hear it, because I want all your higher senses to become as effective everywhere as the ones you need to have on earth, where you feel familiar—at home, so to say. You follow me?”

“Yes,” I said—“thank you for all you are teaching me, for every single word. I shall remember them ”

“That’s very good. And you will also implement them, won’t you, with the

same aptitude? But enough said, today we have another aim before us. Come with me then.”

We travelled on. The scenes we passed were not the ones I had seen before. Intoxicating fragrances greeted us, and musically toned voices came from the flowery fields we were approaching. The air was filled with their calls.

“A happy day of Light to Halio, who has come.”

Disbelief and delight mixed, I turned to my friend. “How can this be, how can such felicity be for me, Christalis? If this is the gift of heaven to me, I cannot be happy, until it is for all, for everyone! I am not better than my fellows; they too are waiting, hoping for their share of joy!”

“It will be, it will come to all, Halio, and I am happy to know that your heart is pure and never forgets those whom you remember even here. It is this unselfish dedication which gives you the credentials for this work, God’s work.

“Neither you, nor I, nor heaven will be satisfied until it can bestow its gifts, its benevolence on all His children. It was not God’s love that deserted them—but they who deserted Him. But now all of this has changed and so will everything and everyone. Let us live for that. God’s labour cannot cease until His work is done. Come, we are almost there.”

Music was coming from a distance and it grew more audible as we went on. It was glorious and drew me like a magnet. I began to run leaving Christalis behind, forgetting everything save to give myself to this heavenly sound. He caught up with me and held me by my arm.

“Halio, wait, where are you going?” But I only had ears for that music and my eyes gave ample answer as to which direction I needed to go. He laughed his silvery laugh...

“A child again? Come here a minute, someone wants to meet you.”

This must have been the day for amazing things to happen, because we arrived before a golden pavilion with glowing silken curtains for a door. It parted as if on command, thought-command, no doubt. There emerged a goddess of such beauty that I felt my heart would break right then just from seeing her. She came smiling toward me saying, “Sweet Halio, I greet you on your birthday. Please come in. Your friend Christalis asked me to robe you and arrange you for the occasion.”

Too stunned to move though she reached for my hand, I could not move a limb. Christalis came to my aid, he touched my heart and my forehead, which brought me back to life.

“Go with her, and do not be too long.”

I was hardly in a position to make decisions, or do anything else in fact but stare at this goddess and at all that I saw in this huge room. A room? It was more like a world, complete with garden and fountain, and talking, conscious things.

I saw my robe fall to the ground and felt her flowery hands busying themselves with something she had put over me. She did something to my hair,

then holding up a mirror that appeared from nowhere, she said, “Now look at yourself, how beautiful you are.”

A cry escaped me, and I put my finger on my lips, because the figure whom I saw in the mirror was not myself, yet someone like me. Hair of gold, with jewels and flowers strewn through it, crowned a body dressed in a gown of the finest gossamer stuff. A jewelled band held its folds round my waist, a clasp on one shoulder glittering like a star.

She only smiled and said, “One day you will come to this body and will not be so amazed. But I understand.... Come, my dear, we mustn’t keep our friend waiting too long.” Putting her hand on my shoulder, she led me to where Christalis stood, himself looking like a high god of glory.

He came toward us smiling, and placed a garland round my neck, embraced me and said in pure tones:

“May the light of the High be your permanent ornament, Halio. Become like a shining star in His firmament and a guiding light and beacon for all who would seek to find their way, as you have done.

“And now, to mark the day of your birth on earth and the significance of our companionship, take this gift from me: a symbol and token of our bond.”

He drew from the folds of his garment a golden casket and told me to open it.

My hands were trembling, I fumbled with it uselessly, but it flung open by itself—and there in the box glowed a ring of a pink diamond. Blinking, trembling, I looked at it—“It is like a star on a clear night!” I said

“Only here is eternal day, Halio,” he replied—“but let its light be your guide. Come, beloved one, may I place it on your finger now? With this ring I bind our friendship and the task before us in dedication to the Supreme’s Will. To bring heaven and earth closer in a bond, that was never dreamt of before... except resting in the mind of God, whose mind is Light.”

My eyes were moist. Overcome with emotion, I whispered, “I shall treasure this ring through eternity and I touch the ground upon which you led me to walk. Your prayer is also my own heart’s constant prayer. May I never fail it, for the earth is calling, I hear it from here calling from a million souls. May the Light of Heaven be theirs to illumine their lives. May it not be too long in coming, my beloved friend, teacher and guide whom I love with all my heart.”

“May it be so. It shall not be too long, Halio. Your prayer has strong force in it! But let us go further now!”

He thanked the goddess for her assistance, as she stood there watching us, a heavenly witness to this event. I too showed my gratitude to her with palms joined... we were off, to where? I never asked a question, nor could I muster many words, there was little need for them here.

“Well, Halio,”—his hand was holding mine—“you made a wish some time ago and I promised to fulfil it. You longed to hear again some great music and

for the uplifting performances you used to delight in. Well, it seems to me that today is a good day to fulfil that wish." He looked at me lovingly, but my hands trembled still, I could not control them.

"Like a tiny bird fluttering its wing! Halio, more of these delights are in store for earth."

But I, the fool that I was that day, with so much excitement, asked him: "Christalis, can I keep this gown please? How much Christopher would love to see me in it."

He laughed so delightedly that he filled the air with jingling bells. "Halio, my little bird, how can you go down to that body in this gown, looking the way you do now? Have you forgotten that you are in another body here?"

"But it is me," I argued—"I am myself all the same!"

"True, and one day the two will blend into one, I promise you that."

"All right then—I'll wait," said the foolish Halio.

"Over there we go! Look, this is one of heaven's theatres. They know that we are coming... see, they are already at the door to receive us."

One of heaven's radiant ones stood at either side of the entrance, each holding fragrant bouquets, and singing: "Oh Light Divine... the Birthday Halio" and they presented me with them.

"Enter, Christalis; enter, Halio of Earth."

"Thank you, beauteous goddesses, I thank you very much. I love flowers so, and we haven't any on earth such as these " Gracefully, with dancing hands they indicated that we should proceed within.

Multitudinous coloured brilliances greeted me, blinding my eyes. Not letting go of my hand, Christalis led me on. Two seats made of flowers called out: "I am for Christalis—I am for Halio, please take us." I made an effort to look about me, but saw only the conglomeration of coloured brilliances glittering above so many flower seats such as greeted my eyes when we entered.

"There are high beings here, Halio, though you cannot see them now. Calm yourself, dear, you can lay your bouquets on your seat, they won't wilt, they are for you."

I held them to my face to kiss them, then did as he had suggested, and kissed my ring too. "Never shall we part"—I said to it with silent words.

"No, we won't," said the ring. My beautiful friend smiled, but said nothing.

A chime of celestial music reverberated through the air, signalling the opening of the performance. The curtain, made of light, slid aside with a rhythmical motion revealing an empty stage. The light in the hall dimmed, the stage came alive.

Here was a lake of azure-blue amidst a world of forest and blooms. A single white swan was gliding on its shimmering surface, a marvel of gracefulness. Heavenly music rose from a flute, soaring to a crystal pitch ever higher in sonority... The swan began to dance upon the water—then it flew up into the air.

There it continued its dance singing gloriously whilst it danced, then came down flying with indescribable grace.

A string instrument joined in... another swan came gliding in to join the dance. The two flew spiralling, wings touching and parting, necks stretching one towards the other... Up, up they flew, ever up towards infinity, till they were hardly visible—no more than two spots of glittering light—then, returning like floating white veils in the air, came touching down upon the sapphire blue lake.

Other instruments joined the first two, rousing the swan people, and they performed a symphony made visual in a concerted dance. And now I noticed that the first two wore jewelled crowns.

Slowly the music mellowed... majestically the swan people swam away. The lake was empty once more.

The flute again: a huge lotus rose into view, resting upon heart-shaped leaves of emerald, drops of water diamonds sparkling upon them.

The lotus began to unfold its pink petals as dancers do, moving graceful arms. It revealed its golden heart. Enthroned upon it sat a goddess of unimaginable beauty holding a stringed instrument. Never have I beheld beauty such as hers... Incomparable, marvellous. She touched upon the strings lightly, then with somewhat more force, played upon them a life-creating sound that changed the scene.

Now there was only water everywhere... a vast expanse of water as far as the eyes could see and nothing else at all. The strings played strong notes... Tiny wriggling things appeared in it, and at last one large fish. It swam around rapidly, criss-crossing the waters, calling for other fish to appear. The music caused them to dance a watery tale of finding a mate, creating a teeming new life.

Another scene followed. The strings conveyed that the water had cooled down the red-hot molten earth. The music was deep, throaty—earth was hard as a rock. Strange and huge creatures came to life looking for food where there was little to be had. They fought for survival and devoured each other. One large boar with huge tusks appeared amidst them. The creatures retreated in fear and he began to dig into the hardened crust with his strong tusks to make it more pliable. Others came back and did the same...

The scene disappeared once again, giving room to another... The music was vigorous, sweeter in tone yet forcefully strong. There was green growth everywhere, animals roamed freely in thick forests. Fruits were hanging in abundance from the trees, the bushes were full of lush leaves and berries, enough to feed them all.

The music came to a halt... an air of expectation... not a sound from anywhere. The goddess sat upon the lotus-throne waiting... What was she waiting for?...

A flash of light from above! It wrote on the sky one word: "Proceed!"

She lifted her heavenly hand with captivating gracefulness, and touched the

strings, her instrument resting on one lovely arm. She played with such a tone of beauty that I felt that this sound could change the world.

All of a sudden other musicians arrived. Tiny they were and very beautiful. They came skipping and dancing from all over in droves, taking their seats on swaying flowers and on the boughs of the trees. Flute-players, harpists, players of all sorts of string and wind instruments and tiny drums beating like hearts.

Sweet were their countenances as were the tunes they played. The enchantment of their music was so intoxicating, so magical, that all the flowers, the trees and the very ground that supported them were charmed into a swaying and swooning dance.

Not only they, but we on our flower seats swayed from side to side. Had Christalis not supported me, maybe I too would have floated off to who knows where—to the great beyond perhaps with the swans that had disappeared into the sky.

As if the world had expanded, the field grew into a huge expanse of flowery grove. The trees were in full bloom, others heavy with fruit. Birds and butterflies of unimaginable colours flew about. The birds sang solos, joined by the choruses of other flying things with ecstatic cantatas... then... all was quiet again... everything was still.

A god, resplendent, came floating through the air, playing on a stringed instrument, singing in his descent. He sang of God's greatness, and of the Mother's mightiness of Love. . the Mother of all created beings, from whose smiling lips new worlds took shape... Creatures appeared. She gave them bodies of Her choosing and scattered them to people Her worlds.

His music and song of sublimity was beyond comparison. He sang as he alighted, and with one great crescendo this heavenly troubadour announced:... "and from Her heart of Love, the Mother of Heaven called forth Man."

The singer stopped his song... he came closer toward the grove and, as if arrested, stood motionless.

All hearts in the audience waited breathlessly... as indeed the whole universe... rapt with expectation.

The swaying, dancing fields stayed... everything was still... only the great vast sea lapping at the shores hummed its rhythmical tone.

Suddenly thunder, and one single bolt! Heartbeats were heard... faintly at first, more audibly after, without a stop.... The earth had parted like lips opening and issued forth its newborn—the infant Man.

Two golden hands came down from above and lifted him up in the air, and held him to Her golden breasts—the Divine Mother was feeding Her young. But we could not see Her face—a blinding radiance hid it from our sight.

Her celestial hands laid the infant back on the earth upon a flowery cradle. She waved one hand; the gentle breeze fanned it... sweet white lambs guarded it as She sang a song of the spheres where She was ultimate Queen. The Mother of

Heaven lulled Her child to sleep.

The light dimmed on the stage, the play was over, but no one moved. All sat captivated, transported to heights that even these heavenly hearts could hardly bear to hold.

How or when we came to be where we were sitting now, under a fragrant blossoming tree, I could scarcely tell. Christalis called to it and it lowered a branch, offering us its blossom for cup and some of its nectar to drink. He held it to my lips—"Come, drink this, it will give you strength." Then he rose. —"Hailo, it's time for you to return."

This nectar gave back my speech, I turned toward him, my heart was filled with felicity.

"Blessed be this day of fulfilment, Christalis... Let this bliss spread its unfailing omnipotence and touch the earth. Renew its life, awaken its spirit and uplift the consciousness of love in men."

I leaned down again to kiss the ground, caressed its soil with my heart's love and rubbed its sacred dust over my hair. I offered my hand to him to lead me back to where he had lifted me from.

Christopher slept deeply and so did my own body lying there at peace. Gone was my garment of splendour, the jewelled ornaments I had wanted to show my son; but the ring had left a faint mark on my finger—I kissed it now ...

Once again I was Earth Mother's own, thanking Her for giving me birth.

(To be continued)

THE PRAYERS TO SŪRYA AND AGNI IN THE ĪŚĀVĀSYA UPANIṢAD

1. The Form and Style of the Concluding Verses

If we pass from the first fourteen to the last four verses of the *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* (15 to 18), we find that the four fall into a distinct class by themselves, distinct both in form and style. In these verses the Upaniṣad adopts a form and style proper to the Veda rather than to the Vedānta.

Their closeness to the Veda is attested by three important things. First of all, they are prayers addressed to the Vedic gods Surya and Agni. Secondly, there are many words such as *pūsan*, *satyadharmā*, *amṛtam* and *kratu* which reinforce their Vedic association. Thirdly, verse 18 has been bodily taken from the *Ṛgveda* (1-189-1) and used as the concluding *mantra* of the Upaniṣad.

There are two ways in which their affinity to the Veda can be viewed. This depends on how the division of the whole Vedic corpus is made. According to an age-old tradition, it is divided into two major portions, the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. Here the Vedas stand mainly for the Brāhmaṇas to which the Samhitās are added as subsidiary texts, and the Upaniṣads refer to the texts that appear at the end of the Vedas. According to another tradition less popular than the first but equally old, the Vedic corpus falls into three broad divisions: (i) the Samhitās; (ii) the Brāhmaṇas; and (iii) the Upaniṣads. Here the Vedas represent the Samhitās not subordinated to the Brāhmaṇas, but regarded as having an independent status and standing as the common source of inspiration to both the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads. Thus the Vedas are considered to be superior to both the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads. Of the latter two, the Upaniṣads have acquired a unique position—they not only form the concluding portion of the Vedic corpus but also reveal the inner essence of the Vedas, *Vedānta*. Thus the Vedas may be understood as referring to mainly the Brāhmaṇas or only the Samhitās. Therefore the closeness of the last four verses of the *Īśāvāsya* to the Vedas may be viewed in two ways—as a closeness to the teachings of the Brāhmaṇas or to those of the Samhitās.

Therefore the four verses may be interpreted in two ways: one, from the point of view of the Brāhmaṇas; and the other, from the point of view of the Samhitās. If we go through the extant commentaries on the *Īśāvāsya*, two of them strike us, one by Shankaracharya and the other by Sri Aurobindo, for they work out the two possibilities mentioned above.

2. Shankaracharya's Commentary

Shankaracharya comes in a tradition which opposes the Vedānta to the Veda, taking the latter in the sense of the Brāhmaṇa and at the same time

affirming that the Veda, unlike the Vedānta, deals with the lower knowledge, *aparāvidyā*. Hence he upholds this tradition while interpreting the four verses. In view of their Vedic style and form he thinks that their aim should be the same as that of the Brāhmaṇa.

Heaven is the object of the works and *upāsanās* expounded in the Brāhmaṇa. Immortality of the soul, according to them, is attained only in Heaven and not in the world. There are two Heavens, higher and lower. Those who go to the higher Heaven (*devaloka*) do not return to the mortal world; and those who go to the lower Heaven (*pitrloka*) return to the world and are again bound by the mortal limitations.

3. Explanation of the Text

Behind the golden light of the Sun is Brahman (*apara brahma*), the Truth, *satya*. In the absence of divine grace the golden light has a blinding effect on the devotee, making both the face of Brahman and the passage to His abode invisible. Once the grace is there, the effect of the golden light will be restrained. And, as a result, the veil over both the Face and the Passage will be removed. Hence the devotee who has worshipped the Truth since his childhood in the prescribed manner, *satyadharmā*, prays for the removal of the luminous obstruction, by the grace of Surya, *tattvam pūṣannapāvṛṇu*.

In his effort to win the grace he glorifies Surya by several epithets—*pūṣan*, *ekarṣe*, *yama*, and *prājāpatya*—and repeats his prayer in another form asking Him to withdraw the rays and the burning light, *vyūha rasmīn tejah*. When his prayer is granted and the obstruction removed, he will be able to see the most beautiful form of Brahman, *rūpaṁ kalyāṇatamaṁ*, not only in the solar orb but in his heart as well, *so'ham asmi*.

As the vision is made possible by going to Brahman and as this going culminates in the attainment of immortality, *devātmabhāvam*, the devotee, who has become fit for immortality, is now concerned with the journey to the abode of Brahman, *brahma loka*. This depends on four important things—*vāyu* (life-principle), *śarīram* (body), *kṛtam* (deeds of the past) and the grace of Agni. The Vāyu carries the soul from birth to birth and keeps the cycle as an unbroken process; the *śarīram* serves as the physical seat of the soul and keeps it tied to the physical world, a domain far away from the domain of God. When they fall away from the soul which has become fit for immortality, the cycle breaks, the bond ceases and the journey begins. Hence the prayer, “Let them go back to their respective sources—the Vayu to the immortal *anilam* and the *śarīram* to the earth in the form of ashes”, *vāyur anilam...atha idam bhasmāntamaśarīram*.

To complete the journey he also needs the support of two other things—on his side, the deeds which ensure the realisation of *devātmabhāva* in the world of Brahman and on the other side, the grace of Agni who protects the soul's

passage from becoming a crooked process on account of the sins still lurking in the body and conducts it by the good path which is straight and safe. Hence, the devotee in his prayer turns towards the deeds done in this life, *kṛtam*, and the help Agni gives to the departing soul, *agne naya supathā rāye*. A soul that reaches the abode of Brahman by the good path does not return to the mortal world but is eventually united with the supreme Brahman who is bodiless and pure, *akāyam śuddham*, at the end of the world-cycle.

Shankara has worked out his view that the last four verses of the Upaniṣad are closer to the Veda (the Brāhmaṇa)* than the Vedānta. But his interpretation is vitiated by two defects. First of all, he takes the golden lid, *hiraṇmaya pātram*, to be the brilliant solar orb (*āditya maṇḍalam*) which has a blinding effect on the devotee's vision.¹ As the burning light (*tāpakam jyotiḥ*) of the solar orb is physical,² it is obvious that it affects the physical vision of the devotee. Therefore, by withholding (*upasamhāra*) this burning light the vision of the physical eye of the devotee can be improved. Now the question is this: Is it possible to get the vision of the Truth and its most beautiful form through improving the power of the physical eye? It may be argued that just because the devotee is not able to see the face of the Truth with his physical eye he is asking Agni to free his soul from *vāyu* and the body so as to enable him to see its most beautiful form without being hindered by the physical limitations. Whatever the merit of this argument, it does not take away the strength of our remark. For if the devotee really wants to transcend the solar orb and see the Truth through the freed soul, his appeal to withdraw its rays and its light and heat is pointless, for it supposes that the Truth can be seen if the solar orb becomes less oppressive and hostile to the physical eye. Secondly, the interpretation put on verse 16 by Shankara is contrary to the teaching of the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*. The Upaniṣad tells us that in the worship of the Sun, *āditya upāsanā*, the link between the subject and the object is of vital importance, *tāv etāv anyo'nyasmin pratiṣṭhitau* (5-5-2). Through the rays of the *āditya maṇḍala*, says the Upaniṣad, the person in the *maṇḍala* rests on the person in the right eye, and conversely the latter rests on the former through the function of the eyes.³ If the devotee, as in the sixteenth verse of the *Īśāvāsya*, prays for the removal of the rays that fall on him, he will be removing by his prayer the link necessary in the right worship of the Sun. This is violative of the rule prescribed for Sun-worship. The reason why these contradictions arise from Shankara's interpretation is that in the *Īśāvāsya* the prayer to Surya is not meant to be taken as the *āditya upāsanā* of the Brāhmaṇa.

4. Relation of the Text to Other Verses

Apart from interpreting the four verses, Shankara is obliged to show how

* Wherever the term 'Veda' is used in connection with Shankara it stands for the Brāhmaṇa

these verses are related to other verses in the Upaniṣad. We shall see how he meets this point. According to him, verses 9 to 14 set forth how a qualified individual wins the twin goals of the Veda—going beyond death (*mṛtyum tīrtva*) and attaining immortality (*amṛtam aśnute*). Here two formulas are suggested for this purpose, one combining works (*avidyā*) such as *agnihotra* with meditation on the gods (*vidyā*) and another combining two forms of worship connected with the Manifested (*vināśa*) and the Unmanifested (*asambhūti*). Of the two, the first, says Shankara, is taken and elaborated in practical terms in verses 15 to 18. He further says that verses 9 to 14 keep in mind the teaching of verse 2 that one who imagines himself to be a mere mortal being, *naraḥ*, should desire to live a hundred years here untouched by evil deeds (*aśubha karma*) by performing works ordained by the Veda. He has not related verses 15 to 18 to verses 1 and 3 to 8 because he finds that they are *not meant* to be related to the latter. He points out that verses 1 and 3 to 8 are addressed to the renunciates whose aim is to protect the Self through the renunciation of life and works. Whereas other verses including verses 15 to 18 do not have the renunciates in mind but the mortals who imagine their self to be a doer and an enjoyer and who wish to live a hundred years here doing works such as *agnihotra*, etc. In other words, the eligibles for these two classes of verses—1 and 3 to 8, 2 and 9 to 18—are entirely different and have nothing in common. Thus by bringing in the principle of *adhikāribheda* Shankara makes no attempt to unify them; rather he justifies his position that there is no connection between them in the Upaniṣad.

(i) If verse 2 may be taken as upholding the principle of *adhikāribheda* with respect to the mortals, as is taken by Shankara, then by the same token verse 3 must be considered as decrying the principle. On Shankara's own showing the aim of the third verse is to decry the mortals who live in ignorance, *avidvan-nindārthe-ayam mantra ārabhyate*.⁴ By extension the third verse decries those who are engaged in works and meditations as ordained by the Veda. A censure on the ignorant thus becomes a censure on the principle which makes them eligible for such works and meditations. In this circumstance it is difficult to maintain that the Upaniṣad is wedded to the principle of *adhikāribheda* or that the last four verses are not meant to be related to verses 1 and 3 to 8 on account of this principle.

(ii) Rightly understood, the principle seems to be guided by a rule like this: if two parts of a text are found to be in conflict with each other, the way to end the conflict is to somehow keep them isolated or deny that there is a conceivable connection between the two. As the name itself suggests, it is a principle of separation rather than reconciliation, *bheda*. If the concluding verses, like the other verses—2 and 9 to 14, are left as they are and not harmonised with verses 1 and 3 to 8 by taking shelter under the principle of *adhikāribheda*, it reduces the Upaniṣad to the position of a bundle of discordant ideas and teachings.

5. Sri Aurobindo's Commentary

Sri Aurobindo admits that the four concluding verses of the *Īśāvāsya* differ from the previous verses in both form and style. He also admits that their form and style are Vedic, but, unlike Shankara, he traces these features to the Samhitā part. According to his studies, the Vedānta is more akin to the Samhitā than the Brāhmaṇa, for its main preoccupation is the discovery of the inner sense of the Samhitā. Hence he does not see any opposition between the Vedānta and the Veda. To him the four verses, though Vedic in outward appearance, are Vedāntic in aim and do not stand apart from the other verses of the Upanisad to introduce a disconnected sequence of thought.

As the four concluding verses are woven around two powerful Vedic figures Surya and Agni, we shall note how Sri Aurobindo unfolds their original significances. To the sages of the Veda, says Sri Aurobindo, Surya is divine illumination. "Surya enlightens the mind and the thoughts with the illuminations of the Truth. He is *vipra*, the illumined. It is he who delivers the individual human mind from the circumscribed consciousness of self and environment and enlarges the limited movement which is imposed on it by its preoccupation with its own individuality. Therefore he is *br̥hat*, the Large. But his illumination is not a vague light nor does his largeness come by a confused and dissolved view of self and object; it holds in itself a clear discernment of things in their totality, their parts and their relations. Therefore he is *vipaścīt*, the clear in perception."⁵ He is the Lord of Light and Truth, and through Him we arrive at Immortality. Like Surya, Agni is another symbol of the Vedic poets. Agni, says Sri Aurobindo, is the flaming will of the Godhead. He is the immortal worker whose "mission is to purify all that he works upon and to raise up the soul struggling in Nature from obscurity to the light, from the strife and the suffering to love and joy, from the heat and the labour to the peace and the bliss".⁶ He is the deliverer and leader who "destroys the enemy, the assailants, the powers of evil, enriches the soul with all they try to withhold, gives the triple peace and the triple fulfilment of the mental, vital and physical being and, labouring in the light of the supramental Truth, leads beyond, creating in us the world of immortal felicity".⁷ The gods Surya and Agni, therefore, represent the twin "gates of Immortality", Surya opening man's consciousness to the divine Light of the Lord and Agni raising man's will to the divine Force of the same Lord. In the Lord the divine Light and the divine Force are two inseparable aspects always united with each other. Hence Sri Aurobindo, commenting on the last four verses of the *Īśāvāsya*, tells us that "the prayer to Agni completes the prayer to Surya"

(To be continued)

Notes

- 1 Shankara's Commentary, verse 15
- 2 *Ibid* , verse 16
- 3 *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, 5-5-2 Tr Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta Advaita Ashrama), Fourth Edition, 1965
4. Shankara's Commentary, verse 3
- 5 Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda* (Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972), pp 276-77
- 6 *Ibid* , p 359
- 7 *Ibid* , p 373

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

69. SHOW... LET ME SEE

THE sun in the west resembled a ball of fire. It was time for King Kulothunga Chozhan to take a stroll in the royal garden. It was customary of him to choose a common man every day to go with him. That evening too a commoner was waiting to accompany him.

“What’s all the news today?” asked King Kulothunga Chozhan, allowing his hand to rest on the commoner’s shoulder.

“What should have gone to the palace has gone to a bungalow,” said the commoner.

“Ho! Sounds interesting! Go ahead,” said the king.

“Your majesty! A merchant from the far North had among his other wares a very costly piece of cloth. Made of top quality silken threads, the cloth was embroidered with winged creatures and with red and blue flowers. He had spread it out for us to see and we have never seen such a marvellous cloth in our lives. And when he quoted the price our mouths went agape. The merchant chuckled and then asked, ‘Are there no takers in your kingdom?’ ”

“Why didn’t you bring him to the palace?” interrupted the king.

“Well, your Majesty! Before I could do so, somebody guided him to Sadayappar’s bungalow. And we saw the merchant return jubilantly carrying a bag of gold. He stopped near us for a second or so and complimented us, ‘If a subject in the Chozha kingdom could afford to give me more than I wanted for my cloth, then your king will definitely buy the costliest cloth I bring next time. Surely your land is a blessed one.’ ”

“Oh, I see! Sadayappar bought the cloth. Then it must really be nice to look at, for Sadayappar is not only a great philanthropist but also a connoisseur of art and literature. No wonder he paid more than the merchant had quoted.”

Sadayappar was quite surprised to see the king’s messenger at his doorstep. The king’s letter changed hands. Sadayappar unfurled it and read:

We have not met each other for a long time. Please be kind enough to call on me any time at your convenience.

Kulothungan

The king eagerly awaited Sadayappar every day. And when he didn’t turn up for a fortnight, the king inquired into the matter. To his dismay, he found that Sadayappar was bedridden due to an abscess in his left thigh.

King Kulothunga Chozhan felt very bad about it and as a matter of courtesy he wanted to schedule a visit to Sadayappar. But before he could fix a day to do so, Sadayappar surprised him by coming to the king’s court.

The king stood up, smiled, rushed towards limping Sadayappar and helped him reach a chair close by the throne. "Are you completely cured of your ailment?"

"I am better now .. I was disabled for several days. You must excuse me, your Majesty, for this belated call," said Sadayappar

"Oh! I am most honoured by your visit today," said the king, admiring all the time the beautiful silken garment that adorned Sadayappar. Touching his sleeve, he said, "Lovely! Is this the one for which you've paid through your nose?"

Sadayappar nodded his head and said, "But it is worth its price. It is quite a comfortable wear and looks grand."

"It certainly looks grand on you," approved the king slapping Sadayappar on his left thigh in a friendly manner.

"Huh...h...h," screamed Sadayappar holding his painful thigh.

"I am sorry... I am sorry... I forgot all about your abscess. Is it still paining? Show it, let me see the abscess," requested the king to Sadayappar's embarrassment and surprise

To lift the garment up to his hip in front of so many courtiers and ministers in order to expose the abscess looked indecent. While Sadayappar thought of a way to fulfil the king's desire, the king himself felt awkward for having asked Sadayappar to show the abscess.

All of a sudden Sadayappar tore that part of his garment that covered his left thigh and exposed a blistering abscess. "Small it may be, but horrible is the pain."

The king was shocked to see the costly garment torn a little. "Huh! What have you done to your garment? You can't use it again," said he peering anxiously at the opening in the garment.

"It matters little, your Majesty! I can afford to buy one more such cloth. But I can't reject your friendly request."

70. A PACK OF CADJAN LEAVES AND A STYLUS

"This is not the first time you are doing it. I have excused you on two occasions. I can't pardon you any more," howled Vana Rayan.

"But, Sir! This time I didn't send the man away. I told him to be comfortable in the bungalow and stay till you return from your pilgrimage. But the man was so shy that he left the place telling me that he would come another time. And I am not at fault," said Vana Rayan's assistant.

"Did you ask him his name at least?"

"Yes I did... He said simply 'Poet'."

"Where did he come from?"

“From the land of poverty, he said.”

The word ‘poverty’ pricked his heart like an awl. He silently wept over his inability to help the unknown visitor. He then gave strict instructions to his assistant to register the names and addresses of the people who came seeking his help in his absence.

Vana Rayan, one among the many affluent men in Kongu Nadu was very broad-minded and magnanimously gave away a major chunk of his earnings to the poor and the needy. And to the poets and artistes he gave whatever they wanted.

Vana Rayan was in for a shock a couple of months later. When his aged mother fell seriously ill, the village physicians who diagnosed her disease invariably declared that her end was near. Vana Rayan being the only son cared for her and remained by her side round the clock for several days. At last, in spite of his intensive care, the old lady passed away.

Vana Rayan mourned his mother’s death and after the formal ceremonies that went on for more than two weeks he resumed work.

“Poor Vana Rayan! He was unable to attend to his work during the illness of his mother,” said a relative to another in the presence of Vana Rayan.

“True! No other work was more important to me than attending to my mother,” said Vana Rayan.

“And that’s why I drove away strangers who came seeking your help,” said the relative coolly.

“Who came?”

“Huh! Not very important persons. They called themselves poets, musicians, singers and song-writers. They were really lazy fellows who were not prepared to do manual work and earn their wages.”

“Why didn’t you send them to me?”

“Oh, no!... You were very much worried and those fit-for-nothing fellows could not have entertained you.”

Vana Rayan gave a bit of his mind to his uncouth relative and ordered his servants to keep a pack of cadjan leaves and a stylus at the entrance of his bungalow.

Commanding a couple of his servants to remain at his gate, he said: “Whoever comes seeking my help should be given a cadjan leaf and a stylus whether I am in station or not. Ask him to write his name, his address and his needs”.

Vana Rayan’s command was obeyed. That was the way he made poets and artistes happy and thereby flourish in their chosen field never bothering about the next meal.

(More legends on the way)

P. RAJA

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother Vol. 4, Compiled by Shyam Kumari, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. 1995, pp. viii + 257, Rs. 75.
Available at SABDA, VAK and also with the author c/o Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605 002.

SRI AUROBINDO and the Mother are not only great philosophers but also solicitous, empathic and unfailing friends and guides to their disciples and devotees all over the world. The book under review contains 25 stories about how Sri Aurobindo and the Mother came to the rescue, both physical and spiritual, of their disciples and devotees. Together, the 25 stories constitute an epic saga of the journey of 25 human beings through an apparently endless series of struggles, tensions and unexpected vicissitudes of life towards the achievement of total faith in the benevolent benediction of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The stories not only appear as sources of inspiration to the spiritually inclined but will also enchant the mind and intellect of even the agnostics throughout the world.

Shyam Kumari has already published three volumes in the series under the same title. The readers who are familiar with the earlier volumes will have the opportunity of going through another set of spiritual experiences of a wide cross-section of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's disciples from different parts of India as well as other countries of the world. The stories cohere into a harmonious whole under the central motif of faith and trust in the beatific spiritual influence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. What is particularly outstanding about the volume is the central theme. The devotees have all passed through harrowing experiences of life, and while they progress, at the level of earthly events, towards an annihilation of hope and prospect, they paradoxically arrive at an unexpected divine resolution that appears to them to be a miracle which, they realise in their heart of hearts, has been transformed into a perceptible blessed reality by the immanent benign grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. What contributes to the attraction of the common theme is the multifarious complexity and extraordinary variety of the experiences of the large cross-section of devotees who have all converged to the ultimate realization of the Grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Shyam Kumari has edited and occasionally re-told the stories with superb skill and felicity. The whole book produces in the mind of the reader a simultaneous juxtaposed impression of variety and unity.

The stories are written not only with devotion but also with literary flair. The editor-*cum*-writer has brought them together with an unfailing sense of artistic beauty and woven them into a bouquet of human offerings at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The book radiates a spiritual splendour that,

over and above sparkling and casting a spell, infuses an inspiration for a greater spiritual realisation in the inmost recesses of the hearts of its readers. I am sure this book will be welcomed by men and women all over the world.

In the preface, Shyam Kumari tells the genesis of the stories. Some of them are compiled from the books of the sadhaks; some are based on interviews held with the devotees by her, and some are written by the devotees themselves. In most cases, identities of the devotees are not disclosed, probably because the stories are in the form of confessions. All the stories are powerful, very ably pruned and pared into a lucid design fraught with literary and artistic beauty and appeal.

The preface is followed by an introduction by Shyam Kumari. She concludes her introduction with the words: "Through each of these stories the love and consciousness of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother run like golden notes. If by reading them the reader is brought nearer to his soul, if by its influence he is drawn closer to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and their Yoga of Transformation, the purpose of these books will be fulfilled." I can assure Shyam Kumari that her purpose in this volume under review is entirely fulfilled.

The first story is the story of the Mother's "lion", Champaklal. Champaklal's devotion to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is unparalleled, its unique features are delineated in line after line which presents a moving document of guru-shishya relationship. As in *Ramakrishna Kathamrita* we find the day-to-day record of Sri Ramakrishna's conversations and quotidian life, similarly Champaklal records his conversations with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Hence, this book offers not only stories but also living records of the devotees' direct contact with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This aspect of the book enhances its value and appeal immensely.

There are stories which let us know about Sri Aurobindo's food habits in the early austere days in Pondicherry (the story entitled "Unalloyed Gold"). Many small details about the Mother's habits and in regard to her car-drives and her attitude towards her driver are to be found in the story, 'Bala—the Mother's other Driver'. The stories are in the form of anecdotes retold from memory. Hence, they are never sombre, dull or dry like philosophical arguments. One can read the stories bit by bit, and is most likely to enjoy every bit of the book.

The story entitled 'Divine Protection' narrates in two parts the incidents in the lives of a couple, incidents that show how Sri Aurobindo and the Mother protected them from mortal calamities many a time.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother attracted many devotees, both men and women, from different parts of the world. There are several stories written or reported by them, the stories tell how they left their rich comfortable lives in the West, and came to Pondicherry to stay there forever in order to be in the vicinity of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Ashram with its vast purity and benedictory atmosphere.

The last story 'Living a Spiritual Life' tells how a rheumatic patient from a poor family gradually overcame all the physical and pecuniary problems through constant meditation on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and evolved into a world-famous medical surgeon who, after retirement from service, built the world's largest eye hospital—Arvind Eye Hospital—in Madurai.

All the 25 stories are fascinating. They simultaneously charm and uplift the readers. The whole book seems to bask in the blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Through a reading of it, we perceive the genuineness of Shyam Kumari's offering: "My humble and grateful Pranams to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother." I hope the author will present us with many more volumes in the series to let us know Sri Aurobindo and the Mother more closely, and uplift us morally and spiritually with the stories of mortal human beings' divine encounters with the two Avatars of the twentieth century.

SUBHASH CHANDRA SAHA

Great Sir and the Heaven Lady by Maggi Lidchi-Grassi, published by Writers Workshop, Calcutta; pp. 227, price Rs. 250.

Writers are well aware of it: it is difficult to write a book about someone of the opposite sex. Psychologically, they always lack certain elements necessary for being completely true to fact. They may sound convincing, but there is a certain inner truth which escapes them. A male writer will not easily identify himself with a female character; a woman writer's chances with regard to a male character are no better.

This is the main reason why in my opinion the book by Maggi is so remarkable: *Great Sir and the Heaven Lady* is the story of a man, told by a woman who removes herself from her femininity. Were this work to appear without the author's name being given, everyone would think it to be the work of a man. But no: it is a woman who, from within, has reconstructed for us the *true* story of a young American soldier.

And here we find a second cause for wonder and surprise. For if it is difficult enough to change one's sex in a sense, in order to be able to write a book, it is practically impossible for a woman to don the skin of a soldier and to evoke those essentially virile emotions which are created by the sight of a battlefield, by participation in the fights, and by the death of comrades with whom one exchanged jokes only the moment before.

And Maggi accomplishes this feat with the greatest possible ease and simplicity: she is John Kelly, the young infantryman who has a brush with death on every page and whom God guides and protects.

For she is not afraid to add another supreme difficulty to those I just

mentioned. Her book about war is in fact a book about spirituality—which may not come as a surprise to those who have read her *Battle of Kurukshetra*, but which, when it is a question of describing recent historic events, becomes a supreme literary achievement.

No preaching, no propaganda. Nothing but a description of facts by a novelist of the category of D. H. Lawrence: a profound human warmth, a poetry which arises straight from a simple and vibrant language, the sense of a divine presence at the core of all things, a divinity which is conscious of all our individual movements and of the place they occupy in the mystery of the world

John Kelly, who is not at all a plaster saint, who is a young run-of-the-mill American and who has a girlfriend back in the United States, is inwardly a man with an unusual receptivity, a fact of which he becomes very much aware. A voice counsels him. It is the voice of *Great Sir*, as he calls him: Sri Aurobindo, as he finally discovers (but without knowing at once who Sri Aurobindo is in reality). An ineffable love enfolds him. It is the love of Her whom he calls the *Heaven Lady*: the Mother (whom he will meet later at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram accompanied by . Maggi)

I have nothing to add about this great and beautiful book, so powerful and so touching.

Really nothing?

Yes, there is one more thing: we are all of us John Kellys, humble little soldiers full of ignorance and naiveté, guided by a divine voice in the night of the world. It is not the least of Maggi's virtues that she allows us to understand—that is, to have faith and hope, to listen within ourselves.

ARCHAKA

Towards the Light of the Supreme, by Samar Basu; published by World Union, Pondicherry - 605 002; printed at All India Press, Pondicherry - 605 001; pp. 58 + iv, price Rs. 30, Dy size

This nice booklet is a collection of three essays by Samar Basu: *Universal Man, Spiritual Man and His Society* and *The Journey's End*. The first two appeared as independent articles in the *World Union* and the third one was written as a connecting link between the two when the proposal of publishing the present booklet came up.

The concept of the universal man, *vishwa manava*, comes from hoary ancient times and has always found expression in human thought. Samar Basu has given a brief outline of the doctrine of 'Cosmic Humanism' resulting from the philosophy of Pantheism, the 'Religion of Man' as set out by Rabindranath Tagore at variance with Einstein, and the 'Religion of Humanity' put forth by Sri Aurobindo

“The truth of man is the highest truth of the manifest world,” emphasized Tagore. But Sri Aurobindo affirms that man has to exceed himself. “The aspiration to exceed himself is delivered and articulate within him.” From ‘mental man’ to ‘spiritual man’: this is the call of Sri Aurobindo.

When there are a good number of spiritual men, a spiritual society will come into existence. The spiritual society will differ from the normal society, as stated in the second essay, in two fundamental points: “Firstly, the normal society treats man essentially as a physical, vital and mental being; whereas a spiritual society regards man not as a mind, a life and a body, but as a soul incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth. Secondly, in a normal human society men live like slaves—slaves of power, slaves of authority, slaves of custom, slaves of all sorts of imposed law whereas a spiritual society will recognise that individuals must have sufficient freedom for all its members,—mind, life and body—to grow in their own strength to find themselves and their potentialities.”

The last item, *The Journey's End*, speaks of the consciousness of the superman and of the Mind of Light. It is rather heavy reading as compared with the first two essays which can be enjoyed by many looking for the social philosophy of Sri Aurobindo.

SHYAM SUNDER JHUNJHUNWALA

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Seventy-eighth Seminar

19 February 1995

SOME GLIMPSES OF THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF THE MOTHER

THE MOTHER—THE SHAKTI OF SRI AUROBINDO

Speech by Sunayana Shukla

IT is only natural that on the occasion of the Mother's birth anniversary we should talk of her life and draw inspiration from it. Since we are celebrating her birthday, my thoughts have dwelt around the circumstances of her birth. As we know, before entering into a human body before birth the soul chooses the place of its birth and the family into which it will be born. So it was not at all by chance that the Mother chose to be born in France. Rather, it is of great significance that France was her country of birth even though neither her father nor her mother were of French origin. Her father was Turkish and her mother was Egyptian-Jewish. They came to settle down in France only one year before the Mother was born. Before this they had lived in Cairo where the Mother's brother Mattéo was born. So, even though the Mother was born in Paris and brought up there, she was not really French. Even her name, Mirra Alfassa, is not a French name at all.

A few words about France then would not be out of place. If there is one country in the world that people associate with the enjoyment of the senses it is surely France. And yet there is no other country which is so rational and clear in its thinking. The French people, like the people of all other European countries, channelise all their efforts and energies to make the material aspect of their lives as perfect as possible. This comes from a belief that there is only one life and each one should derive as much pleasure from it as possible. Fortunately in France this hedonism is tempered by a sense of fairplay and justice. And the French people are very proud to say that France is the country of "Human Rights". This concept was born during the French Revolution, even though we use it a lot nowadays. In other words, in its culture the vital as well as the rational aspect of human development has had importance and the two aspects are finely balanced. But what makes France stand out from the rest of Europe is her spirit of rebellion. It was the French Revolution that gave to Europe the mantra of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity". France is known in the world for her love of the

unconventional, for breaking of bonds and allowing people to experiment in every field. It is no wonder then that in many fields of creativity she has always been ahead of others—whether it is art, literature, cinema or fashion. France is associated more with sensitivity than with sentimentality, more with clarity of thought than with cut-and-dried intellectualism. A marvellous symbol of this is the French language itself which while remaining musical and elegant is so clear that it leaves no room for ambiguity.

So, we can picture in our mind's eye the Mother growing up in beautiful Paris in the 1890s, a time when France was the centre of the intuitive creations of the Impressionists and also a time when through her colonies France was taking interest in the different cultures of the world. Politically it was the period when her monarchies and empires were over. All other countries of Europe were under the sway of monarchy but France was already a republic. The spirit of expansion, creation and discovery was in the air. It was a time not only of Monet and Rodin but also of Marie Curie the physicist and Alexandra David-Neel, the spiritual seeker and traveller.

We are not the first to ask ourselves why the Mother chose France for her birth out of all the countries of the world. She herself once said to Champaklal, "I was born in France because some special education was necessary."¹ On another occasion she said, "It is through France that the spiritual message will reach Europe. That is why I chose France for my birth, although I am not French."²

The special European education of which she spoke and which she had received stressed the importance of perfection in the material world. This education was essential in her future work of executing Sri Aurobindo's will, and of running a large growing community like the Ashram. When she came to live in India, our country was very far from the Great India of the Mahabharata. On the contrary she was subjugated, her great spirit was asleep, her people were lost in the maze of superstitions and ignorance. Not only had people lost their mastery over life but they seemed to give no importance to the world that surrounded them. In a fatalistic way the Indians believed that life on earth was a period of suffering which had to be borne so that one could find happiness in the other world.

It was during such a period of darkness that the Mother came to live here and do Sri Aurobindo's work, bringing with her the best of Western culture which mingled with the best of Indian culture embodied by Sri Aurobindo, and formed the solid base on which they could build a nuclear society which could aspire to do the Integral Yoga.

The Mother has uttered a great truth in a few words: "Without him, I exist not; without me, he is unmanifest."³ It was for this work of manifesting in the

¹ *Champaklal Speaks*, ed M P Pandit, 1975, p 125

² *Ibid.*

³ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 13, p 32

physical world what Sri Aurobindo had perceived in his supramental vision that the Mother had to be born in far-away France. But when the time was ripe she could leave behind her the West with all its opulence and live in the little, comfortless town of Pondicherry.

The meeting of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo was the coming together of the two opposite aspects of creation which complement and fulfil each other. Sri Aurobindo represented supramental Knowledge while the Mother embodied supramental Action. He was Ishwara and she was his Shakti. He was of the East and she came from the West. Two opposite and complementary powers must come together to bring into the world a new creation

Once the Mother took charge of the Ashram it grew like a forest, naturally, without any preconceived plans. As and when a need was felt a department was created or an activity was started. The first departments were those related to food, such as agriculture, dairy farms, bakery and granary. When the Mother saw that the rice brought from the market was full of stones, she gave the work of removing the stones to some sadhaks and this is how the granary started. The dairy began when the Mother bought the first cow. The owner wanted to sell the cow and as the Mother used to buy its milk for a long time she bought the cow. By and by other services were started. Eventually the school was created and all the activities related to the children came into being. Work was not only necessary for the self-sufficiency of the Ashram but also as an important part of the development of the Sadhana.

As early as the 30s the Mother used to receive a daily report from the departmental heads. After going through it she used to give them the instructions for the day. In this way, even though work was delegated, she had an overall view and control of all that was happening. If there were difficulties between workers these were brought to her to be solved. If anything new was being started, she did not hesitate to ask a person totally untrained in the field to be trained and given its charge. No opportunity was lost for learning. When she gave a certain work to anyone she also gave him her spiritual force to do it.

Sri Aurobindo could continue, undisturbed, his sadhana because the Mother took charge of the practical side of everything in the Ashram. Her practical knowledge was not limited to any one field. She could guide the workers in all activities, from the preparation of food to the keeping of accounts, from the care of children to the making of perfumes, from physical education to the construction and maintenance of buildings. There is ample evidence of the Mother's suggestions to people for remedies for the various illnesses they were suffering from. She gave advice on colour and composition to the women who stitched and embroidered her clothes. A great deal of her attention was concentrated on the Press so that Sri Aurobindo's works might be published in the best of conditions. And looking after the working of the various departments was only part of her real work. Her day started at 4 in the morning and went late

into the night. If anyone needs proof of her divinity this itself should suffice, this superhuman capacity for work.

To a large extent her capacity of organisation was the gift of her European upbringing. It gave her a thorough knowledge of the material world and a strong sense of discipline. She has herself said that she was always grateful to her own mother who had instilled in her, from childhood, a sense of discipline and self-forgetfulness in the concentration on work. The Mother demanded thoroughness in work and an attention to detail: nothing short of perfection satisfied her. And she was always full of praise for those who did their work sincerely.

Another aspect of this special education was her capacity for communication with the Sadhaks. She expressed herself with ease and sweetness, a quality that is necessary for maintaining a clear and happy relationship with people. The unreserved way in which she showed her affection and appreciation made people open out to her easily. Sri Aurobindo in his spiritual grandeur inspired awe but the Mother could speak to people on their own level and reduce the most complex ideas into the most simple language, and she could make each one in the Ashram feel that he or she was important to her. Each one felt that the Mother had a special corner in her heart for him or her.

This facility in establishing a personal contact was not limited to the people of the Ashram. It extended even to her disciples who were living outside the Ashram and who consulted her on many subjects. It was also extended to those visiting dignitaries and heads of state who came to her for guidance and had full faith in her. She received them with her characteristic charm and elegance. It was her way of doing things as they should be done which kept the Ashram in good relation with the outside world.

When we see how effortlessly she handled the legal, financial and administrative aspects of the Ashram, we understand the significance of the words: "some special education was necessary",⁴ which I have quoted before

It was only in Europe at that point in history that a woman could have been so independent, free to travel to other countries, enlarge her scope of knowledge and experience and experiment in a new way of living. And yet after having seen so much, learnt so much, achieved so much, when the Mother saw Sri Aurobindo for the first time she could surrender herself entirely to him. When Barin (Sri Aurobindo's brother) asked him, "What was your feeling when you saw the Mother?", he replied: "That was the first time I knew that perfect surrender to the last physical cell was humanly possible."⁵

On 15th August 1954 when Pondicherry was merged with the Indian Union she made a very touching declaration. Here is its closing part:

"I am French by birth and early education, I am Indian by choice and

⁴ *Champaklal Speaks*, ed M P Pandit, 1975, p 125

⁵ *Glances of the Mother's Life*, compiled by Nilima Das, Appendix C, p 252

predilection. In my consciousness there is no antagonism between the two; on the contrary, they combine very well and complete one another. I know also that I can be of service to both equally, for my only aim in life is to give a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's great teaching and in his teaching he reveals that all the nations are essentially one and meant to express the Divine Unity upon earth through an organised and harmonious diversity."⁶

It is not enough to look at the Mother's life as mere spectators: the time has come when we must live her teachings, collaborate in her great mission for earth and humanity.

⁶ *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed), Vol 13, p 43