

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

SPECIAL ISSUE
24 NOVEMBER 1995

PRICE: Rs. 8.00

Revised Subscriptions

from January 1996, owing to considerable rise in costs, especially of paper.

INLAND

Annual Rs 100.00

Life Membership Rs 1400 00

Price per Single Copy Rs 10 00

OVERSEAS

Sea Mail

Annual \$18 00 or £12 00

Life Membership \$252 00 or £168 00

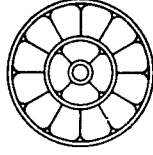
Air Mail

Annual: \$36 00 for American & Pacific countries

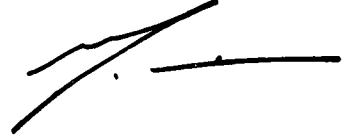
\$26 00 for all other countries

Life Membership \$504 00 for American & Pacific countries

\$364 00 for all other countries



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.



All Rights Reserved No matter appearing in this journal or part thereof may be reproduced or translated without written permission from the publishers except for short extracts as quotations
All correspondence to be addressed to
MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India
Editor's Phone 34782
Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

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

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. XLVIII

No. 11

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

CONTENTS

<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>	
FAITH	865
<i>Amal Kiran (K D Sethna)</i>	
LIFE — POETRY — YOGA	
SOME OLD PERSONAL LETTERS	... 867
YOGENDRA (A REMINISCENT NOTE)	. 872
<i>M S Srinivasan</i>	
INDIAN CULTURE AND NATION-BUILDING	. 874
<i>Nilima Das</i>	
SRI AUROBINDO — THE SOUL OF INDIA	. 877
<i>Elizabeth Stiller</i>	
I HAVE KNOWN BLISS (Poem)	. 880
<i>Sitangshu Chakraborty</i>	
THE WORLD IS ONE (Poem)	881
<i>B. C. Sen</i>	
APPLIED GITA	882
<i>Shyam Kumari</i>	
MUSINGS ON <i>PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS</i>	886
<i>Jagat Kapadia</i>	
TO WHOMSOEVER THIS MAY CONCERN	893
<i>Aurowilly (William Netter)</i>	
A NEW DREAM WORKING IN SOUTH INDIA	... 898
<i>Abani Sinha</i>	
A PLUNGE INTO THE UNKNOWN	900
<i>V Jaybee</i>	
SHIVA AND THE MYTH OF PHALLUS WORSHIP	908
<i>Seikh Abdul Kasam</i>	
THE UPWARD JOURNEY (Poem)	... 913

<i>Mahendrakumar</i>	
MY INTRA-OCULAR LENS OPERATION	. 914
<i>Wilfried Huchzermeyer</i>	
ESSAYS ON THE MAHABHARATA (XIV)	920
<i>Georgette Coty</i>	
CHRISTALIS A STORY	926
<i>P Raja</i>	
A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS	933
BOOKS IN THE BALANCE	
<i>H Maheshwari</i>	
<i>Review of</i> ASPECTS OF SRI AUROBINDO <i>by</i> AMAL KIRAN (K D SETHNA)	937

STUDENTS' SECTION

<i>Speech by Menaka Gupta</i>	
THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION	
SEVENTY-NINTH SEMINAR, 23 APRIL 1995	
THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF SRI AUROBINDO S AND THE MOTHER S TEACHINGS	941

FAITH

WORDS OF SRI AUROBINDO

FAITH does not depend upon experience; it is something that is there before experience. When one starts the yoga, it is not usually on the strength of experience, but on the strength of faith. It is so not only in yoga and the spiritual life, but in ordinary life also. All men of action, discoverers, inventors, creators of knowledge proceed by faith and, until the proof is made or the thing done, they go on in spite of disappointment, failure, disproof, denial because of something in them that tells them that this is the truth, the thing that must be followed and done. Ramakrishna even went so far as to say, when asked whether blind faith was not wrong, that blind faith was the only kind to have, for faith is either blind or it is not faith but something else—reasoned inference, proved conviction or ascertained knowledge.

Faith is the soul's witness to something not yet manifested, achieved or realised, but which yet the Knower within us, even in the absence of all indications, feels to be true or supremely worth following or achieving. This thing within us can last even when there is no fixed belief in the mind, even when the vital struggles and revolts and refuses. Who is there that practises the yoga and has not his periods, long periods of disappointment and failure and disbelief and darkness? But there is something that sustains him and even goes on in spite of himself, because it feels that what it followed after was yet true and it more than feels, it knows. The fundamental faith in yoga is this, inherent in the soul, that the Divine exists and the Divine is the one thing to be followed after—nothing else in life is worth having in comparison with that. So long as a man has that faith, he is marked for the spiritual life and I will say that, even if his nature is full of obstacles and crammed with denials and difficulties, and even if he has many years of struggle, he is marked out for success in the spiritual life.

It is this faith that you need to develop—a faith which is in accordance with reason and common sense—that if the Divine exists and has called you to the Path, (as is evident), then there must be a Divine Guidance behind and through and in spite of all difficulties you will arrive. Not to listen to the hostile voices that suggest failure or to the voices of impatient, vital haste that echo them, not to believe that because great difficulties are there, there can be no success or that because the Divine has not yet shown himself he will never show himself, but to take the position that everyone takes when he fixes his mind on a great and difficult goal, "I will go on till I succeed—all difficulties notwithstanding." To which the believer in the Divine adds, "The Divine exists, my following after the Divine cannot fail. I will go on through everything till I find him."

*

As for experience being necessary for faith and no faith possible without it, that contradicts human psychology altogether. Thousands of people have faith before they have experience. The doctrine "No belief without experience" would be disastrous in spirituality or for that matter in the field of human action. The saint or bhakta have the faith in God long before they have the experience of God—the man of action has the faith in his cause long before his cause is crowned with success, otherwise they could not have been able to struggle persistently towards their end in spite of defeat, failure and deadly peril. I don't know what X means by true faith. For me faith is not intellectual belief but a function of the soul; when my belief has faltered, failed, gone out, the soul has remained steadfast, obstinately insisting, "This path and no other: the Truth I have felt is *the* Truth whatever the mind may believe." On the other hand, experiences do not necessarily lead to faith. One sadhak writes to me: "I feel the grace of the Mother descending into me, but I can't believe it because it may be my vital imagination." Another has experiences for years together, then falls down because he has, he says, "lost faith". All these things are not my imagination, they are facts and tell their own tale.

I certainly did not mean a moral but a spiritual change—a moral man may be chock-full of ego, an ego increased by his own goodness and rectitude. Freedom from ego is spiritually valuable because then one can be centred, no longer in one's personal self, but in the Divine. And that too is the condition of bhakti....

I don't know what is X's objection to emotion, it has its place, only it must not be always thrown outward but pressed inward so as to open fully the psychic doors. What you say is perfectly correct—I am glad you are becoming so lucid and clear-sighted, the result surely of a psychic change. Ego is a very curious thing and in nothing more than in its way of hiding itself and pretending it is not the ego. It can always hide even behind an aspiration to serve the Divine. The only way is to chase it out of all its veils and corners. You are right also in thinking that this is really the most important part of yoga. The Rajayogis are right in putting purification in front of everything—as I was also right in putting it in front along with concentration in *The Synthesis of Yoga*. You have only to look about you to see that experiences and even realisations cannot bring one to the goal if this is not done—at any moment they can fall owing to the vital still being impure and full of ego.

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME OLD PERSONAL LETTERS

USUALLY I would be inclined to beat you at the game of writing a reply after considerable delay, but just now my glance fell on your envelope and at once I sprang to attention. It was as if you had appeared before me and silently told me to reply. I wondered what I should pen. Then I remembered Sir Philip Sidney's famous sonnet in which he expresses his search for a subject and ends with the sudden appearance of the Spirit of Poetry:

“Fool!” said my Muse to me, “Look in thy heart and write!”

My feeling that you were standing in front of me merged with this recollection and I moved at once to my typewriter with my gaze in-drawn.

What do I see in my heart? A strange unrest, a swirling of shadows, circle after circle of them around a figure at the centre poised firmly yet straining upwards—

Arms taking to a voiceless supreme Delight...

This is the figure with which my physical consciousness has to fuse. Obstacle on obstacle is in my way. They are indeed, as I have said, “shadows”, but they have clustered from an age-long past—the past not only of this life but of many earthly embodiments moving in the same ignorant round. A call has come at last to ache for the beatific Beyond with my very flesh and blood and bone. So far the outer self in its prostrations to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo has served as a medium for the inner being. Now the outer self has to make use of the inner being to get a living sense of the Absolute Existence whose vast wayward wandering reflex is the 78-year old Amal Kiran hobbling on his infirm legs with the help of his two “Canadian Canes” towards the Samadhi every afternoon at 4. Of course the name given by the master—“Amal Kiran” meaning “A Clear Ray”—is always like a Mantra to its bearer and reminds him of another line of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*:

A ray returning to its parent Sun.

However, Amal Kiran has lived habitually from within outward, employing his body like a *vāhana*, a vehicle—a godling imitating the great lioned Durga or the glorious peacocked Skanda and imagining himself astride his favourite animal: the horse. For the last four years the pair of Canadian Canes aiding my own pair of legs have really made me a quadruped like my fancied *vāhana*, but

how poor in movement, quite a caricature of the Rġgvedic Dadhikravan, the white steed galloping ever towards the Dawn! Now, within this caricature the urge has arisen to enshrine the vision of the Ideal Physical, the *kāraṇa śarīra*, the Causal Body which the Upanishads speak of—the Body of Bliss with its eyes of luminous love and its mouth of nectarous knowledge. A quite new phase of sadhana seems to have started. Sometimes the body feels a stretching and tearing sensation. No doubt, there is always a background of calm,

A wide unshaken look on time's unrest,

but the old tendency to go on with the inner being's progress and not realise that the very cells of the body have a divine dream in them—this tendency is fast fading: the result is an unease in the body and yet a distant taste of some paradise regained which was never in my purview before. I surely cannot look forward to any physical transformation in the true sense of the term, but a radical refining and purifying of the body-feeling with some response from “a voiceless supreme Delight” can be hoped for—a more conscious installation of an instinctive urge towards the “Beauty of ancient days that is ever new” in the breath-heave and the blood-beat, in the glimmer of the grey cells and the shimmer of the sex-stuff.

I have let myself go too much in my own direction. Let me turn now to your problems. I feel that you have been steadily growing towards your goal. The work of guiding people in perplexity from a centre always in touch with the Aurobindonian future cannot help contributing to your own development. With your heart invariably in the Ashram-atmosphere all that you do is bound to channel light. Whatever you channel must at the same time be offered back to its golden source and you must try to see, in all whom you help, the Omnipotent Himself in disguise so that your helpful touches tend to awake and set free the needy one's own hidden resources that deepen down to something infinite

(11.7 1983)

*

All that you recount is remarkable—and the most strikingly so is the premonition or rather prevision you had of the Mother's departing from her body. As you spoke of it openly to a gathering and as Mr. Iyengar who was part of it has told me of your announcement, one may consider it well authenticated from the viewpoint of scientific evidence. The other experiences cannot be similarly established but since the most extraordinary among them has been confirmed we have no reason to doubt the others.

I feel honoured that you have opened your heart to me. Your very first experience after coming into touch with the Mother tells me a good deal. The river seems to symbolise your own career. The suddenly risen sun represents the Truth that is Sri Aurobindo. His filling the river with blazing light and turning

the whole light-brimming river to your heart signifies that from that time your life which had been outward on the whole became inward, and it was not only pushed inward but driven into the inmost depth of you, the psychic being.

You say that you always sit in meditation with your eyes open. Is there a special reason for this? I am also in the habit of meditating with open eyes, but I have never done so for four hours nor do I think I can do so.

By the way, your saying that now you are both transcendental and universal is not clear to me. The higher light joining the psychic does not mean that one has become universal and transcendental. To become universal, one has to participate in the Cosmic Consciousness. The psychic being is not automatically cosmic—what can be cosmic is the Self of selves, the Atman—either in a static or in a dynamic way or in both ways together. Again, to receive light from above the mind is not to grow transcendental. It only means that something from the “overhead” levels has come into one. To be transcendental implies being poised far above the mental centre in the brain. Strictly speaking, the transcendental poise begins only in the Supermind. Even the Overmind is still cosmic, though cosmic in the most fundamental sense which covers the various cosmicities on all the other planes. We have to be very careful in interpreting our experiences.

(16.7 1983)

*

One of the most effective ways to keep thinking of a correspondent is to delay replying to him or her. This I realised very keenly from the great delay that has taken place in writing in answer to your warm letter of 1 October '83. I am not finding an excuse for my “neglect”, but out of quite an amount of evil comes good in the strange economy of the universe, for often what seems evil is not really so. This is a subject too wide and deep for the present letter: all I can affirm at the moment is that your letter lying on my desk for over 3½ months without being tackled brought you up vividly to my mind and heart in a sustained manner—half accusingly half invitingly and by both gestures creating first a sense of duty and then an acute awareness of the call of your beauty. It was as if you were standing beside me, a being of light and love, silent in a kind of moonlight mystery yet eloquent with your smiling lips and with one hand stretched to touch my face. Why “face”? I believe the face is the most memorable part of one's bodily self. Lines from various poets went through my mind and moved my heart. There is the immortal question of Marlowe's Faust addressing the apparition of Helen:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
And burned the topless towers of Ilium?

Then the cry in another Elizabethan poet, at once agonised and ecstatic in front of an unexpected death:

Cover her face, mine eyes dazzle, she died young.

Again, the words a modern poet—Stephen Phillips—puts into the mouth of a lover:

Thy face remembered is from other worlds,
It has been died for, though I know not when,
It has been sung of, though I know not where.

Finally, Sri Aurobindo's phrase on a vision of the Divine Mother:

Those that have seen thy face shall weep no more

I can't say my 79-year-old "mug" would have inspired any such verse by its actual quality, but the typical character of any face is that it is not a mere superficiality but always a transparency and your hand was drawn to what your eyes had discovered during our short yet deep personal acquaintance in the ever-revelatory atmosphere of the Ashram-life. You must have discovered quite a lot which others might have missed; for you looked with the eyes that had always sought the Perfect One behind the broken appearances of the world, the Indescribable who has to be dreamed of night after night if waking day is at last to find Him—

Beauty the soul must love ere eyes can see...

Now to less rhapsodical themes though not necessarily unimportant for being so. How is your new work developing? What new opportunities has it brought you for the single Tryst that is the aim of all our roads? Here, on my side, the demand has grown more intense to make the Outer a clearer vehicle for the Inner—the demand for greater equanimity, wider compassion, keener sight of the One in the many. I hope my birthday on November 25 has marked a step further in the journey beyond my own small self. (28.1.1984)

*

I congratulate you on your birthday-experience. Two or three hours of "unimaginable rest" must have done you a lot of good, even physically. Perhaps your heart-condition is stabilised because of it. And since such rest carries a force inherent in it—"one with" it, as that line of Sri Aurobindo's assures us—you should have the confidence that all calls on your body will be met successfully. Of course, common sense has to be still exercised and you must not try Olympic feats, but even a good start towards achieving them by the time you are 90 may be considered commonsensical. If at present I have any energy beyond the

ordinary it must be attributed to whatever capacity I may have for

A wide unshaken look on time's unrest.

Your experience of "something flowing" into you when you woke up from sleep one night is also an indication of growing Spirit-ward. To make more and more room for the Divine's flow into you, there must be from your heart a flow towards the Divine, a spontaneous movement from ever greater depths

Till all the heart-beats of your life's increase
Count but the starlike moments of His peace.

Thanks for thinking that I have the mastery to replace a bad vibration by a true one. I am very far from being a master of vibrations, but now and then an automatic drive takes place. When I read that Sarosh was still suffering from piles, a calm concentrated benevolence at once went forth from the middle of my chest—a streaming out from the soul-centre behind—to heal her. If at the same time God's *tathāstu*—"Be it so"—accompanied it, some effect is sure to be produced

(1 2.1984)

*

February 21 is a great day for writing from soul to soul. The Mother's birthday makes us more than usually aware of our depths by opening us up to her light and love with an intenser touch of Grace. Grace is something we all need very much, not only because of our own shortcomings but also because the Integral Yoga has put us in the midst of the diverse calls of life and the various pulls of relationships rather than isolating each to grow within his own aura. The wonderful quality of Grace is that it represents God in search of man instead of man in quest of God as religious aspiration generally exemplifies. And on a day like the present we feel as if the Divine Mother were stretching her arms as far as arms can go. I need this stretching very much, for these days the pressure seems to be on my physical consciousness, my body-sense, to act as if it were doing Yoga on its own and not merely serving as a good appendage to the Yoga of the other parts. The mantra from Sri Aurobindo which haunts me the most these days is.

Arms taking to a voiceless supreme Delight...

To catch these arms and pull them towards that Beyond of Bliss the straining of Grace towards me would be the sweetest sign that I am not hopeless and helpless. Today the assurance appears to come quite strongly. (21 2.1984)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

YOGENDRA

A REMINISCENT NOTE BY AMAL KIRAN

YOGENDRA Rastogi, a very dear friend, died on August 14 this year. The end came in a Bombay nursing home after three months of a complicated illness. He had been ailing with kidney trouble for a long time, but with the help of dialysis he was carrying on. Some other ailments added to his poor health, but they were less serious and would not by themselves have brought a close to his life in his middle sixties. When Balkrishna Poddar died some time earlier at that very age, Yogendra in a telephone talk with me remarked on his premature departure. Little did I dream that within a short period two staunch friends would be leaving me in what I can only call a "heavenly hurry." No doubt, the prospect of joining Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is a most blissful one, but we would have wished the flight of this pair had been delayed for our sakes: we greatly valued their active embodied presence.

Exactly in the period that Yogendra's condition took an unfavourable turn my mind was full of him. On the very day I had thought of giving him a ring late at night I was given the news by Balkrishna's wife Sunanda that he had made his exit the night before.

It is hardly surprising that he should have figured in my mind so vividly during this time. He and I, along with Soli Albless, Kishor Gandhi and Navajata, were closely associated during our days in Bombay preceding my exodus to Pondicherry. And he kept his link with me intact for fifty years.

He was directly connected also with the beginning of *Mother India*. In fact it was he who arranged a couple of meetings with the Mother in Pondicherry to discuss the launching of this periodical in February 1949. With his keen practical sense allied to a genial temperament, he most naturally filled the role of Manager of *Mother India* in addition to whatever duties were performed in his spare time by Navajata who was officially the Managing Editor as distinguished from myself who carried out the literary editorship, helped by Soli Albless whom I had taken as Associate Editor.

The personal relationship between Yogendra and me is sufficiently highlighted by his warm-hearted article for my ninetieth birthday, entitled after the term he had enthusiastically adopted for me: "Boss." It was indeed most pleasant for me to be addressed thus again and again with simple spontaneity. From the start we felt a marked affinity. And we were "chummy" despite the fact that in point of age I could have been his father. Actually, his own father had the same age as mine.

On my eighty-eighth birthday he arranged to be in the Ashram with me. And I am sure he would have given me his company again and again if he had possessed the power which his Guru commanded and exercised in response to

this disciple's prayer. Yogendra had appealed to Sri Aurobindo for the boon of being able to see him occasionally no matter how far he might be. Time and again Sri Aurobindo appeared to him. I well remember how Yogendra sat up in sudden attention during a cinema show we were seeing together. On my asking what had happened, he confided that in one corner of the stage in front of the screen he had glimpsed Sri Aurobindo standing in full majesty. Several must have been such "darshans". His relationship with the Mother was deep but not so keen as with the Master though he never failed to carry out with zeal whatever work she set him. And his zeal always on my behalf was also notable enough to justify my making a reference to it a very grateful closing note to this little obituary.

INDIAN CULTURE AND NATION-BUILDING

INDIAN Culture is admired all over the world for the profundity and richness of its spirituality, the grandeur of its artistic and architectural achievements and the depth and sweep of its philosophy. The Indian psycho-spiritual methods of self-development, called yoga, are now recognised all over the world as the most authentic and effective path for inner individual development. There is sufficient literature written by competent savants and adepts exploring these different aspects of Indian culture with deep insight. Recently there has been a growing appreciation of the importance of the spiritual values of Indian culture for the future evolution of humanity. This is primarily due to the influence of the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo who are the first among modern spiritual masters to relate the spiritual values of ancient Indian culture to modern society and the emerging future. But unfortunately very little creative work is being done at present in India to extend and explore further the lines and possibilities indicated by Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo.

We who belong to modern India and love our motherland and admire our spiritual heritage must remember that the days of singing of our ancient glories are over. The need of the hour is not a nostalgic dreaming of our past greatness but to explore the possibilities of how to realise the deeper insight, vision and values of Indian culture in our modern environment and in every dimension of our modern society—economic, social, political and cultural. In short, what we need most today is not a philosophical and aesthetic appreciation of our culture but “applied culture”, or in other words culture applied to the modern development-process and Nation-building.

The word “Culture” in popular usage is normally associated with the “soft” aspects of life like Music, Art, Literature, Philosophy, Religion, etc. It is the realm of the poet, artist, thinker and saint or sage. What has it to do with the “hard-core” realities of economics, society, politics, industry and commerce? We have to deal with poverty, a ruthlessly competitive global economy, a fast-changing society and the galloping pace of technological progress; productivity, efficiency, professional competence, “competitive strategy”, marketing, management, technology: these are the watchwords of the contemporary world. What we need today are not the lotus-eating exponents of culture but dynamic result-oriented executives, technocrats and managers. There is a line of rhetoric fashionable among some sections of the modern youth. The orthodox exponent of culture confronts this arrogance of modernism with the arrogance of his spiritual and intellectual orthodoxy, dismissing it scornfully as the evils of the “materialistic” civilisation. We cannot do this because we believe that there is a truth in this turn of the modern mind to which Sri Aurobindo refers appreciatively as the “great pragmatic endeavour”. For we in India have indulged too long in pietistic romancing about our culture and it is high time we looked at it

not merely as an object of admiration but as a source of development.

But the popular rhetoric against culture and the enthusiastic admiration for the modern commercial and technological pragmatism spring from a lack of understanding of the importance of culture for the long-term well-being and “sustainable development” of the society. The progressive pragmatic mind of the west is growing wise and discarding its popular short-sighted outlook which refuses to see beyond the immediate utilitarian ends. For example, some of the latest developments in management thought and practice view culture and values as the source of long-term organisational stability and effectiveness. As Thomas Watson Jr, the former chief of IBM, the multinational computer giant, and one of the legendary business leaders of America who made the name IBM synonymous with computers, writes in his book *Business and its Beliefs*

“Consider any great organisation—one that has lasted over the years I think you will find that it owes its resiliency not to its form of organisation or administrative skills, but to the power of what we call beliefs and the appeal these beliefs have for its people. This then is my thesis: I firmly believe that any organisation, in order to survive and achieve success must have a sound set of beliefs on which it premises all its policies and actions. Next, I believe that the most important single factor in corporate success is faithful adherence to these beliefs. And finally I believe that if an organisation is to meet the challenges of a changing world, it must be prepared to change everything about itself except those beliefs as it moves through corporate life. In other words the basic philosophy, spirit, beliefs and drive of an organisation have far more to do with its relative achievements than do technological or economic resources, organisational structure, innovation and timing... All these things weigh heavily in success. But they are, I think, transcended by how strongly the people in an organisation believe its basic precepts and how faithfully they carry them out.”

The above passage, written in the context of organisational management by one of the most successful business leaders of the modern age, applies equally to the management of a Nation. In the ultimate analysis what determines the long-term viability and success of a Nation is not the hard and tangible things like management and technology etc. which dazzle the superficial outward-gazing look but the soft and intangible factors like the spirit, philosophy and beliefs of a nation—which is what culture is all about—and the firm fidelity to these values and the sincerity and creative effectiveness with which they are lived by the people in the collective life. But how to find these values, the right sort of values which can touch the heart of the people of a Nation and galvanise them into inspired action? Here comes the pragmatic importance of culture in human development. According to our Indian view, each Nation is a living organic being with a body, life-force, mind and a soul and endowed with a unique temperament and genius to fulfil a unique mission in the evolutionary destiny of humanity. The Indian ethos believes that only those values which are in harmony

with the unique spirit, temperament and genius of a Nation—called its Swadharma—have the highest emotional and motivational appeal for its people. And this Swadharma of the Nation is revealed in its culture. It is with this faith in a higher pragmatism that we shall be approaching the subject of culture and development.

Thus the basic principle of our Indian approach to development is that the development policies and strategies of a Nation must be based on the unique spirit, temperament and genius of the Nation. So from our Indian perspective, the first task of national development is to discover or rather rediscover what is the unique spirit, temperament and genius of our Nation. This work has already been done with an unparalleled creative force and insight by Sri Aurobindo in his luminous writings on Indian culture especially in his masterpiece *The Foundations of Indian Culture*. But there is a second equally important task which yet remains to be done. This is to figure out how to dynamise the spirit of the Nation in every department of national life. This requires creative thought which links the eternal verities of the spirit with the mobile and changing realities of life.

What we need at present for building a strong and vibrant future India is a new social synthesis based on the essential values of our own cultural ethos but at the same time in harmony with the changed conditions of the modern society and “plastic to the call of a more luminous future”. The series of articles which will follow in the subsequent issues of *Mother India* aims at evolving such a uniquely Indian social synthesis which can provide a basis for a new approach to development.

M. S. SRINIVASAN

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of October 1995)

SRI AUROBINDO stayed at Chandernagore for about six weeks. The first three days he stayed with Motilal Roy, although one night was spent in the house of a friend of the latter. Later on, Motilal took him to the northern part of Chandernagore, to the house of one Balai Chandra De, for his lodging, where he was free from prying eyes and eavesdropping ears.

In fact the Government throughout its intensive search elsewhere could not trace his whereabouts. Sri Aurobindo's staying in Chandernagore proved indeed a blessing to Motilal Roy, for he profitted greatly by his discussions with Sri Aurobindo on many aspects of Yogic Sadhana. This is how he has described Sri Aurobindo. "A completely surrendered individual. One felt when he spoke as if somebody else was speaking through him I placed the plate of food before him,—he appeared to be so absorbed even when he was eating; he used to meditate with open eyes and see subtle forms and spiritual visions."¹ "Three deities appeared before him—Ila, Mahi (Bharati) and Saraswati whom he later recognised as Vedic Ishwaris. Motilal was himself now attracted to Yoga and Sri Aurobindo gave him guidance—'Surrender everything to God' was his instruction."²

In the meanwhile, the British Police were at work. A number of anonymous letters were found addressed to Sri Aurobindo's Calcutta address. One of these asked him to come out in the open. He suspected the motive behind it and wrote in a newspaper that he had not left out of fear and that there was no warrant against him; if there is any he would have come out. It appears the Government actually issued a warrant thereafter, confirming his suspicion that the letter was a ruse by an agent of the Government. One of the ablest commentaries is Motilal's testimony. Chandernagore was doubtless the hyphen connecting the political period in India and the Yoga period in Pondicherry.

At Baroda in January 1908, the Nirvanic or Shunya realisation; at Alipore in May-June 1909 the realisation of the omnipresent Divine, of Vasudeva who is everywhere and in everything, *Vasudeva sarvam iti*. what was the new *Siddhi* at Chandernagore? Mainly on the basis of Motilal Roy's words quoted above, Satprem writes.

"That day of 1910 at Chandernagore Sri Aurobindo reached the bottom of the hole, he had crossed all the layers of dirt on which Life had sprung up, inexplicable flower; there was now only this Light above shining more and more intensely as he descended, throwing up all the impurities one by one under its keen ray as though all this Night called ever a greater Light, as though the line of the subconscious was withdrawing, withdrawing towards the depth in an ever more solid concentration in the inverse image of the concentration above,

leaving this single wall of Shadow under this one Light; when, at one bound, without transition, at the bottom of the 'inconscient' Matter and in the dark cells of this body without falling into ecstatic trance, without the loss of the individual, without cosmic dissolution, and with eyes wide open, Sri Aurobindo found himself precipitated into the supreme Light."³

Satprem says: "Sri Aurobindo found the Secret at Chandernagore in 1910 and worked on it forty years; he gave up his life for this."⁴

In London there was a sharp debate between Morley and Minto concerning the arrest and prosecution of Sri Aurobindo. The Lt Governor of Bengal wrote to Minto: "There is certainly nothing in Arabinda Ghose's past records which would justify exceptional tenderness towards him. On the contrary, although he escaped conviction on the actual charge of conspiracy in the Alipore Bomb case..., yet it is beyond doubt that his influence has been pernicious in the extreme. He is not a mere blind and unreasoning tool, but an active generator of revolutionary sentiment. He is imbued with a semi-religious fanaticism which is a powerful factor in attracting adherents to his cause; and I attribute the spread of seditious doctrines to him personally in a greater degree than to any other single individual in Bengal, or possibly in India."⁵

"But Morley was not impressed with this plea of Minto's henchman. He called for the facts of the case. The summaries of the articles that appeared in the *Karmayogin* given in the *Times* did not seem to make them seditious. As was his wont, whenever he wished to have his own way, Minto taunted the Secretary of State for being too sympathetic to Sri Aurobindo. Morley's reply was blunt: 'The point is in my mind that the institution of proceedings against him (Sri Aurobindo) was a foolish blunder, from the side of policy. I have always understood that proceedings for sedition were only advised when a conviction was reasonably certain. Is a conviction reasonably certain in this case? I should think decidedly not, and I *hope not.*' Piqued, Minto wrote back: 'As to the celebrated Arabinda, I confess I cannot in the least understand your hope that we shall not get a conviction against him. I can only repeat ...that he is the most dangerous man we now have to reckon with, he was one of the instigators in the Manicktolla murders and has an unfortunate influence over the student class, and Indians who know him well have told me he is quite beyond redemption. Surely you cannot hope that such a man should remain at large.'⁶ *

"While these polemics were going on between the Chief in London and his subordinates in Delhi, Sri Aurobindo had left for Pondicherry for good. But the issue did not lapse with his departure. The Government of India speculated that Sri Aurobindo was probably on his way to France to assist Krishna Verma and other freedom fighters abroad and start his campaign in England. And Sri

* We quote from a conversation Sri Aurobindo had with a disciple "Lord Minto said that he could not rest his head on his pillow until he had crushed Aurobindo Ghose. He feared that I would start the Revolutionary Movement again, and assassinations were going on at that time "

Aurobindo not being at hand, prosecution was launched against the printer of *Karmayogin*. He was sentenced in the lower court but on appeal the High Court quashed the sentence, holding that the article in question was not at all seditious. Thus, the prophecy made by astrologer Narayan Jyotishi at a time when Sri Aurobindo was unknown in political circles that he would escape three prosecutions launched by *mlechhas*, had come true.”⁷

Sri Aurobindo had come to Chandernagore because of an inner directive: “Go to Chandernagore.” While in Chandernagore, he received another *ādes*h from above. He writes: “Some friends were thinking of sending me to France. I was thinking what to do next. Then I got the *ādes*h—command—to go to Pondicherry.”⁸

The decision had once again been taken out of his hands. In retrospect, the whole Chandernagore interlude, hedged in as it was by two commands, was filled all the while by the ambience of the Divine Mother and sustained by a constant vision of Her powers and personalities.

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References

- 1 *Sri Aurobindo—The Hope of Man*, by Keshavmurti, p 187
- 2 *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, by Nirodbaran, p 112
- 3 *Sri Aurobindo or The Adventure of Consciousness*, by Satprem, translated by Tehmi from the French (1977), p 259
- 4 *Ibid* , p 238
- 5 *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Century*, by Manoj Das, p 134
- 6 *Ibid* , pp 137-38
- 7 *Sri Aurobindo—The Hope of Man*, by Keshavmurti, pp 188-89
- 8 *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, by A B Purani, p 133

I HAVE KNOWN BLISS

I HAVE known bliss
In the darkest abyss,
For above me I could see the sun
Telling me a new day had begun.

I have known delight
In the unexpected sight
Of fungus spiraling a staircase up a fallen log,
Fingers of pine embroidering mystic symbols in esoteric patterns on a fog,
On rippling night waters golden sequins of moon,
Entwining branches of birches whispering a subtle tune,
Early morning waters caressing a rocky shore,
Advancing armies of mosses flying their golden spore,
Sea-crafted pebbles, perfect, smooth and round,
Everywhere I look or listen, I am by beauty bound.
Everywhere I look and listen, more and more and more!
It is not a vacuum, but replication that God and Nature abhor!

So many ways He giveth to amaze,
And I become a Hallelujah chorus of jubilant praise!

Man's simple and uncomprehending mind
Searches for the right equation that will bind
The Creator to an 'either-or', a simple rule;
Only a fool
Would dream
That so vast and complex a scheme
Could be reduced to the level of our comprehension,
The infinite variety, immaculate invention
That makes no two leaves, or trees or grains of sand, or anything exactly the
same.

How limited the Creator's game
Would be
If he made exact and calibrated replicas of even two or three!
My creator is cleverer than that,
He pulls Infinite Variety out of His magician's hat.

With each note of His flute He
 Creates a new beauty,
 With each one of His dances
 Creation advances,
 And I become a singing reed in jubilant elation
 For the infinite variety of His creation.
 Glory! Glory! Glory!

ELIZABETH STILLER

THE WORLD IS ONE

UNDER ego's magical influence
 What I thought to be only mine,
 And revolving for my appeasement,
 Appears now to be an objective existence
 And nest of all!

Through the experiences of life
 Inner perceptions have grown
 To realise
 Mind is not the throne
 Of existence—
 Something yet awaits
 In the depth of the heart.
 What mind fails to see
 The heart feels
 And only there
 Are discovered in love
 The latent strings of unison.

SITANGSHU CHAKRABORTY

APPLIED GITA

THE purpose of this article is to show how, even without taking up spiritual practices, one can usefully utilise some of the teachings of the Gita in everyday life. The suggested practices are—

1. Not to act on an impulse.
2. Not to be too insistent about anything.
3. To discipline oneself first before disciplining others.
4. To learn to feel at rest while working strenuously.
5. To learn not to expect anything from the persons one loves.

Someone, who tries to practise these, says he has found peace and happiness of an extraordinary kind. I came across him perchance and was amused to hear all this. His name is Abodharathnam. He said he had multifarious experiences of life. I had myself read the Gita several times but could not make out where in it such teachings could be found. So, I asked him where and how in the Gita he could find such teachings. I present here the answers he gave:

“1. First of all let us visualise what necessitated the Gita to be told. An impulse of grief tended to push Arjuna out of the battlefield. He was no child. He knew his business and the people he had to fight against. He was thoroughly prepared for the consequences. The mere physical presence of those people in front of him was hardly any reason for him to change his mind. Somehow a fear of sin suddenly engulfed him producing the grief that confused him. Krishna analysed for him the entire situation threadbare and cleared up the confusion, enabling him to refrain from acting on the impulse and to take his decision with a cool head and clear conscience.

“Now, recall the words of the Lord—‘Happy and united (with God) is he who can contain the upsurge of desire and wrath while living in the body’ (Ch. 5/23). It is needless to mention that desire and wrath, like grief, are nothing but impulses. All these together lead me to the conclusion that if one really wants to be happy, he should not act on any impulse whatsoever. Attempted practice of this has so far paid me high dividends.

“2. It can be deduced from some of the teachings of the Gita that one should not be too insistent about anything whatsoever. The Lord has said:—‘Pondering over any of the objects of the senses, one gets attached to it; from attachment is born desire to get it, desire, if unfulfilled, produces wrath; wrath causes infatuation; infatuation develops into loss of memory; loss of memory brings about dwindling of intelligence which ultimately leads to destruction’ (Ch. 2/62-63). The desire spoken of here seems to be an insistent desire and the destruction that of spiritual life. For ordinary life this can be taken as the bringing down of calamity on oneself. This principle can be extended to all other insistent desires as well. Take, for instance, the insistent desire to have always what one likes and to avoid what one dislikes or to stick to one’s own ideas and

opinions or even to readings of situations.

“The teaching that follows is—‘Enjoy the objects of the senses without likes or dislikes. This control of oneself brings in peace and satisfaction’ (Ch. 2/64). I have been trying to practise these teachings. I can’t say I have succeeded in achieving the goal. But this teaching often comes up in my mind to warn and enable me to try and correct myself. In course of time, I have learnt to look into my own mind off and on and to watch its movements. Often my latent defects and deficiencies come out and I try to rectify them.

“In this connection, the oft-quoted teaching of the Gita may also be examined—‘You are entitled to the work alone and not to its outcome; do not look for the outcome, nor indulge in inaction’ (Ch. 2/47). My experience has been that when I am not insistent on producing the best results, I can work better. Eagerness to produce the best results often clouds my mind and restricts my capacities. My concentration tends to shift from the process to the result to come, making me miss some step or other. As a consequence, the quality of the work dwindles. Though it does not necessarily happen, such is often the case. This has taught me that I should work with all sincerity and concentration and be prepared to accept without hesitation the outcome whatever it is, even if it be the opposite of what is desired. I should also be prepared to re-do the work ungrudgingly, if necessary. If I can look dispassionately at myself and my work, I can easily find out if I am going wrong anywhere and can correct my mistakes in time. Of course, all this is my personal experience and I cannot vouch for others. The most I can say is that it is worth trying.

“3. At one time or another all of us have to impose or enforce some discipline on a person or a group of persons. The commonest example is a parent who has to discipline his child. The Lord says—‘Whatever a superior does, the inferiors follow; what he establishes the others practise. I have no work to do in the three worlds. There is nothing that I do not have or have yet to acquire. Even then, I go on doing some work or other all the time, sleeplessly. If I do not, all the world will follow my example and I shall bring down calamity on them’ (Ch. 2/21-24). This suggests that one should himself learn to practise meticulously the discipline that he has to enforce, to set examples to his inferiors. A parent has to teach his child honesty and truthfulness; a teacher has to build up the character of the child in many respects. Most of their labour goes waste because they are not careful enough to desist from inadvertently setting bad examples. This happens because they are not clear in their minds as to the extent of their responsibilities. A father scolds a child for stealing a classmate’s pencil, asking him to return the same, and promising to bring him one from the office where he is employed. Little does such a father realise that what he himself proposes is also stealing. The mother, who teaches the child not to tell a lie, herself tells a lie to save the self-same child from the wrath of its father, when it has been mischievous. There are also the teachers who simply concern themselves with

the subjects they teach, neglecting the other spheres of life where their acts and conduct may and do, more often than not, set bad examples.

“4. The Gita says—‘Whoever experiences inaction in action and action in inaction, is the intelligent among mankind and works in union with God’ (Ch. 4/18). I experimented with this teaching. First of all, while doing the most strenuous kind of work I would tell myself that I was at rest. I would repeat this whenever I would feel fatigued. Gradually a time came when I could work hard for hours together without feeling tired. The contrary also proved true to me. I would start telling myself that I was working strenuously when I was in fact sitting idle and getting bored and would start thinking of the work I would have to do next. I would start this exercise whenever boredom would try to overpower me. Gradually a time came when I started to feel that no work nor even any company was needed for me to avoid boredom which, before this, was my greatest enemy.

“5. The idea that one should learn not to expect anything from the people he loves occurred to me from the prayer of Arjuna asking Krishna to pardon him in the same way as the father forgives all wrongs of his son, the lover of his sweetheart and the friend of his companion (Ch. 11/44). Pondering over this, I came to realise that most shocks, that lead to much suffering and unhappiness in life, come from persons one loves. Acts and conduct of others do not cause such acute suffering. The reason seemed to me to be the expectations one has of the people he loves. At the least one expects reciprocity and fair-play from his beloved. One even imagines the withholding of these by the beloved at the slightest cause. He feels like forsaking his love. But experience shows that love, once it touches, cannot be forsaken, however grave the provocation may be. It may get clouded for the time being but soon reappears—no matter however hard one may try to forsake it. All these taken together make me feel that if one prepares himself to forgive all wrongs of his beloved, he could lessen his sufferings. The best way I could think of is to try not to expect anything whatsoever—not even fair-play—from the people I love. By nature I am prone to love people around me and have suffered many a heart-breaking shock in my life until I got this idea from the words of Arjuna. Well, since then I have been trying to practise this with all earnestness. Now I can shake off more or less quickly the expectations that I have of the people I love, and try to be happy with my own love for them.”

Abodharathnam paused. I asked him why, if what he felt was correct, did Krishna argue so much to induce Arjuna to massacre his near and dear ones. His reply was—“It was not love that had weighed so much with Arjuna in thinking of leaving the battle-field as the fear of sin that would ensue. The effect of the war would be the ruination of the entire warrior community of the country (Ch. 1/28-45) and this is what was weighing heavily on him. His idea of pardoning the

person loved was probably confined to the three cases he enumerated and it, I presume, was based upon the then current practice of the country.”

I told him that what he said might be quite convincing, but he had been trying to interpret the teachings of the Gita divorced from their contexts. To this he replied—“I have a family heirloom—a sword—and I am no warrior. I have no use of it as a sword. I can keep it locked up in the cupboard or I can make use of it as a chopper. As a practical person, I prefer using it as a chopper. Similarly, I am using the Gita my own way instead of keeping it locked up in its theories.”

I told him that he seemed to take the Gita differently from others and asked him what he felt about the spiritual practices suggested by the scripture. He answered—“The teachings of the Gita are eternal. Great men of different ages have interpreted it differently—according to the needs of their respective ages. As I read it, I feel one can take up any of its teachings that may suit his own nature and practise it. However, there are two prescriptions that interest me—(i) One may worship any godhead he likes; it will in effect be worshipping Krishna, the absolute spirit; the method suggested is to remember the godhead, be devoted to it, do oblations to it and prostrate oneself before it (Ch. 7/22 and Ch. 9/34 read together) and (ii) To share with Krishna all one does—working, eating, worshipping, giving, meditating, etc. (Ch. 9/27). By following the latter discipline it seems possible to make Krishna one’s friend and constant companion. If I ever take up spiritual practices, I shall probably take up either of the two or both together. But it is too early for me to say anything more about it.”

Here too, I found, he has a point. He says all depends on what one wants; if one wants to unite with God, it goes without saying that he has to take up some spiritual practice. Abodharathnam has not taken up any spiritual practice and is happy to live in his own mind and in peace. Well, in the ordinary life, to find peace and happiness is a great boon and it is all I myself would aspire for. When next I took up the Gita my eyes stuck to the assurance given by the Lord—On this path, no effort is lost, no obstacle prevails; even a little practice delivers from the great fear (Ch. 2/40). A feeling overwhelmed me—maybe this assurance covers the interpretation of Abodharathnam as well!

B C. SEN

MUSINGS ON PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

Our Mother Earth

THIS tectonic land mass of mighty mountains, raging volcanoes, leaping torrents, swelling oceans, sprawling prairies, verdant forests and countless miles of undulating fertile fields is the outer manifestation of the sacred body of the Goddess Earth

It is not a form of matter which has somehow taken shape in the immensities of Space. It is the Divine Love which churned Matter to emerge as this fair Earth. It is formed of all the attributes of the Gods mixed in a divine proportion, "A residue of Gods."

This Mother earth is the most suffering amongst the Divine Beings. Its inner self burns in terrible temperatures, it has to house volcanoes in its bosom, it has to bear the tearing pain of many a cataclysm, the grinding pressing together of its plates which took place billions of years ago to give it its present shape and then the slow cooling, the birth of life-giving air, water, and the life of the plant world sustaining animal life, the in-gathering of the abundant mineral store to enrich the living of its children—all this it bore happily through the sustaining power of Divine Love.

Alas, today our fair Mother Earth is disconsolate because the human race, which inherited its wealth, is acting in a most cruel manner and is bent on Earth's destruction as well as its own self-annihilation. Man poisons her with chemicals which will take millions of years to dissolve, tears her breast with atomic explosions which destroy the purity of her atmosphere; he burns her verdant robe, pollutes her rivers and oceans, releases the Furies of hatred and brutality which suck in their stinking belly all the God-given wholesomeness.

The long-suffering Earth cries out but not in vain. The Divine has heard her cry and has answered her call. The sweet Mother reassures the Earth in her *Prayers and Meditations*. First she turns towards the Supreme and awaits his message and after receiving this message in the silence of her inner being, she writes on February 5, 1913,

Thy voice is heard as a melodious chant in the stillness of my heart, and is translated in my head by words which are inadequate and yet replete with Thee. All these words are addressed to the Earth and say to her:—Poor sorrowful Earth, remember that I am present in thee and lose not hope; each effort, each grief, each joy and each pang, each call of thy heart, each aspiration of thy soul, each renewal of thy seasons, all, all without exception, what seems to thee sorrowful and what seems to thee joyous, what seems to thee ugly and what seems to thee beautiful, all infallibly lead thee towards me, who am endless Peace, shadowless Light, perfect

Harmony, Certitude, Rest and Supreme Blessedness.
 Hearken, O Earth, to the sublime voice that arises.
 Hearken and take new courage!

This is the sublime assurance that the manifested Divine Mother gives on behalf of the Supreme Divine to our long suffering Earth. Elsewhere the Mother has said categorically,

Yes, the earth cannot be destroyed, but a civilisation can be destroyed.¹

Let us tread softly and with reverence on the bosom of our Mother Earth who sustains us, for Homo Sapiens may be an endangered species. At one place in one of her talks, which Nolini Kanta Gupta noted down and the Mother later corrected, she says,

... And the problem that faces us today is this: whether mankind will be able to change sufficiently and grow into the higher being that shall inhabit the earth as its crown in the coming cycle or, being unable, will go totally, disappear altogether or be relegated to the backwater of earthly life, somewhat like the aboriginal tribes of today.²

In this connection it is rewarding to read another of the Mother's pronouncements:

Earth a Symbol

The earth is the centre of the material universe. It has been created for concentrating the force that is to transform Matter. It is the symbol of divine potentiality in Matter. As we have said, the earth was created through a direct intervention of the Divine Consciousness: it is on the earth alone that there is and can be the direct contact with the Divine. The earth absorbs and develops and radiates the divine light; its radiation spreads through space and extends wherever there is Matter. The material universe shares, to some extent, the gift that the earth brings—the light and harmony of the Divine Consciousness. But it is upon the Earth alone that there is the full and final flowering of that consciousness.

The psychic being is found on the earth alone, for it is a product of the earth: it is the touch of the Divine upon Matter. The psychic being is a child of the Earth: it is born and grows upon Earth, it is native to nowhere else. Still when it develops sufficiently and becomes an adult individuality, it can

go to other physical domains, visit other planets, for example.³

*

Seeking for All Support in the Divine

Life is a constant struggle against overwhelming odds. The surges of adverse chance wash away the precarious sandbar from under our feet and the ocean of misfortunes raises its cruel waves sky-high to engulf the struggling mariner-soul shipwrecked on the shoals of life. In vain the stricken being cries to relatives, friends, guards or gods. The denizens of the deeps advance with hungry growls to gulp the budding goodness, the upward effort that some human beings represented. All around is the roar of the surf breaking on those rocks which have witnessed for ages the sinking of many idealists due to the fury of misfortune, which have witnessed the standard-bearers of Truth stoop and make a covenant with Falsehood, which have sighed when the purest gold was mixed with baser alloys, when once more was lost the cause of God in one or another of us.

When in the middle of adversity we turn to everyone who is near or far but never pause to think or remember the Lord who is in us and in whom we dwell. If we would turn towards the Immanent Divine Lover seated within, we would be saved from all catastrophes. Hell's hordes would be unable to pierce the armour woven around us by our trust.

After all, the Lord is the Cause and the Constituent, the Creator and the Destroyer. He is Omniscient, Omnipotent and Omnipresent—say the scriptures. When we have tried and failed in all our endeavours, have been abandoned by all, then why not try the Truth of the scriptures? Why not test God by invocation? Will he also fail us? Never—if the call is made with faith. Our supreme Lover may like to test us and tease us but, when sincerely invoked, will never abandon us.

On February 8, 1913, the Mother made a most beautiful testament of faith and trust in the Divine,

O Lord, Thou art my refuge and my blessing, my strength, my health, my hope, and my courage. Thou art supreme Peace, unalloyed Joy, perfect Serenity. My whole being prostrates before Thee in a gratitude beyond measure and a ceaseless worship; and that worship goes up from my heart and my mind towards Thee like the pure smoke of the incense of the perfumes of India.

Let me be Thy herald among men, so that all who are ready may taste the beatitude that Thou grantest me in Thy infinite Mercy, and let Thy Peace reign upon earth.

To try to be the Divine's herald is like being on the Cross every moment. Only the Divine Avatars or Vibhutus undertake to walk this path of thorns. Unluckily there are only a few who are ready to taste the Divine's elixir of immortality. Most of us, even when drawn inexorably towards the Divine, try to pull the Divine to our own base level. We climb a 1000-foot-high plateau and that to us seems the Everest of our endeavour. We would have the Divine forever busy with our small desires and bodily welfare, our blind passions and ever-changing ephemeral needs. We live blindly and suppose our candle flames to be the effulgence of the sun. Only the Divine Avatar can bear, with love and equanimity, the million dupes of *maya* that we worldly creatures are.

In her infinite compassion the Divine Mother has chosen to carry the burden of our darkneses in spite of our abysses. We would be wise to shift our lives' responsibilities on to her strong shoulders.

O my soul, let us travel light. Accept neither weakness nor strength, greatness nor shortcoming as thine. Let Her carry the burden of our Karma and of our future, for she has invoked the Lord in our name. Let us not miss this rare opportunity, this golden chance.

Come! Let us search for that mystic bluish-purple flower she has named *Seeking for all support in the Divine (Solanum seaforthianum)*. For she has said,

Never seek support elsewhere than in the Divine, never seek a satisfaction elsewhere than in the Divine, never seek satisfaction of your needs in anyone else than in the Divine—never, for nothing whatever. Whatever your needs they can be satisfied by the Divine alone. Whatever your weaknesses they can be borne and cured only by the Divine. He alone is able to give you what you need ever and always and if you try to find satisfaction or hold or support or a joy or... whatever it is . in anyone else, you will always fall flat on your nose one day and that always hurts, sometimes hurts very much.⁴

*

Simplicity

Until now, human progress has been the result of constant effort. The Divine first manifested on the earth as *Mahamatsya*, the Superfish, the first moving organism, on what then was an earth torn by cataclysmic upheavals, belching volcanoes, searing gases and a near-total desolation. This first Avatar was the model earth had to follow. It took her billions of years to produce plant life followed by the plankton and krill and the crustaceans. Then following this evolutionary urge were born first the fishes which lived below the surface of water, followed by the fishes which raised their heads out of the water and

floated and frolicked freely on the waves. Thus by a constant effort was achieved the first landmark victory in the evolutionary spiral of earth. These water-based creatures constantly worked to stay alive. Hunting for food, assimilation, procreation and survival required sustained effort

From the fish to the mental man the story of creation has been a record of permanent tension and upward effort. Actually our very existence requires effort. Even the simple act of standing needs the coordinated effort of many muscles under the control of our brain. Each physical activity of life requires effort. In the same way all refinement of the senses, all sharpening of mental powers, all self-control require effort.

Is then constant and concentrated effort the only way for progress and advancement? Yes, but it is so only up to a certain point. Once a conscious personality is evolved, a certain poise of consciousness attained, a level of disentanglement from the senses takes place, an inner freedom is achieved—then this constant tension of effort becomes an obstruction.

Once we are sufficiently advanced and can stand somewhat aloof from the lures of the temporal and turn towards the Divine, we can advance on the path through *nurbharata*, reliance on the Divine, and *samarpana*, surrender to the Divine. There is then opened another way and other means to arrive. One needs only 'to be'. On February 12, 1913 the Mother wrote in her diary *Prayers and Meditations*:

As soon as all effort disappears from a manifestation, it becomes very simple, with the simplicity of a flower opening, manifesting its beauty and spreading its fragrance without clamour or vehement gesture. And in this simplicity lies the greatest power which is least mixed and least gives rise to harmful reactions.

Once one is turned towards the Infinite, the self-giving has to be of an ingathered simple surrender. We have to be like the pure incense stick whose smoke rises automatically and effortlessly upwards. All that the sadhak has to do is to distance himself from deflating vital upsurges. For the Mother warns us:

The power of the vital should be mistrusted, it is a tempter on the path of the work, and there is always a risk of falling in its trap, for it gives you the taste of immediate results; and, in our first eagerness to do the work well, we let ourselves be carried away to make use of this power. But very soon it deflects all our action from the right course and introduces a seed of illusion and death into what we do

Simplicity, simplicity! How sweet is the purity of Thy Presence!

Let us then not try to achieve spectacular results by herculean Tapasya.

Instead let us sit at the feet of our sweet Mother, have total trust in her, and do as best we can the work given to us, not caring to know how far or whether at all we have arrived. The result, let us leave in her Omnipotent hands. If she wants us to succeed it is her glory, if she wants to fail in us, it is her decision. The desire to be successful on the spiritual path, the desire for union and *siddhi* are also turbid waves in the luminous sea of surrender. The only thing we should let happen quietly is to belong to her more and more integrally, in more and more elements of our being. We should very naturally sweep away the sense and illusion of a separate entity, till we become nothing and she becomes All. This also we should not strive for, but just let happen, like the falling of autumn leaves. Let us let go of the thread connecting us to the kite of our ego. Then automatically our liberated being will attain a state in which we will live by her, in her and ultimately simply be one with her in her own time and in her own way.

*

Uplift

When our heart wants to soar to the highest heights of consciousness, when our emotional being aspires to hold the flower-soft feet of our Divine Mother and lay our head on them in total surrender, then why do we slip back into the accustomed grooves of lowly desire-ruled actions? O, what curse of the Gods holds our feet glued to the evolutionary ooze while we would rather float with the stars? If only sadhana could be a straight ascent and life a linear march, if there were no turning back, no losing of ground once gained, if our victories were not partial and mostly ephemeral, how wonderful life would be, what saintly hues of love, peace and perfection would colour our being! Sometimes we are frustrated by the obduracy of our lower self and by the wilful or playful ways of the Divine. Nothing seems fair—neither humans nor the Gods seem to be just. One wonders where to take refuge, how to progress.

Our inner being knows that there is only one refuge, the Lord. When life and sadhana seem to have come to a halt, when the path seems to be lost in the jungle of desires, then we have to turn to the Lord with intenser faith, and greater frequency. On March 13, 1913, in a short *prayer* the Mother shows us how to call and what to say,

... Let the pure perfume of sanctification burn always, rising higher and higher, and straighter and straighter, like the ceaseless prayer of the integral being, desiring to unite with Thee so as to manifest Thee.

Only the Lord can purify and uplift us. He is our Way, our Goal and our Refuge. Let us stretch our hands for him to hold firmly, let us cling to him like a

child, never letting go of him and then if we manage to hang on, in his own time and in his own way, he will lead us to him. The dreams of all our lives will come true, the nights will be a thing of the past and sun-like the Divine will relume us and we shall follow his path of gravitation secured to him forever.

(To be continued)

SHYAM KUMARI

References

- 1 *Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol 10, p 142
- 2 *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol 3, p 217
- 3 *Ibid* , p 228
- 4 *Flowers and Their Messages*, p 234

TO WHOMSOEVER THIS MAY CONCERN

ALL those who invest their lives in the Integral Yoga do so on their own aspirational base—aspiration for the Divine realisation. They must bear in mind that they by their own choice are lovingly risking their lives for the divine possibility envisaged by Sri Aurobindo, and the fulfilment may or may not follow in this life. All progress in the Integral Yoga is subject to the quality of aspiration, opening and surrender. Becoming an Ashramite or declaring oneself a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is not in any manner indicative of a guaranteed progress in Sadhana. Past performance does not indicate future results. Results respond to continuous performances. There is no assurance of transformation if the life remains divided between the Divine and some other aim or activity which has nothing to do with the realisation of divine truth. Dedication sooner or later delivers a Sadhak from all obstacles, dedication diminishes delays in progress. The first and foremost thought that must sink into every cell of our brain is the fact that by accepting to do the Integral Yoga, the Sadhak is committed to Sri Aurobindo in every moment of his life. The best course of action, perhaps, lies in constantly fulfilling this commitment, in repeating Sri Aurobindo's name more and more until it becomes automatic but heart-filled, non-stop and fully psychic-supported. Even if repetition became mechanical, it would be mechanics controlled and operated by the psychic being, if a Sadhak is sincere in his intention and devotion to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Japa of Sri Aurobindo's name can achieve everything for us in Sadhana if the mantra of His name is repeated with love and bhakti; because if it were done so, the surrender to our Divine Parents would follow naturally and effortlessly. The voltage in Sri Aurobindo's name holds the possibility of the whole Integral Yoga.

*

When we do any work, however personal it may be, we must bear in mind that since the whole 'life-play' has been created by the Mother for Sri Aurobindo's delight and, further, since every aspect of life that we encounter or live in or live with is a truth of Sri Aurobindo chosen by the Mother from His inexhaustible mystery, then in doing this work we are naturally coming into close contact with an aspect of His Truth. If we keep this sense of coming into contact with Sri Aurobindo's Truth in front while doing any work, and if while doing so we remember that this work is a part of the life-play created by the Mother for Sri Aurobindo's delight and that when having such a constant remembrance if we offer the work we do to Sri Aurobindo's delight then certainly the movement of Karma Yoga gets into motion. We must keep the conviction in mind that Sri Aurobindo's Truth is eternally Bliss-filled and so the work then naturally has got

to be interesting; such an awareness implanted in our mind would keep boredom in work away because Sri Aurobindo's Truth can never be boring.

*

The Integral Yoga has many pluses that are unique—they are of the kind that no other yogas have. But the Integral Yoga has many minuses too that are unique and provide tremendous struggles calling for patience—patience that can consume a whole life-time, and in the end if we are still the victim of popular error in understanding the process of rebirth which believes that “I” i.e. the ego of this life gets reborn again in the next life we would have failed to understand the differentiation between the true “I” and the ego “I”; consequently we would leave the body with a false certainty that the ego “I” will once again come back to the Ashram in a new body; ultimately the life would be ending with ignorance at least in this aspect. If, however, the knowledge has dawned on us in the process of the Integral Yoga that a different mind, vital being and body will be born, and that all the fruits of labour of Sadhana in this life will go to a new mind, vital being and body of the next life, the minuses of the Integral Yoga may make us truly regret having lost a wonderful opportunity of enjoying life when it was there. Mind and vital being would feel a sort of betrayal after having struggled so hard in Sadhana; and now they will be ditched by the Soul when it leaves the body, one after the other in the process, while actually they have been counting all along on Supramentalisation if not in this life in the next life or lives to come. In short these two faces of the “ego” are the positive minuses with which we are knocked out in the Integral Yoga. But the so-called true minuses are really the positive points because they offer tremendous challenges—challenges of keeping our trust, faith, confidence and dependence in relation to the Mother intact no matter what happens. This is possible when we allow the true pluses to overcome the minuses. But really there are no minuses in the Integral Yoga. Our comprehension is crooked and so we have a cock-eyed vision. Determination to take always the psychic attitude will ultimately knock out all so-called minuses of the Integral Yoga—the Psychic plus must pulsate in all parts of the being.

*

Worshipping the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is an important aspect of the Integral Yoga. When we touch their feet either in imagination or by the use of their photographs, we must keep the thought alive that since they are not beings of limits we automatically touch their feet everywhere in all dimensions, in all existences. The Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's feet being “Ecstasy's altars”, worshipping their feet can open us to every bliss they can bless us with. Their feet, never stagnating, constantly on the move forward ever

in time, carry the worshipper with them in progress. Every unfoldment released carves out their footprints in and on 'time'. These carvings send currents of ecstasy through and through the full circle of 'Time'—the circle so infinite that their feet will never return to the same places once again. Thus 'time' under the constant pressure of their moving feet has become 'ecstasy-charged'. Consequently every moment of our life is filled with their bliss. To experience this ecstasy of 'time' in time we have to love our Divine parents simply, purely, and without expectations. The rest will follow. Their feet are the gateway to this bliss; worshipping them gives us an entry.

*

Complete trust in the Mother brings into operation a blissful reality—the reality of Her fingers and Her hands. Her fingers touch every movement, every moment, every aspect of our life—Her detailed attention which is Her care and love. Her hands that mould the future are constantly shaping our future. All this takes place only if we keep our faith pure and intact.

*

To the sincere aspirants of the Integral Yoga, the Mother is always supporting them. She contains us like a baby in a basket-cradle.

*

Sri Aurobindo has a hand in our life. We are always sitting in the hollow of His palm. If we believe in this, this reality becomes operative in response to our positive imagination.

*

To enjoy taking credit is, in the ordinary sense, a joint mental-vital play. In this sense, the mind and vital forces are never so much in harmony as they are when it comes to taking credit. This is because we all have an inherent desire (ignorance-oriented) to be important according to our fancies, and we, by sheer habit, fish for compliments. We the children of the Mother are no exceptions. However, if we realised that all play is of the Mother, and so all credit goes to Her, we would make a very good beginning—beginning of turning to Her Truth. Surrender of the ego is the indispensable prerequisite of the Integral Yoga. Unfortunately, more often than not, we surrender ourself to the ego instead of surrendering the ego. The most convenient way of surrendering our ego to the Mother is, to start with, by surrendering our so-called credits to Her. Let us give

all credit to the Mother for all we accomplish—real or imaginary. Many times she imposed tests on us by passing the credit to us while actually the work was all hers. These were strong tests of our egos in which we mostly failed. Hers were also encouragements but at times they implied silent warnings that we should not get carried away by the flights of our egos.

*

Between two poles a straight line is the shortest distance. In a certain sense spirit and matter are poles apart. In the Integral Yoga these poles can be joined by a straight line of surrender. Walking on this straight line, matter can move swiftly towards the pole of spirit. The Mother has put Her emanation in our heart and by doing so she has extended Herself from the infinity of distances that exist between our material being and Her summitless perspective. The one who was otherwise inaccessible to us has become accessible by this extension from Her eternity. The pole of the Mother's love which is the light that illumines our heart is very close to our body and our outer person. Because we fail to use the straight line of surrender, the distance between these two poles becomes distorted and we get diverted to routes that make us lose our way. The rock-hill of ego is standing between these two poles, and unless we blow up this rock-hill by the dynamite of surrender, we may go astray and by the time we find our way back we may be at the end of our life.

*

All our past lives and their times have been chronicled in our souls. What has been chronicled has converted itself into the future—future lines of destiny, as if our experiences of past lives have taken the course of chronicling future events in advance. These decrees of destiny are not easy to cancel. Here in the Ashram the inevitability of Karmas can be eliminated but may not be eliminated. To rise above destiny has been made possible by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother but this possibility has been made conditional. Mere meditation and prayer may not necessarily make us escape from Karmic experiences. Only surrender is the key. Surrender is no doubt difficult but if we make a sincere effort to surrender what is chronicled in our soul in advance will stand cancelled by the action of their Grace. Spiritual efforts should not be limited to only "Opening". Many of the chronic diseases that strike the Ashramites would not have taken place if efforts to surrender had been continuously sincere.

*

The past haunts us in a variety of ways. We remember the pleasant past and

we remember also the unpleasant past. We compare present boredoms with what nice times we had. We gloat over our past successes and achievements. We take pleasure in talking about the past. Past persistences from the subconscious are the big challenges that confront us in the Integral Yoga. It is said that 'every beat of the heart takes us closer and closer to our life's end'. In the Integral Yoga our sincere efforts to practise it would change the dictum to 'every beat of the heart takes us closer and closer to our future goal'. An important obligatory aspect of the Integral Yoga is that we develop a powerful sense of belonging—belonging to the future. When this sense becomes constantly dominant, it naturally becomes our preoccupation to concentrate on our spiritual potentials. When this gets implanted in our brain, or to put it humorously when we are brain-washed by the forces of the future of our spiritual potentiality we understand our true responsibility. We have been shouldered with a great responsibility. We have been given a wonderful opportunity of becoming the first waves of the ocean of light that the indivisibility of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is. We must become fulfilled beings by our total and complete self-giving to them. When we make sincere and persistent efforts to accomplish what we have been made responsible for, our Divine parents in loving response will not only focus their beams on our souls in order to dissolve the Karmic darkness that clouds, obstructs and intercepts our psychic light but also by reaching into the very core of our soul commence releasing our spiritual potentiality. Our inner unrealised capacities then would no longer remain shut up in our souls.

*

All existences, all dimensions, all creations, each and every detail of all these, is by Sri Aurobindo, of Sri Aurobindo and for Sri Aurobindo—Sri Aurobindo who is summitless, Sri Aurobindo who is fully, totally, completely, integrally, eternally, Mother-filled. The point we may miss again and again is that we are committed to Sri Aurobindo in every moment of our life—Sri Aurobindo who is all that is as aforesaid and infinitely more.

JAGAT KAPADIA

A NEW DREAM WORKING IN SOUTH INDIA

“Life is like a box of chocolates.

You never know what you’re gonna get.”

Forrest Gump’s Mother

NOT long ago most people could not handle the fact that the earth is round. Now, most people cannot handle the self-evident truth that a new stage of evolution is upon us, and that our concepts of death are changing radically.

There comes a time in the course of human events when self-evident truths start to peek through so clearly that they begin to demand our attention.

There are strong signs now which are both positive and negative:

On the positive side: clean, high standards of living in the developed countries; great new discoveries in science and technology: sub-atomic physics—the new matter, a unifying field beyond atoms and quarks; micro-biology’s DNA and RNA; the new research on consciousness and the human brain; cybernetics and the fast expanding global information highway;... wonderful new creative interest in outer space; even a large communications empire called “Dreamworks”; an exhilarating spiritual awareness among futurologists around the world.

On the negative side: the bloody demise of old-fashioned organized religions everywhere; an apparent ending of the traditional myths about Heaven and Hell; political revolution and anarchy all in a mixed-up-gatherum of race and money, culture and power; runaway consumerism with conglomerate ownership in the hands of an unenlightened unhealthy few; computer-age unemployment; an alienated youth, strangely bored, and wallowing in aimless violence and a weird obsession with cold-hearted sexuality... encounters in an atmosphere of fatal disease and secret drugs; all dreams of the future ended!

A more complete vision of evolution could perhaps better handle these great contemporary challenges and the frightening new dangers. There seems to be a blatant lack of direction on all levels in addition to the mysterious, debilitating boredom among the young. There is a crucial need for new knowledge and some far more realistic dreams of the future. The old myths of “Heaven Above” must be combined now with true visions of a dynamically evolving earth in an evolving cosmos. In a recent film, winning big awards and breaking box office records, *Forrest Gump* finds it difficult to distinguish “Where heaven ends and the earth begins”, and his Mother always told him that, “death is just a part of life”.

At a place in South India for nearly a century close attention has been directed towards future dreams. The place is the Ashram at Pondicherry, founded by Sri Aurobindo and the Divine Mother in 1926. A new evolutionary city called Auroville was begun nearby in 1968. This ecologically advanced

township exists in an atmosphere of new global and cosmic awareness. Serious research is being conducted there on totally new concepts of life and death. In Auroville there is a guideline being used to direct these exciting new steps into the future. It is a book inspired by the Mother and written by Sri Aurobindo, called *SAVITRI*. There is even a project afoot to present the 49 cantos of this great epic poem (the longest in the English language) in video form. These videos would act as a core source for some of the great creative software of the future. They would begin to effect the changes demanded now by a modern world on the verge of a new stage of evolution.

As Forrest Gump's Mother could very well be saying now, "When the next stage of evolution truly arrives, there won't be one boring chocolate in the box!"

AUROWILLY (William Netter)

A PLUNGE INTO THE UNKNOWN

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE UNEXPECTED

(9)

AFTER taking the plunge in August 1953, although some parts of my outer being often found themselves breathless and struggling in a deep ocean, shoreless and boundless, my psychic being was always in the lap of the Divine Mother. Even in the midst of severe despondency and depression, from the depth of my being I felt time and again blinding flashes of delight like lightning in the heart of dark clouds. This gave me hope and a new courage to march onward.

In Sri Aurobindo's Yoga there are no set rules to be followed by everybody. First of all, one has to become conscious of what one is and one has and what is happening in and around oneself. The Mother's Yoga-Shakti is working always as the guide of the sadhak. She is guiding everybody from within according to his or her need.

One day, during pranam, as I bowed down, the Mother gave a hard poke on my back corresponding to the region of my heart in front. My feelings were hurt. I was annoyed and depressed. I thought—why this unseemly behaviour? If I have to correct something in me why not tell me clearly? Then came the answer from within—“Look carefully where the poke has hurt you.” And I found that it was my hurt pride. “Then cast it out”—came the command from within. But it is easier to understand—not so easy to act. It seems that one's heart is being torn out of the body—it is so painful!

Thus my sadhana was progressing through everyday events. There was no moment of respite—neither in daytime, nor even at night. One night I dreamt that as I was moving through a dense forest, a band of robbers surrounded me. I told them without fear—“See, the Mother's Force is protecting me from all sides, you can't do any harm to me.”

On another occasion I saw that on a chariot-like vehicle I was being carried at a tremendous speed—no earthly vehicle moves so fast. And the driver was the Mother herself—although I could not see her, I felt her presence.

Still in another dream I saw that the Mother was giving me the juice of the pomegranate fruit with a spoon on the hollow of my palm and I was drinking it while the Mother was sweetly smiling at me. The significance of the pomegranate fruit is—Divine Love spreading over the world.

Once I was so disturbed in mind that I did not go for the balcony darshan. The Mother spoke to me in a dream that night—“Why haven't you come for the balcony darshan?” Often in dreams, the Mother spoke to me in Bengali. These are only a few dreams among many.

Our day started with the Balcony Darshan. It has left in my memory a lasting

sweet impression of heavenly beauty and grace. Just as the sun rises at the horizon slowly above the meeting line between the sky and the sea, even so the Mother would appear at the threshold of her door slowly—first, the top of her veiled head would be seen, then gradually her whole face and body. She would stand placing her hands on the top of the parapet and look towards the crowd waiting below for her—first in front, then on both sides right and left. Utter silence would reign.

I remember that a lady would come daily with a dog for the Balcony Darshan. She would chain the dog to a lamppost. The dog would bark loudly to get himself freed. But as soon as the Mother would be at the Balcony the dog would fall silent along with all of us! Within a few minutes the Mother would see everybody in the crowd—individually. Then she would lift her eyes towards the sky offering the whole crowd to the Supreme Lord. Then, slowly again, she would move back step by step with a parting smile for her children, stand for a moment on the threshold and would slowly disappear.

I have never seen her turning her back while going inside except on one occasion. That day I was in a rebellious mood and extremely unreceptive.

I remember also clearly the occasion when during the Balcony Darshan I had an absolutely unexpected and scintillating and thrilling experience. I don't exactly remember which year it was—perhaps 1954. At that time the Mother was coming late to the Balcony—sometimes as late as 9 or 10 a.m. It was the day of Mahalakshmi puja. As the time for the Mother's coming was uncertain, I was reading the book *The Mother* and was at the part where Sri Aurobindo described the attributes of Mahalakshmi. My consciousness was in deep concentration on Mother Mahalakshmi. I was sitting below Sri Aurobindo's room. Suddenly the Mother arrived. Everybody stood up. The Mother, as usual, moved in front but, unlike on other days, she at once turned towards her right and placing her hands on the railing looked directly towards me for quite a few minutes and poured down her forces into me from head to foot like a cascade! The force was so dense and strong that my body grew heavy—so heavy that while returning to Golconde I could hardly lift up my feet.

My body became aware of this Force gradually during concentration time in the Playground when the Mother herself was present there. That Force first came down on the top of my head, then on the face, then on the chest and further down till from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet every inch of my body was possessed by that Force. Slowly and gradually, even from a distance, even where the Mother was not physically present, my body could feel this Force, this Yoga-Shakti, whenever I concentrated on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

But I have observed that whenever my ego comes forward this Force withdraws. This has happened innumerable times. Many a miracle happened even in my body and even a chain of continuous miracles could happen if Mr.

Ego did not try to occupy the central stage.

I give one instance. The Mother was giving her blessings in the Meditation Hall. It was about 10.30 or so in the morning. And perhaps it was the summer season. The Samadhi courtyard became too hot for the soles of the feet to bear. People were moving forward in a queue up to the point where the gracious shade of the 'Service tree' was available. Then they were running up to the point where again shade was available near Bula's and Purani's rooms. An idea came to my mind. Sri Aurobindo says that it is possible to turn pain into delight. He himself did it. He could turn into delight the pain caused by the sting of red ants. I thought—why not give it a trial? Instead of running on the hot courtyard I moved slowly on it as usual. And what was my wonder when I felt waves of delight rising up from below my feet! But then as soon as Mr. Ego appeared, the experience disappeared!

I give another instance. Long before I came to know Sri Aurobindo and the Mother directly, when I was a mere college student at Santiniketan, I had a similar experience. I had Sanskrit as one of my subjects. Our syllabus included the second chapter of the Gita where Krishna explains to Arjuna that a soul cannot be cut by weapons, nor be burnt by fire, nor be drenched by water, nor be evaporated by air. Now, one day, as I was returning home from morning classes at about noon while the blazing sun was shooting its tormenting shafts of rays, I suddenly remembered that particular sloka of the Gita. I tried to come in contact with my soul and remain in soul-consciousness. Suddenly I felt that I was no more being afflicted by the sun! However, that state of consciousness could not be kept for a long time. Here, too, the reason was the same—Mr. Ego!

I was giving vent to my spiritual experiences through Bengali poems and was offering them silently at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I did not publish nor did I show my poems to anybody including poet Nishikanto in spite of my intimacy with him. In fact, my first Bengali poem was published only in 1967 in the Bengali quarterly, *Purodha*.

Towards the end of 1953 I felt that Sri Aurobindo was speaking to my heart—"Why not try to write a poem in English?" I was extremely diffident about it. Never did I learn this language seriously. Never did I imagine that one day I would have to go outside Santiniketan. My ambition of becoming an artist there was frustrated by the Lord who took away the painter's brush from my hand and gave a poet's pen instead! I loved English for the first time when I started reading and translating Sri Aurobindo's poems. However, my first ever English poem entitled "Onward to Victory" was written towards the end of 1953. After thirty-five years, with much hesitation I sent this poem along with a few others to the editor of *Mother India*. This is the reply I got from him:

"Dear Abani,

I congratulate you. You are undoubtedly a poet, five out of these six poems

are certainly worth publishing—I shall be glad to launch you in *Mother India*.
17.8.88 Sd. K.D.S.”

The poem entitled ‘Onward to Victory’ was first published in the November 1988 issue of *Mother India* along with the editor’s comments.

I gave vent to my experiences of Balcony Darshan in a very small poem which I did not send for publication. Here it is being published for the first time:

Balcony Darshan

There comes She!
A look,
A smile,
A gesture,
And all is said,
And all is done!

The editor’s comment on this poem:

“Very attractive.”

(10)

In Amrita’s birth-centenary year, it is time for me to reveal some of my encounters with him. Amrita means nectar. My very first encounter, however, was not at all nectarous!

It happened like this. When I was staying in Golconde as a visitor—perhaps it was in 1954—one day I approached the Ashram Watch-repairing Department with my wristwatch. They told me that for this Amrita-da’s permission was necessary. He was the manager of the Ashram and finance was his department.

I went to Amrita-da. Without mincing words he told me curtly: “Watch-repairing in our Department is not done for an outsider.”

The very word ‘outsider’ cut me to the quick. For, not only was I aspiring to be an ‘insider’ but also I knew within my heart of hearts that I was already an insider more than many other insiders. I saw with my own eyes many insiders leaving the Ashram. One of them was the renowned singer and writer Dilip Kumar Roy.

It was in 1953. One day as I was chatting with poet Nishikanto in front of his house, we noticed Dilip Roy moving in a pensive mood towards the head post-office past the Ashram Dining Room. Nishikanto called to him in a loud voice, “Hello, we are still alive!” He turned his face towards his old intimate friend, smiled a little and again proceeded on his way. Soon afterwards he left the Ashram.

Many other people I knew left the Ashram. That young man whom the Mother had made an 'insider' at the very first chance, and who had scant regard for Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's messages, also left. Many others, I saw with my own eyes, left the Ashram, while an 'outsider' like myself was clinging to this Ashram like a limpet in spite of difficulties galore.

There are some fruits like 'amlaki' and 'haritaki' which are health-giving medicinal fruits but taste bitter and pungent. And yet after tasting these fruits if one drinks a glass of water—oh! it is all sweetness! My experiences with Amrita-da was something similar.

By the middle of 1957, I tasted the real 'Amrita', the human ambrosia, and since then until he left his body I received his love and goodwill in an overwhelming manner. All that will come in its own time and his letters to me will reveal the overflowing nectar in his heart.

In 1954, some very important and historic events took place in the Ashram. A renowned journalist and research-worker came to the Ashram in the month of February. He gave a talk in the Playground accompanied by a slide-show on remnants of ancient Hindu civilization in some parts of South America. His name was Chaman Lal. He had an interview with the Mother on 25th February 1954 and distributed typed copies of the interview at the Ashram Playground. The report had four headlines:

1957—A Great Historic Year for India
 Dissolution of Pakistan Inevitable
 Serious Possibilities of Russo-American War over India
 The Mother Foresees a Brilliant Future for India

The report generated much excitement in the Ashram and all over the subcontinent. There was some confusion about the correctness of the report. The Editor of *Mother India* himself wrote about it. In order to further clarify the question, I am quoting from a portion of Questions and Answers in the Mother's evening class held on 12.1.1955 at the Ashram Playground:

Question: Mother, many people are asking whether the crisis about which You spoke to X in reference to 1957 is the same as the one of this year or whether it is different....

The Mother: I haven't spoken about a crisis. I don't know what he has written... But certainly I did not speak to him about a crisis.

Question: There is a possibility of a war between Russia and America over the question of India...

(The Mother looks surprised) In '57?

Question: Yes, Mother.

The Mother: Never in my life... I never said this. And it is not there in what

he has written, because I would never let it pass.... There is the possibility of a war but I didn't say '57. (*Silence*)...

Quite obviously, it is the people who mixed up the four headlines together and made a confusion. Chaman Lal could not be blamed for this. As the Mother herself clarifies, she had seen the report before passing it. The four headlines should be seen and understood separately.

The year 1954 will be remembered for two more historic events in the Ashram and Pondicherry.

On 14 August 1954, in the evening, at the Ashram Playground, sitting in front of the spiritual map of India the Mother read out her historic 'Declaration' wherein she expressed her long cherished wish of becoming an Indian citizen while retaining her French citizenship and thus adopting a 'double nationality'. This was the first step towards a World-Union which was unfortunately negated by unwise Indian politicians who could not see beyond their noses. In 1942, when the Cripps Mission came to India, Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's sane advice was disregarded by Indian politicians and they pushed back opportunity after opportunity presented by the Divine.

The second historic event occurred on the 1st November, 1954 when Pondicherry along with other French settlements in India had its *de-facto* merger with the Indian Union. On this occasion the Mother, during the Balcony Darshan, hoisted the spiritual flag of India (the Ashram flag) on the Ashram main building. Later during the general blessings in the Ashram Meditation Hall she gave each one a card bearing a drawing of the flag in gold and blue along with the following message of Sri Aurobindo:

“A free and united India will be there and the Mother will gather around her her sons and weld them into a single national strength in the life of a great and united people.”

There had been other celebrations in the town in some of which the Ashram participated I deemed myself fortunate to be in the Ashram on these historic occasions.

Side by side with these outer events inner events of my own life and sadhana were occurring. My father had been pressurising me to return to Bengal. He did not believe that this path of yoga was my true path. I thought that if the Mother made me an Ashramite then my father would not have any chance to pressurise me any more. But then the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had their own ideas and did not come to my rescue.

I was seething with anger and revolt. Just at that time, one day, Jatın-da, in whose garden I was working, introduced to me a temporary visitor, a relative of his. He was a young man of my age. He told me in front of Jatın-da—“Why are you whiling away your life over these trifles?” I understood his point of view and

did not reply. Most young men think like him. For them sadhana is a wastage of life.

One night I dreamt that I was standing in the Reception Hall in front of Sri Aurobindo's photograph—which is still there. I addressed Sri Aurobindo thus: "I won't be able to do your Yoga." Sri Aurobindo inclined his head on one side signalling his consent. Then I was moving away from Sri Aurobindo. As I was moving away I felt a deep anguish and pang within my heart. Something called out to Sri Aurobindo: "Lord, when the end comes may my head rest at Thy feet."

I saw myself flying in the sky while Sri Aurobindo was standing on the ground below. Then I heard clearly Sri Aurobindo's firm command: "Come down over here." I was absolutely powerless to disobey this command. Then I saw myself floating in the sky while slowly coming down. A strange vibration surrounded me. It was the vibration of Sri Aurobindo's command which forced me to come down in spite of my revolt. At last I descended and stood before him.

Where I alighted was absolutely a new place—something like Auroville when it was first inaugurated. A newly built thatched house—not of Auroville type but of Bengal type—was standing in front of us. Sri Aurobindo told me: "Look, I have made this new house for you." Then I woke up.

Ten years after this incident, before my birthday in 1964, I wrote to the Mother describing this dream and wanted to know its significance. At that time the Mother was not well and was not receiving even birthday people. Later, one day Nolini-da called me and said: "The Mother has received your letter; you can go to her on your birthday."

Then on my birthday, in my birthday card that I received from the Mother's hands, I found the following message of Sri Aurobindo typed on a card attached to my birthday card:

The significance can become evident only if we go behind appearances and begin to understand the forces at work and the way of their working and their secret significance

Sri Aurobindo

I understood the "secret significance" which I am not going to divulge here.

Thus through all my trials and troubles Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's Presence was always with me in spite of all my stupidities.

In the same year (1954), I don't remember the exact time, the Mother came for Balcony Darshan with her face half-covered and her neck fully covered with her veil. She was suffering terribly and yet she came to the Balcony to bestow her blessings to the waiting aspirants below.

Dr. Sanyal, who was staying at that time in Golconde, used to sit daily in front of me at the table during lunch in the Golconde dining room. He told me

that it was due to the Mother's toothache that half of her face and the whole of her neck had been so much swollen that at first she was unwilling to come for the Balcony Darshan. But afterwards she changed her mind and came in spite of her sufferings.

This incident shook me so much, particularly when I thought about my revolts against her, that after coming back to my room from the Balcony, I was led to shed tears and wrote three Bengali poems on three consecutive days. Here I am giving a simple prose rendering only of my first poem entitled

The Mother's Illness

Half of Thy face and the whole of Thy neck are completely veiled. And yet, O emaciated Moon, Thou sheddest Thy charming and soothing light! Thou standest yet at the Balcony! Thy sick-bed can't keep Thee away from us, Thy unworthy children. Thy eyes are sleepless as ever and the cascade of Thy love flows down even in the midst of the sufferings of Thy body!

Never did I witness such a sight. Never did any history or legend tell us of such a story. Blessed is he who has witnessed such a scene.

Thy suffering body leans down on the railing of the Balcony ignoring the sick-bed. For Thy mission, O Sleepless One, is to give away Thy Grace and help to all who aspire for the same even a little.

A darkness is about to engulf the earth. The Asuras sing in a chorus their anthem of victory over Truth and Light. We, Thy ignorant children, know it not. Do we know that in the body of a frail woman the Divine Warrior is fighting single-handedly all the evil forces upon this earth?

Only this I know definitely that a day shall come when Thou with a body full of divine light and power will manifest Thyself free from the reign of all illnesses and will deal a final death-blow to Death itself and free mankind from its tyranny.

I, with a pure heart, await that ever-cherished blessed hour.

It took the Mother about three days to recover completely.

On 31 December 1954 for the first and the last time the Mother read out her new year message in her Playground class in the evening, explained the significance of the message and answered various questions. The Mother forewarned all, that the year 1955 was going to be a difficult year and asked everybody to do his best to go through the coming difficulties.

I had already too many difficulties to go through. How will the new difficulties of 1955 be? I wondered.

(To be continued)

ABANI SINHA

SHIVA AND THE MYTH OF PHALLUS WORSHIP

IN the Puranas, which are often compared to encyclopaedias, one finds besides other information innumerable stories meant to elucidate the mystic element in Indian religious thought. Sometimes the germ of these stories can be traced to the Vedas and the Upanishads. And these stories raise questions and provoke us to inquire and investigate, which perhaps is their true purpose. Consider the following account of a story from the Shiva Purana—

“Ravan by practising great austerities obtained a boon from Shiva. Hungry for power to dominate the world Ravan wanted Shiva’s Shakti. But since Shiva and Shakti cannot be separated he asked for Shivalinga. The boon is granted but Ravan is warned that he must not put it on the ground till he has reached his destination. Ravan happily starts carrying it back to Lanka expecting Shakti also to come in the wake of Shivalinga. On the way, however, a call of nature forces him to hand it to a shepherd boy who puts it on the ground and disappears because Ravan takes long to come back; and even mighty Ravan is unable to lift it up.” He then obtained a boon: an unlimited power from Brahma. Now the question arises: what is this Shivalinga of the story? A number of western scholars would have us believe that it represents Shiva’s phallus. Let us see why it is a figment of their preconceived notions and warped imaginations. The main argument of those who hold this belief is that since in the Vedas there is no mention of the deity called Shiva, the Aryans must have adopted this god from the pre-Aryan tribes or the Harappa culture people. This reasoning and the evidence they furnish resemble the often criticised police procedure of investigation where a certain person becomes a prime suspect and then a lot of evidence is gathered but only that which will prove his guilt.

There is sufficient internal evidence in the Vedas to prove that Shiva is not different from Rudra and this view is now generally accepted. In the Yajurveda, chapter 16, wholly devoted to eulogy of Rudra, he is described as the lord of all things good and bad, with such epithets as shivatānu, pashupati, nilagrīva, sahasrāksha, shankara, shiva, sūta and girīsha, which clearly show that Shiva and Rudra represent the same god. The verse 49 of chapter 16 of the Yajurveda reads, “O Rudra, your body which is auspicious, radiating peace and which for ever removes all bodily ills, with that have grace on us.” And verse 51, “O bounteous and auspicious (lord), look on us with benevolence and kind thoughts. Up on that yonder tree, keep your (destructive) weapons and wearing a skin (bare-bodied?) come to our homes bearing your bow”—such were some of the prayers addressed to Rudra. So Shiva does not find mention in the Vedas because at the time he was worshipped as Rudra. But that even Rudra should be mentioned in comparatively few hymns and only four or five hymns should be wholly addressed to him is a little puzzling for a God who as Shiva occupies so prominent a position in the Trinity of later times.

The explanation, perhaps, lies in the fact that in the Vedic times all gods were looked upon as several aspects of the same supreme Godhead and represented certain psychological functions and powers in the Vedic yoga. Thus Rudra, who is described as red, violent, terrible may have been thought of as the terrible and fierce aspect of Agni and Indra by which they destroyed enemies.

Why did the name Shiva replace Rudra? The answer is not far to seek: Rudra, the terrible, destroys our enemies, the adverse forces which hinder our progress, but in so destroying the impurities and the enemies within, will he not destroy us or something of us which responds to them? Verily, few of us have the strength to welcome Rudra. Sayana deriving the name Rudra from "Rud" gives the meaning as the god who drives away suffering or that which causes suffering. I think it is also possible to derive the name from the root "Rudh", in which case Rudra would be the god who removes or destroys all that opposes, all that obstructs. Men therefore prefer to call Shiva the benevolent, auspicious and kinder aspect of Rudra, a herald of peace to heal by his presence the aches and sufferings of life. But while Rudra was perceived as the fierce and terrible god who could be kind, Shiva is a god of Peace and Ananda who can be a fierce destroyer.

Speaking of the origin of the Puranic Trinity, Sri Aurobindo says, "Rudra, the violent and merciful, the mighty one, presides over the struggle of life to affirm itself; he is the armed, wrathful, and beneficent Power of God who lifts forcibly the creation upwards, smites all that opposes, scourges all that errs and resists, heals all that is wounded and suffers and complains and submits." (*The Secret of the Veda, The Doctrine of the Mystics*) Thus we see that Sri Aurobindo does not distinguish between Rudra and Shiva; they are two faces of the same god.

The Puranas often try to explain the substance of some Vedic hymns through stories, but in so doing they give the godheads such individual characteristics that they appear at times even antagonistic while at other places the same scriptures proclaim their oneness. Shiva Purana, for example, narrates how Brahma and Vishnu quarrelled over who is the greater one between them. When the quarrel reached a high pitch, to their utter surprise there appeared a column of fire which seemed to pervade everything, endless above and endless below. The two stopped quarrelling and decided to investigate. Brahma in the form of a swan sought to find the top while Vishnu as a boar tried to find the bottom. When unsuccessful and baffled they met again, Shiva appeared before them through the column of fire and convinced them that it is he who was the greatest. Now, in the R̥g-Veda too the infinite column of fire is mentioned in several places—"Unlimited, facing downward, facing upwards, how does he not sink?... who has seen when he (Agni) joins heavens and is its pillar (*skambha*) and guards the firmament?" (RV. IV, 13, 5) and "... a pillar of supreme being in its abode he stands at the starting of the ways in the upholding laws." (RV. X, 5, 6)

In the Karna Parva of the Mahabharata, there is a story of Rudra, who by

shooting a single arrow from his bow killed three invincible asuras living in their three fortified cities and destroyed also the fortified cities. In this endeavour of Rudra, earth became the chariot, Brahma the charioteer, Agni, Soma and Vishnu the shaft, arrowhead and the tip of his arrow respectively. The story perhaps wants to convey that to rid the physical, vital (prana) and mental consciousness of hostile possession and realise God, the combined effort of the psychic fire or the soul's aspiration, a sound physical foundation, a happy disposition in the vital being and a one-pointed will in the mind are necessary. Like Rudra, Agni and Indra are also referred to as *purandara*, the destroyer of the city, in the Vedas; this has wrongly led western historians and their Indian followers to find confirmation of their preconceived idea that the Aryans destroyed the cities of their enemies such as those of the Harappa civilisation.

Worship of Shiva in the form of a Shivalinga is at least two thousand years old. Even many of the foreign invaders like the Shakas and the Kushanas became Shiva-worshippers. There is a Shivalinga of Kanishka's time in the Allahabad museum with Shiva's face carved on its four sides. The Puranic and Tantric literatures classify Shivalingas in different ways. One such classification is based on the perception that Shiva, the Lord, is immanent in all elements, earth, water, fire, air and ether and so there are Shivalingas in each of these elements. The Shiva Purana says, "O sage, there is no limit to the number of lingas; the entire earth, the entire universe is in the form of a linga." Another classification based on yogic experience informs us that there are four Shivalingas with the corresponding shaktis present in four yoga-chakras or lotuses in the subtle physical body of man—Swayambhūlinga in the mūlādhāra, Paralinga in the swādhīsthāna, Bānalinga in the anāhata and Itaralinga in the ājñā chakra. It is interesting to note that the word bāna in Sanskrit means arrow, thus serving as a link between Bānalinga and Rudra's arrow.

The word "linga" in Sanskrit has some twenty meanings. A few of them are (1) mark, symbol, sign, etc., (2) disguise, (3) a symptom in medicine, (4) evidence, (5) gender (grammar), (6) sex, (7) male organ of generation, (8) in Samkhya philosophy the principle called pradhana or prakriti, and other meanings in logic and literature. Also, the term linga-deha is used in Samkhya and Vedanta to denote the subtle body that survives death; and atmalinga to mark the divine presence in the heart.

Just as the advaita-vedantin says, "*Jīva Brahmaivanāparaḥ*, the soul and brahman are one", the Shiva-worshipper says, "Jīva and Shiva are one." The jīva is the atmalinga in the heart and serves as a link with the Shiva stationed above the sahasrara chakra. It is Shiva's grace that burns the fetters that bind the jīva, the soul, and allows it to make its Presence felt in the heart and call and receive the Divine Influx. The Shivalinga that Ravan was carrying in the Puranic story mentioned earlier was, therefore, a subtle body of Shiva, an emanation of Shiva in other words, and not the phallus. Ravan could not keep it because the

Divine Presence does not abide with the tamasic nature into which Ravan relapsed.

Most men, to express their devotion to God or an ideal, need external support in the form of an idol or an emblem. Thus countries are represented by their flags; and honour or dishonour to its flag is honour or dishonour to the country. Even movements and organisations like the Olympic or UNO or UNESCO find a symbol or emblem useful and necessary to evoke in the people a desired response. The Shivalinga can and does evoke the expected natural rather complex response in the worshipper. In ancient times the Shivalinga reminded him of the infinite column of fire rising from the Inconscience to the Super-consciousness and Transcendence. It also meant the arrow of Rudra that destroyed the tripurāsuras, and their hold over the physical, vital and mental worlds. Now, for many centuries Shivalinga means for the worshipper the soul in his heart, atmalinga, the link with its counterpart the Cosmic Soul, the Shiva.

Shivalinga also represents the inseparable Shiva and Shakti together. Generally the pedestal is considered as the Shakti and the column Shiva. But if distinction has to be made, then it might be more fitting to think of Shiva as the pedestal supporting the play of Shakti.

How did Shivalinga come to signify the phallus for some people? Besides the word linga, which has phallus as one of its meanings, there are two stories in the Puranas which may have contributed to the spread of this myth. The first story narrates that it was Shiva who was to create the Universe, but since he was absorbed in tapas, Brahma created the Universe instead. So Shiva discarded the linga, having no more use for it. Brahma and Vishnu arranged to make it an object of worship. Now, linga of the story need not be taken to mean the phallus; the soul is a higher creative power, even the mind has power to create. Shiva's creative power is not in his phallus. And Shiva could not have discarded the linga but used its power for other creative purposes. The second story tells us that rishis like Atri, Bhrigu seeing Shiva walk naked among their women and not recognising him cursed him. This resulted in Shiva losing the linga or phallus.

Before we discuss the implication of the story we must remember the injunction of the shastras that all "smṛti" literature is to be interpreted in the light of "śruti", that is, the Vedas and the Upanishads. Does the above story conform to the Vedic and Upanishadic truths? In order to elucidate the mystic truth of the Vedas, the Puranas sometimes err for three reasons. First, because the truth is misunderstood, secondly due to sectarian bias arising out of the divide in the Shiva and Vishnu cults and the need to establish the superiority of Brahmins, thirdly in good faith for some reason which seemed valid at the time. In the present case, if we take into account that these Puranas were written or given final shape after the 8th Century, when there was an influx of foreigners into India, the society was in turmoil, and the existence of rivalry between Buddhist and Hindu faiths, the Puranas may have had to face the charge that

Hindus were phallus-worshippers. There was no need to protect the educated and intelligent who knew what Shivalinga stood for. But in order to save the ordinary people's faith in Shivalinga the authors must have advanced the view that even if the charge were true the Shivalinga is worthy of worship. The story also showed the power of the Brahmins who could curse even gods. Thus the stories are ill-conceived and deserve to be ignored.

In India even now there are some two and a half million tribal people, yet there is no report of phallus-worship prevalent among them. And if a grinding stone in every Indian household is not to qualify as the phallus by its resemblance then we will have to give up the notion that the stone objects found at ancient archaeological sites were objects of phallus-worship. If Shivalinga were a phallus, would Shiva's face be carved on it? There are even now some temples where Shiva's face is carved on the linga. When we take all these things into account the only rational conclusion seems to be the non-phallus nature of Shivalinga. The Indians did not, nor do they now, worship or perceive Shivalinga as a phallus.

While Shivalinga may be considered as an iconic representation of Shiva, he is also depicted as *digambara*, *tri-netra*, carrying the moon on his head with matted locks of hair through which flows down the Ganges, which he had received on his head in her descent from the heavens, his throat blue with poison, carrying a serpent on his person and a drum in his hand and Nandi, the bull, his vehicle. Like the Shivalinga, this too is a very attractive picture, each part of it a revealing symbol. Digambara, clothed in space-directions, symbolises his infinite and eternal aspect. The third eye is supposed to destroy the world at the end of the cycle but it is also the eye of yoga or knowledge that burns the ignorance and heralds a new birth. The Divine Ganges on Shiva's head indicates that one must have Shiva's Presence and Peace in the heart before he can receive the full influx of the Divine Light symbolised by the heavenly river Ganges. The same is true for the moon or Soma, the Divine's Ananda streaming in from above. The drum in his hand shows that his eternity measures out time in rhythmic beats. The entwining serpent is the Kundalini Shakti. He lives in the cremation ground which is the heart of his devotee where Shiva has burnt all fetters and ego. His blue throat shows that he saves his devotee by drinking up the world's poison. His vehicle "nandi" shows that Shiva's is the power of ecstatic Peace. Not easily accessible, he lives in a trance on the high peaks of consciousness, only dimly aware of the worlds below.

On the white summit of eternity
 A single Soul of bare infinities,
 Guarded he keeps by a fire-screen of peace
 His mystic loneliness of nude ecstasy.
 ("Shiva"—Sri Aurobindo)

Perhaps he will awaken from his ecstatic trance one day, let us hope soon and, smiting all that obstructs, all that resists and healing all that is wounded and suffers, help the world in its evolutionary march.

V. JAYBEE

THE UPWARD JOURNEY

STUMBLE, stumble, if thou canst not help,
 But draw strength from the unfaded dreams,
 From the mystic words treasured in memory's shelf
 Thou must rise up with the rays of courage
 As the sun rises after a plunge into night
 Seeking the white purity of the glorious noon
 Thy aspiration must fruit if watered with faith,
 Peace must descend if love calls Love,
 Thou must not listen to the litany of complaints
 Against thy upward journey; thou must help
 Thyself, helping thy zeal, saving thy great choice.
 Thou must seek the silence of the stars,
 The joy of the ocean and the equanimity of the earth.

Trudge on, each little progress is a victory over death
 Remember this and that sweet Face for which thou livest.

SEIKH ABDUL KASAM

MY INTRA-OCULAR LENS OPERATION

Introduction

My right eye was operated upon on 3rd March 1990, and the left one on 2nd April 1994. The first time there was a lot of tension because I had had no idea of what an intra-ocular operation would be like. I was asked to take a lot of care for two whole months and given many instructions to be followed.

I write this article in order to offer my hearty respects to those who have helped me and many other Ashramites undergoing the same operation. I know that some of us must have offered money, some distributed presents, some may have given private parties to their close friends and attendants, while some may have only said: "Many many thanks. We will remember you all forever for what you have done for us " What I write, I pour out from my heart as a present for all to read and enjoy. It may also help those who are going to be similarly operated upon in the future.

I divide my article in three parts for the reader to understand and enjoy more easily. The first is about Dr. Mrs. Natchiar, the second about our own medical staff, and in the last I try to show how my batch enjoyed seven days in the Park Guest House.

As a sportsman I take this experience too as a game. We all felt that Dr. Natchiar was, as it were, playing with ease with the cataracts while removing them from our eyes. A Bengali lady remarked, "She removes the cataracts like taking fish out of ponds." Although I call it a game, it should really be called the Great Art of Intra-ocular Lens Operation.

Doctor Mrs. Natchiar

Every year Dr. Natchiar comes to the Ashram to perform these eye operations. She is a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother like her brother Dr. Venkatswamy who was the prime mover in the eye operations here and has given his hospital in Madurai the name "Arvind Eye Hospital".

On 3rd March 1990, she started the operations at about 7 a.m. Assisted by her team of experts, she finished the 19 operations scheduled for the day by 12.30 p.m. She had brought the lenses, and the machine to fix them into the eyes, all the way from the Madurai Hospital. As it is a costly and not easily available machine it must have been risky to transport it like this, but she did it gladly for her patients here. The lenses, also very expensive, are imported from America. Bringing the lenses and the machine here made it very convenient for the Ashramites. Till then one had to go to Madurai for the operations and all too often found it very difficult to get an attendant for the journey and the first few

days of post-operative care. Also it was not easy for those who never went out of the Ashram to adjust to the atmosphere outside. This new arrangement proved to us how the Mother is looking after us and provides everything to make life easier.

Dr. Natchiar does not take any money from the Ashramites. She does all the operations with great care and responsibility. Does this not show how much she is devoted to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo? She personally takes care of each patient so that he or she may not have any problems afterwards.

Now about the pre- and post-operative routines. Prior to surgery we were given only a cup of tea. Two hours later, when it was time for the operation, we were given two injections each, one by one, near the eye which was to be operated upon, so as to anaesthetize the area. Each time the doctor pacified us by telling: "There is nothing to worry about. This is just a small injection. It is given so that the sensation in that area is lost and one does not feel what happens there."

Two doctors then came and took me to the operation theatre. Though I was anaesthetized near the eye and my head was covered during the operation I could clearly hear all that was going on around me. "Cut. Stop. Finished... Roll him out." These were some of the words that were used during the operation.

Once the operation was over I was made to lie down straight like a statue in my bed for four hours. That day we were served only fruit juice and the next day we were permitted a solid diet. And throughout that day we were made to take complete rest.

Thus for the first time ever I had the opportunity of watching Dr. Natchiar along with her team of doctors playing a game with the eye. I have played many games: cricket, hockey, volley ball, tennis, table-tennis, etc. and won many prizes at my school as well as from the Mother after I came to the Ashram. But this doctor's game was completely new to me.

Dr. Natchiar, as I mentioned earlier, started her game early in the morning at about 7 o'clock. Nineteen cataracts were removed and nineteen lenses were fixed. Nineteen games in all within the span of just five and a half hours without any half-time. Each game was a success and worthy of a prize. Where money or cups or medals have little value what could have been a suitable prize other than nineteen smiling faces saying: "Oh, what a player! a magician! an expert! an extraordinary doctor!"

The game started and her magic hands too started moving swiftly on each eye and miracles were being performed. There was renewed hope on everyone's face of proper vision in the near future. The intra-ocular operation requires full concentration and a steady hand to handle the delicate work of lens insertion—after the cataract has been removed from the eye—and then stitching it up. One small mistake and the patient could be blinded for life. Dr. Natchiar is an outstanding doctor in her field and should be given an award and title by the

Government. One day, I am sure, my inner feelings will be fulfilled. I humbly bow to her and to her wonderful team of doctors.

Though the game is over and the players have left the field and gone home, the eye has to be kept safely and handled delicately for about two or three months. The captain of the team, Dr. Natchiar, came to see us the day following the operation and told us: "You have to now learn how to walk slowly—like a newly married bride." There was a burst of laughter all around us, but the nineteen of us could just smile. A little mistake or carelessness on our part in these two months or more and we would be the losers. We would become blind in one eye.

I give here the instructions that one has to remember and strictly follow during those weeks:

1. Do not pour water on the head or allow any water in the eye.
2. Do not sleep on the side on which the treated eye is situated.
3. No coughing, no sneezing, no laughing—these things put pressure on the recuperating eye.
4. No weight-lifting, no reading or writing, no TV or cinema.
5. No cycling and no moving about in the sun.
6. Always use sunglasses and keep the eye covered with the pad provided to you
7. Wipe the eyelids daily with cotton dipped in hot water and squeezed out so that no water gets into eye.
8. After cleaning the eye, put the prescribed eye-drops.
9. Every week go to the doctor for a check-up and consultation till the stitches are removed and glasses with new numbers prescribed.
10. Even afterwards, continue to take as much care as possible.

Remember that it generally takes about six months for the intra-ocular lens fixed into the eye to function normally.

Our Medical Staff

Our Dr. Dutta, affectionately called Dilip-da, is in charge of the Ashram Dispensary and its Nursing Home. He is exceptionally qualified—a heart-specialist, his heart is equally well qualified. He never says 'No' and is always ready to help as much as he can. He is always thinking of his patients and has created many facilities for them. Merely to praise him or to write about him cannot be enough because all of us know very well that by the Grace of the Divine Mother we have this kind-hearted and efficient doctor to look after us during our illnesses. So with my hearty pranams to him I keep quietly remember-

ing him always in my heart.

Now who does not know Vishwabandhu who is ever ready at any time to come to our help? Talking politely, explaining everything properly, remembering all that he has to do for the patients, he never seems to tire. He treats all patients equally, whether they are known to him or not, are young or old, rich or poor. They are to him patients, nothing more or less. All approach him for advice and help. His name Vishwabandhu is most appropriate, it describes fully his nature and work meaning as it does "the whole world's friend". Some call him "Mota-bhai" meaning (in Gujarati) elder brother, and that is what he actually is, an elder brother to all Ashramites. Long live Mota-bhai!

Then come Dr. Jagadishan and Dr. Sushilkumar Pani. In the beginning, when Dr. Pani was not there, Dr. Jagadishan used to examine the patients thoroughly and decide whose eyes were ready for operation. Later Dr. Pani began to look after us all right up to the end. Both are eye-specialists as well as devotees. They examine the patients fully and explain everything thoroughly with great kindness.

After Dr. Natchiar had finished the operations and left for Madurai, Dr. Pani used to visit us daily. On the last day he removed our eye-cap and gave a green-coloured cloth-pad to put over the eye as well as a pair of coloured glasses to keep away the sunlight. He also gave us, along with some personal guidance, a chart with pictures so that we would know whatever we have to do or avoid doing. After one month we were called for another check-up and all our restrictions and our eye-shades were removed. Dr. Pani is not only a nice doctor, he is a quiet man who speaks only what needs to be spoken. This is what I have observed from my contact with him. There is one sister in the Dispensary who too helps eye-patients. She keeps all records and reports of eye-patients. With her sweet smiling face she speaks softly, gently to patients explaining everything that they have to do. She is also a very efficient sister helping every one whole-heartedly. All like her very much.

At the Nursing Home, Dr. Salila-di with her hard-working staff of sisters and servants and the volunteers brought in by Captain Rajkumar organised everything so well that the patients felt completely at home. Food, medicines, items for personal use, everything was there when and where it was required. No wonder, with all these facilities and such kind-hearted attendants, the patients forget their pain and suffering and, in a few days, come away with smiles on their faces and a new light in their eyes.

All these people, from Dr. Natchiar to the most ordinary of Dr. Dilip-da's staff, deserve to be praised and remembered forever. If it were not for them and the facilities they provide, what hardships would one not have to go through? So whatever I write in their praise is too little: my heart will never be satisfied with it. So I offer all of them my hearty and sincere namaskar.

The eye-operations of 2nd April 1994

We were 32 in all to be operated upon that day. Since there was not enough space for all of us in the Nursing Home, some were kept in the Park Guest House (P.G.H.). I was in this latter group. We were taken for the operation to the Nursing Home and afterwards brought back to the Guest House. In 1990 Dr. Natchiar had done all the operations herself, but this time there were three surgeons operating. They started at about 7 a.m. and finished by 5 p.m. Though there were even patients between the ages of 80 and 90 all the operations were successful.

P.G.H. proved to be an ideal place for recuperation. Apart from the sea that provided a very beautiful sight, the staff and volunteers saw to it that we had no problems. Without them we would not have enjoyed ourselves as we did. Some gave us constant advice and guidance. Some sisters were always there to give us meals, medicines, juices and whatever we needed. Even at night they were always ready to provide every help with smiles. By the goodwill of Dayabhai and Kusumben who are in charge of P.G.H., not only was the room we stayed in very big, and we were only four of us there—it was also the best.

From outside P.G.H. looks like a Maharaja's palace, and during those seven days we were actually treated like Maharajas. Attendants were always at hand. Nothing was lacking. Anything we asked for was immediately provided. Our comfort and joy seemed their only concern. In actual fact, during those seven days we just forgot that we had gone for eye-operations! Who can ever expect such treatment—a royal one!

On the last day, while being discharged, some of us told Dr. Dilip-da, "We were admitted on Good Friday 1st April and are leaving on Friday the 8th. We shall remember this day as 'Happy Friday'." So with smiles we came back wishing everyone Happy Friday.

There were four of us in that room. Myself (in charge of P.E.D.'s Volley ball ground); Jitendrabhai (who works in the Corner House); Vijaybhai Bhonsle (a professor in our School); and Dr. Jatin Mahimtura (who looks after our Children's Dispensary). Dr. Jatin's wife used to come daily at lunchtime with the food she had prepared at home and gave us all a share. Besides being a doctor herself she cooks delicious dishes. Everyday she prepared something new for us all to enjoy. In seven days the four of us became great friends for we talked on a large variety of subjects.

Dr. Natchiar remarked, "If I get this building (the P G H.) I can make a nice hospital out of it." Dr. Salila-di said, "If we get some part of this Guest House for our use, we can put many invalids here as it would be an ideal place for them." I feel certain that in future too Kusumben will willingly allow the Guest House to be used for patients of the Nursing Home when such a large number of eye-operations are performed there

After some days Dr. Pani called us eye-patients for a check-up at the Nursing Home at 8 a.m. on Sunday, 18th April 1994. Myself and some others were sitting there after the doctor had checked our eyes. The mother of Joy Tagore (a captain in the P.E D) was still waiting for the doctor's call. So Joy asked me, "Why do you wait now?" I told him we were waiting for someone to take us back. At once he said, "I have a car I will take you all and then come back for my mother." He left each one of us at our homes. My room is in the New Creation block to the east of the Handmade Paper Factory. When I got down Joy told me, "Mahendrabhai, take care not to talk too much, and also avoid the TV for some time." I said, "I will remember your good advice." Then, with a smiling face, he left.

The next day, I heard that he had passed away. At first I could not believe it. On the previous day he was talking, smiling, giving good advice to us and bringing us to our homes after the check-up. Strange to us are the ways of the Almighty. Later I heard that in the morning Joy had been to the Dining Room and was his usual self, chatting and joking with all. Suddenly he suffered a heart attack and Dr. Dilip-da took him to the Nursing Home, but he passed away there. It is the way Life is. The whole Ashram was shocked by this tragic news because he was very good to everyone, from children to the aged. The question which remains in everybody's mind is "Why do such good people go away so soon?" We will never forget this incident in our lives. Our hearty and true gratitude for him is always there.

I conclude with my warm namaskars to all who worked so hard to make the eye-operations such a success. I am sure this write-up will help readers to know what the cataract operation is and hope it will be especially useful to those who are going to undergo the operation.

MAHENDRAKUMAR

ESSAYS ON THE MAHĀBHĀRATA (XIV)

(Continued from the issue of June 1995)

(vi) RŚYAŚRĪGA AND YAVAKRĪTA

SEXUAL temptation is a great challenge for many saints. The Sanskrit language has coined a special term for those who get distracted and are “fallen”: *yoga-bhraṣṭa*. But the case of every ascetic is different. This becomes obvious when we study the lives of Rśyaśrīga and Yavakrīta: the former transforms his “fall” into a positive experience, giving him a larger foundation in life, whereas the latter plunges into total disaster.

Rśyaśrīga was born of a doe under queer mythic circumstances. His father was the ascetic Vibhāṇḍaka Kāśyapa, while the *apsarā* Urvaśī, whom he saw when he was bathing in a river, is said to have played a stimulating role. The young boy grew up in a forest, with an antelope horn on his head, which explains his name. He lived in complete ignorance of the world, and his father was the only human being he ever got to see in his youth.

Now there was a king of Aṅga, Lomapāda, who had mistreated the Brahmins in his country and was deserted by them. As a consequence it stopped raining in Aṅga. As his subjects were suffering considerably, he performed some expiation and the Brahmins forgave him. However, this was not sufficient to bring back the rain. He was advised by his counsellors to bring the very austere and chaste Rśyaśrīga. This would give them immediate relief. Accordingly, a group of courtesans was dispatched on a specially constructed boat which looked like a floating hermitage.

At an appropriate moment when Rśyaśrīga’s father has gone out, the most attractive courtesan approaches Rśyaśrīga who had never seen a woman in his life. The beautiful damsel uses all her art to seduce the young ascetic, and she meets with no resistance. She gives him sweets and wines, and moves about playing with a ball, casually touching his body and then repeatedly embracing him. Rśyaśrīga all the while enjoys the games of his new companion. He has no idea at all what is happening.

A little later, after the courtesan has withdrawn, his father returns to the hermitage where Rśyaśrīga has left unattended all his duties. He describes in glowing terms his meeting with the unknown young person:

A student came who had braided hair,
Full of spirit, not short, but neither too tall,
Of a golden colour and long lotus-eyes,
As radiant as a son of the Gods.

The poet makes R̥śyaśṛṅga describe in his simple innocent terms the female aspects of the visitor:

At his throat he wore what looked like cups
That shone as the lightning shines in the sky,
And below the throat he had two globes,
Without a hair on them, most beguiling.
About the navel his waist was pinched,
But his hips again were very full...

With the same air of innocence R̥śyaśṛṅga describes the erotic part of the scene:

He embraced my body time and again,
And pulling my hair he lowered my mouth;
He placed his mouth upon mine and sounded
A sound that begot great pleasure in me.⁸⁷

R̥śyaśṛṅga's father Vibhāṇḍaka is aghast. After having been kept in such extreme seclusion all the time, his son had been found out by the 'demons' nonetheless:

They are demons, son, who stalk the earth,
In all their wondrously beautiful shapes!
They are peerlessly lovely and very cruel,
And plot to prevent austerities.

Flaunting their beauteous bodies, my son,
They seek to seduce with various means;
And, dread in their deeds, they drop from their world,
And steal the welfare of the forest hermits.

A self-controlled hermit must not frequent them
At all, if he seeks for the worlds of the strict.
They stop ascetics, and then they delight
In spoiling their penance, innocent son.⁸⁸

Vibhāṇḍaka sets out searching for the temptress. The latter cleverly uses the occasion to visit R̥śyaśṛṅga once more in the *āśrama*. The young ascetic is highly pleased to see her and proposes they may go to her retreat before his father returns. They hurry to the floating *āśrama* which takes them to Aṅga. Now the king's effort turns out to be fruitful: immediately the earth is flooded with rain.

R̥śyaśr̥ṅga is subsequently married to Śāntā, the king's daughter.

The king knows that Vibhāṇḍaka would be full of anger when he returned to his hermitage and found that his son had left. Therefore, he takes proper counter-measures by instructing the herdsmen at various cattle stations to treat Vibhāṇḍaka with utmost respect if they met him, telling him that all the lands and crops belonged to his son and that they were at his (Vibhāṇḍaka's) service. The ruse works. When Vibhāṇḍaka arrives at the king's court, his anger has already cooled down, and when Śāntā comes running to him to welcome her father-in-law, it finally subsides. He instructs R̥śyaśr̥ṅga to stay at the court until a son is born, and then to return to the hermitage. This he does, while Śāntā proves to be an ideal wife:

And Śāntā religiously waited on him,
 As compliant Rohiṇī waits on the Moon,
 As the lucky Arundhatī waits on Vasiṣṭha,
 As Lopāmudrā attends on Agastya,
 And as Damayantī did on Nala,
 Or Śacī does on the Thunderbolt-wielder.
 And as Indrasenā Nādāyanī
 Obeyed Mudgala always, O Ājamīdha
 So did Śāntā obey in the woods R̥śyaśr̥ṅga,
 King, caring for him, possessed by love ⁸⁹

Here ends the story of R̥śyaśr̥ṅga, and it is truly a "happy end". The youth, though yielding to temptation, walks on a safe path, even enjoying the goodwill of his ascetic father. Due to his innocence and purity, with the help of a good, devoted wife he gets successfully established in a new status, giving him a wider experience of life after the long period of his extreme isolation. There is no insistence here on monkhood—the verses quoted above give us a whole list of sages living in a happy marriage of the higher, spiritual type.

*

While the main theme in this story of R̥śyaśr̥ṅga is 'innocence', we are told about perversion and its consequences in the tale of Yavakr̥ita, the son of Bharadvāja. His early psychological development took a bitter turn when he observed that Bharadvāja's Brahmin friend Raibhya and his sons were highly honoured everywhere, while his father as an ascetic could not enjoy comparable favours. Yavakr̥ita's inferiority complex moved him to undertake the most severe austerities to master the Vedas. "In a huge blazing fire the mighty ascetic was burning his body, until he began to worry Indra," says the text.⁹⁰ The reference here is not, of course, to a physical fire, but to the *tejas* created by

making *tapas* ('*tapastepe*'). This feeling of heat produced by extreme concentration has been experienced by many students of *yoga*.

Yavakrīta's great efforts move Indra, who comes to see the young ascetic, enquiring about his intentions. The latter tells him that "it takes a long time before the Vedas can be had from a *guru*'s lips: therefore I have undertaken this final effort." Indra however admonishes Yavakrīta that he should follow the prescribed methods, learning from a *guru*. Yavakrīta is unimpressed by this well-meant advice and produces still greater heat in his *tapasyā*, "sorely mortifying the king of the Gods". So Indra once more approaches the ambitious ascetic, trying to restrain him, but Yavakrīta again rejects the god's advice. He even threatens to offer up his whole body in the blazing fire.⁹¹

Indra is convinced now that Yavakrīta is serious about his demands. He assumes the body of an ascetic Brahmin and starts building a dam in the river Ganges by shovelling fistfuls of sand into it. Yavakrīta approaches the Brahmin and asks him about his intention. The Brahmin (Indra) tells him that he wants to build a dam so that the river can be easily crossed. Yavakrīta advises him, "Stop trying to do the impossible. Attempt something that is feasible!" Indra counters, "I have burdened myself with this task, just as you have undertaken the impossible task of mortifying yourself to obtain the Veda."

The mirror effect of this scene is obvious: Indra wants to teach something to Yavakrīta, but the latter has now recognized the god and undauntedly insists on his demand: "If you think that my attempt is as purposeless as yours, Chastiser of Pāka, Lord of the Thirty, then vouchsafe to me what is possible for me...: grant me boons by which I shall prevail over others."

Yavakrīta has won the game. Indra grants him the boons that the Vedas will become manifest to himself and his father, and he would have whatever he desired.

If we analyze Yavakrīta's actions up to this stage, we can discern three major errors that he made in his seeking:

1) The motivation for his *tapasyā* was not a sincere aspiration for inner realization, but rather had its origin in an inferiority complex which was then by way of compensation transformed into an over-ambition to outdo all others. He is not primarily interested in the knowledge of the Veda, but in the fruits that this knowledge is supposed to give him: social recognition.

2) When his *tapasyā* showed a first result and Indra appeared before him, he was not prepared to accept Indra's advice, that is, to follow the prescribed procedure and seek knowledge from a *guru*. This did not suit Yavakrīta, precisely because the exposure to the discerning eye of a true master would have laid bare the flaws in his inner make-up. It would have quickly shown that Yavakrīta was not ready to pay the price.

3) When he finally had Indra's ear, he made the most disastrous mistake of all, namely to ask for a wrong thing, 'to prevail over others'. Here Yavakrīta's

ambition stands exposed. He has no aspiration for inner progress, but is just on the contrary interested in selfish aggrandisement, thus ruining his spiritual career. We may ask why Indra cooperated in this direction, but can answer that he had no choice except to have Yavakṛita learn by experience, since he was so stubborn and would not accept any advice.

Yavakṛita returns home in a triumphant mood, but his father is in no way pleased: "Son, you must be proud, now that you have received the boons you wanted. And, being filled with pride, you will soon perish wretchedly."

To illustrate his point, Bharadvāja tells his son the story of Vāladhi, a powerful seer. After his son had died, he was much grieved and undertook severe austerities to have another son who would be immortal. He got a son by the Grace of the Gods, who would be as indestructible and everlasting as the mountains. Now his son, named Medhāvin, came to know about the circumstances of his birth and behaved arrogantly with other ascetics. Finally a renowned seer named Dhanuṣākṣa cursed him to become ashes. Astonishingly, the curse remained without effect. Thereupon the seer caused the mountains to sunder and Medhāvin collapsed dead.

Bharadvāja warns Yavakṛita specifically not to see Raibhya since the latter would easily crush him with his anger if he was provoked. Yavakṛita promises to avoid him and keeps offending other seers. Then one day he comes to Raibhya's hermitage while the sage has gone out. He sees his daughter-in-law, is overcome by passion and urges her to have intercourse with him. The young girl is very afraid of Yavakṛita's power and yields to his desire to evade his curse.

Soon after this rape Raibhya returns to his hermitage where he finds his daughter-in-law in tears and pain. He gets enraged and takes immediate action against the erring youth. Plucking strands of hair out of his head he offers them into a specially prepared fire. First a woman rises out of it, and then a terrible *Rākṣasa*. Raibhya asks them to kill Yavakṛita.

The beautiful woman seduces the youth and steals his water bowl. At this moment, when he is still in an impure condition, the *Rākṣasa* storms towards him with a pike. Yavakṛita tries to escape towards a pond, then to various rivers. Characteristically, they have all dried up. While Ṛṣyaśṛṅga brought the waters down from the sky, Yavakṛita's red heat has dried them up. The symbolism is very obvious. The ascetic then runs towards the *agnihotra* of his father, but a blind *sūdra* watchman does not allow him inside. The *Rākṣasa* kills Yavakṛita with his pike.

The tragedy does not end here. Bharadvāja is deeply shocked on hearing the news of his son's death. He curses Raibhya that he will be killed by his eldest son, and then offers himself up in a sacrificial fire. Raibhya gets killed by Parāvasu who mistakes his father for an animal in the dark forest. Parāvasu then tries to put the blame on his younger brother Arvāvasu who performs the expiatory rites for Brahmin murder on his behalf. Arvāvasu finally gets the

support of the Gods and is granted a boon by them. He chooses that his brother may be freed from guilt, and that his father as well as Bharadvāja and Yavakrīta may rise again. Thus even this tragedy is mythically resolved happily.

Yavakrīta later asks the Gods how he could be destroyed by Raibhya in spite of his own learning. The Gods point out to him that Raibhya had learnt the Vedas in the proper way by satisfying his *guru*, while he (Yavakrīta) did not have the patience to follow 'the hard way'. Here ends the story of the misguided ascetic whose life became a spiritual failure.

(To be continued)

WILFRIED HUCHZERMAYER

Notes

87 Mahābhārata, 3 112 1, 3-4; 12

88 Mahābhārata, 3 113 1-3

89 Mahābhārata, 3 113 22-24

90 Mahābhārata, 3 135 17

91 Mahābhārata, 3 135 23-25

CHRISTALIS

by

GEORGETTE COTY

(Continued from the issue of October 1995)

Truth and Reverie

“SWAN, O Swan of water and sky... swan of my heart... I saw your flight, heard your soul-rousing song. Let me fly with you, lead us the way to where you are a native of felicity’s light.

“Blaze the trail, O high-winged, for my yearning, searching kind... You, who fly on god-wind... we only on sky-searching dreams for heights.

“... Singing earth-songs, waiting for heaven’s gates to part. Our tunes are made of tears and sighs... glad songs too, loving ones, cradle songs... yearning flutes piercing the night.

“You up there, we below, be our songster... are we not two halves of one whole, reflecting images over the water... separated lovers waiting for airborne wedded flights... Lead on... lead on, we shall follow close behind.”

I sat in reverie, recalling fragments of what I could keep in this small sphere of my mind of that high event, giving vent to my wishing for them, when Christalis appeared before me.

“That was a beautiful prayer song, Halio, I have taken it down. One day we will play it back. Now come with me.” But as I joined him the first thing I did was look at my finger to see whether I had the ring on it that he had given me. He laughed, “I told you it is yours forever.”

“There, we can settle down here, sit beside me. How fast we have travelled today!”

“I am so glad that your wish received fulfilment on your birthday. Did you have your fill then?”

“Much more than I can put into words, nor my gratitude to you. I just cannot forget those dancing swans, nor that glorious music; it still rings in my ears. And the birth of the infant man on earth... nurtured by heaven’s Mother. Oh Christalis, I am still so overcome, may I never forget this! But tell me, the other scenes: were they the sequences of the evolution on Earth?”

“Yes, they were, some only, not all episodes were woven into this particular composition and the swan scene was a prelude to them, insinuating the source of delight, from where all things originate.”

He paused, he himself seemed to have been enraptured by its memory... then continued dreamily—“And the prologue of the heavenly singer announcing

the coming of man was truly superb, don't you think?"

"My words are inadequate," was all I could say.

"But come, my singing bird, I also loved your song, never forgetting the others. This is the right way and it is this that binds our work together."

"Our work, Christalis? But I never do anything I am only accepting all that you give me, all that you teach me; it is you who are doing everything, not I."

"My dear Halio, the giver is nothing without the receiver, he cannot pour from his store of wealth into a tightly shut vessel. Each soul's opening up is a chance for him to plant the seed of illumination there for a future fruition. We have already spoken about this, but let us throw more light upon it, shall we?"

I knew by now from the way he would open a subject and begin to address my comprehension that gems of wisdom were in store for me, and I readied myself to receive them.

"And how does this contact develop?" he began. "When the soul awakens, it begins to widen the opening of its hitherto shut cave, where it had lived till then. I came to aid that process," he continued, "but the task is a joint effort, do you see? I want you to understand this.

"You already know that when this movement starts, unimaginable things begin to happen to the fascination of the entire outer person. It overwhelms and urges him to carry on. His perception starts to widen and now he notices things he had not observed before, and that others cannot see at all. He receives new ideas, inspirations, discovers things: formulae, new directions of knowledge come to him, expressions of arts and sciences.

"At first he thinks them to be his own discoveries until, much later when his consciousness comes more to the fore, he understands that they were but revelations of truth-knowledge coming to him from a superior range, reaching into his own inner self—and from there to his mind. Are you with me?"

I nodded, he continued. "This mind is but a transmitter of those revelations which the inner person, the soul, receives more and more now, because of its own state of developing receptivity. Gradually it gains access to its own rightful domain and from there brings down such knowledge as is beneficial not only to himself but to his fellowman's progress as well.

"In this way, you understand, the consciousness of humanity is also elevated. New and more advanced thoughts come to it, beneficial discoveries, new forms of art and so on, and all this because one soul somewhere has awakened and reached for the spirit's light; the collectivity gains its refinement by it.

"You understand this, don't you, and observe how great is the possibility for future humanity's development, as more and more souls will do the same, as indeed is already the case."

"Your words are food for my soul, Christalis. May I never forget them!"

"You will not, if they are well-stored in your consciousness and not just in

your mind. Already you had a number of experiences and the knowledge gained from them is within you. Not so?

“Good, I think that it is. And now let me tell you this; that which is experienced is KNOWN. It alone remains permanently lodged in the consciousness and there is no substitute for it.

“The rest is mind-knowledge, speculation at best, not that these do not have their place. They do, and we should never undervalue them, because they form the first steps of the ladder

“And here the imaginative faculty plays a wonderful part. Fuelled by the desire to reach toward the unknown, a person is enthused by the hidden prompter within to go in search for it. It whispers quietly that a door can be opened if he perseveres. Moved by the suggestion, the heart finally addresses itself to the mind, and when that accepts the concept, there is no limit to the progress ahead. Together now, fellow travellers on a journey of discovery—they go toward the door, open it and go past what they had thought to be the limit of possibilities. A wonderful discovery greets the being at every turn of its sojourn and the inner prompter tells it that there are more marvels ahead. Now he advises it, not to abandon the search, not to turn back, because the knowledge to be had here is not comparable with what was learnt before.

“The inner being, the hidden self, addresses the outer: ‘First you have heard and now you will know’... He hears it, he comprehends it... captivated by the promise, and by the beauty of the possibility, he moves on.

“Committed now to his grand pursuit, his life becomes one of wonder. As if by a magical force—which is actually his own—it is now activated by the inducement of the search. He finds himself transported to a higher reality, that does not divorce him from his former gains, but enlarges them.

“To his amazement, the horizon of a new reality unfolds before him—and here the wayfarer begins to call for a helper to lead him on, because he realises that this unknown terrain before him cannot be travelled without one. His heightened intuition informs him of this and warns him of the pitfalls, should he attempt to surge ahead foolishly without a guide.

“And when this call is ardent and persistent—the caller and the called meet for the first time face to face. From here on, what was only dreamt about, thought about... becomes a living experience; the true knowledge of things is established.

“The initial desire to reach for the unknown, the enthusiasm and the often desperate need to go past his former limits, is now rewarded. The impossible becomes possible, the road is open before him.

“So we know, don’t we, the irreplaceable value of faith and perseverance, which alone can open the way to the higher reality, the higher truth of things. And these too were the qualities that had called me to you. Satisfied now? Or do you need more illumination here?”

“No, Christalis, your teaching clears the path of my understanding and I thank you for it. Only one thing bothers me: how can this progress be hastened?” I asked.

“Hastened, Halio? I thought that I already explained this to you earlier. I am not very pleased with this question, even though I understand that your concern for your fellowmen is the motivating factor. The Law of Growth must not be interfered with, for no matter what reason. And if it is done by some person lacking in knowledge, believe me, this idea of cheating the Law is seldom an unselfish one.”

“Excuse me then, please. I did not realise this,” I said to him.

“All right, we shall overlook it, as long as you understand, and pray, take careful note of what I tell you now.

“There were many who had attempted this process of hastening the so-called progress of the soul, by a great variety of occult methods. Even by administering certain stimulating drugs that brought about some undesirable effects, and even less desirable contacts, which were taken for genuine spiritual experiences. Inevitably, these resulted in an eventual and quite unavoidable disaster that threw the unfortunate person into an inferno he had no knowledge of how to escape from. Yes, my dear, many a great civilisation came to a bad end because of this unfortunate practice, which grew like a poisonous weed and sucked the life-force away from a once-flourishing race.

“I want you to be absolutely clear about this matter. Shall I go on, or would you rather have a rest for now?”

“No, no, Christalis, I am not tired. How can I be, when what you tell me is of such great importance. Please do tell me what else you wish me to learn. I hunger for this knowledge. I truly do.”

“All right then, I am satisfied with that. Well, you must know that the inner being, the soul, has its own stages of growing. It has to reach its maturity just as the physical embryo and the child-man do. But of course in a natural way and quite without any artificial interference. This goes without saying.

“You must have observed that there are persons who find it difficult to give of themselves anything at all, be it affection, loyalty, love or any finer display of emotion, or even to part with anything of theirs. They are only content with receiving. Men call them selfish, but it is much more than that. They are actually not yet developed souls, some are even in an embryonic state of growth, who have to exist by such means: namely, living on the strength of those to whom they attach themselves. What is more, nature often equips them with a deceptive charm that draws the captivated to them. I repeat, this is their natural state of development.

“Can you push them to a faster growth by an artificial penetration into their natural inner state? This, we know, is not advisable. Attempt it and you create a freak. A few freak individuals first, and when the practice spreads, a freak society.

“Let no one try to do better than God. Some have tried it, and we also know the result.”

He leaned toward me, observing me, and I took my opportunity to unburden my heart

“Please, Christalis, I am sorry I asked such a foolish question. I don’t really know why I asked it. I should have known better by now. Will you pardon me? Please say that you will.”

“But of course, Halio, you must ask me whatever you want to know. Nothing is foolish, it is only a not yet understood matter. My work is to throw light on what is obscure in the mind. After all, this is the issue, is it not? It is true that we have spoken about this already, but since this question remained in your mind, it is just as well that you have brought it up again. Obviously it had not been absorbed in sufficient measure to become comprehensive knowledge.

“Is it all right now, or is there any other matter you wish to bring to light? Never shy away from it, every grain of it is significant.”

“There is, actually, and it troubled me a lot in the past, but much less since I met you, Christalis... Still, everything, as you say, must be seen and understood in the right manner of lucidity, so I venture to ask about it now.”

“Good, perfectly right. Tell me then.”

“What about those people who are wicked and cruel—altogether ill-willed—who no matter how much you try to please them, will only hurt you in the end? What about those who have caused so much misery to anyone near them? In fact, to whole generations, when they were so placed. It is really beyond me how to explain this.”

I paused and hoped that I hadn’t bitten off more than I could chew. I did not have to wait long to find out. Christalis never held anything back from me, always gentle, generous in his understanding and patient beyond words.

“This thought has been lodged in your mind ever since I met you,” came his response. “In many minds in fact. I didn’t want to pull it out from there prematurely, but preferred to wait for a time when you yourself wished to comprehend it—and now I am satisfied that you have the capacity to do so.

“My dear Halio, as we have observed before, a certain degree of anti-divine elements had entered the scene of this earth-evolution. You might take its movement as directed anticlockwise. Instead of showing the correct time, or the right direction, it showed the opposite. Unfortunately, some souls have been drawn towards this wrongly shadowed projection and have given themselves over to its influence. They too, as was the case with their progenitors, lost touch with the real light and became as you described. But you must know that no condition is final, and ultimately none can resist the pull of the Supreme Source—which recalls His creatures to His bosom, even from the bottom of the deepest pit. At the appropriate time He sends His one ray to penetrate their condition of darkness. That ray has enough light to lead them back to the road

they left, enabling them henceforth to distinguish the true light from the false glitter.

“As I have already told you, that process has been in motion for a considerable time now, with unimaginable results—more so since the Great Confrontation.

“This state of affairs is carefully monitored in its progress and it is recorded by high-souled beings, who are entrusted with this field of the work. It is they who pass on to men the light that is theirs and transmit it in their God-serving activities. It is this which is received and registered by the minds of men on earth.

“We have already visited such beings, but there are countless intelligences acting in their own degrees of capacities on countless planes of existences. Concerted into one Universal effort, they are instruments of the God-will to regenerate and, you might even say, re-create this errant world and return it to its originally intended path.”

I was all attention, drawing each word into my depths. He continued....

“Have you, by the way, found many such ill-willed, malefic persons amongst your communities nowadays? Think carefully before you answer this question.”

“No, I haven’t, thank God, and come to think of it, actually they seemed to have disappeared from our midst. That’s strange, isn’t it?... and I never thought of it till now.”

“Good answer. True, many have left their physical forms, having been defeated by the forces of Light, but not all. Nor have they disappeared, Halio, either from the earth or from some other places where they were sent to learn. Rather it is that they are changed, transformed to a great extent—turned toward the Light.

“And I tell you now, that when these formerly antipositioned beings with all their powerful energies realise their errors, their dedication to the Light knows no limit. Such is the Supreme’s power, you see, that at one touch it can cause all wrong formations to crumble into dust... then elevate the sparks from the rubble and give them Light... give them a new life.”

His lovely eyes sparkled at these words, himself the knower of all these realities to which our own eyes are yet shut.

“Not so, Halio, not entirely shut,” he said, receiving my thoughts—“but the veil of ignorance which covers them has not been lifted yet. That too will come about in God’s good time ”

“O Christalis, my own source of light! Isn’t it wonderful, so heartening to know this! How I wish I could share this knowledge with everyone! You know how deeply I care?”

“Not yet, my dear, not yet. Do not be in a hurry, it is of no use. How many times must I tell you this? Everyone will find the way to the truth in their own time. To impart this knowledge, before their own opening toward it, would be an

utter waste. Mostly they would not believe it, or else it would just go past their ears. It's useless to pour water into the sea only to have it washed away by the waves, or into a vessel that has not been seasoned in the fire.

"I do say this of course in general terms, because a growing number of souls are ready for their own flowering. You yourself have heard their calls, haven't you? Do not forget that! It will give you heart, because a true call always brings the helpers rushing toward it, ready to help. But you know this yourself, don't you? When a child is in some need, it calls ceaselessly, 'Mummy, Mummy', and does she not rush to help her little one without delay?—Here is your answer

"Well, Halio, today I am a bit hardpressed for time, but your prayer-song drew me to you. Will you excuse me for now? Tomorrow I will make up for it, you will be satisfied."

He was gone, my beautiful friend had left, and I found myself sitting on the grass in front of our little home, where I remembered the swans before he came—calling them to sing for our hearts and souls to open to the Light.

(To be continued)

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

71. FAITH HEALS

THE betrothal of Thilakavathi to Kalipakayar was announced amidst the sounding of drums and pipes. The date of the wedding was fixed.

Pugazhanar heaved a sigh of relief as the guests moved towards the dining hall to have their dinner. He had been ill for more than a month. Since the physicians had told him that his was a killer disease he wished to marry off his daughter Thilakavathi before he breathed his last.

But Fate willed differently. That night Pugazhanar went to sleep and didn't wake up from his bed. His untimely demise sent a shiver down the spine of his beloved wife Madhiniar and she died of a heart attack, thereby orphaning the would-be-bride and her little brother Marul Neekiar.

All that Thilakavathi could look forward to for solace and comfort was her fiancé Kalipakayar. But before her tears for her dead parents could dry up, news reached her that her Kalipakayar, a captain in the king's army, was killed on the battlefield. Thilakavathi had no tears left to shed. Her heart went heavy. Misfortunes came to her not as single spies but in battalions. Only death could put all her sorrows to flight.

But before she could make the next move she thought of her little brother. At first she tried hard to wave him aside from her memory. But the sight of the poor innocent boy holding on to her sari and looking pathetically at her melted her heart.

Wiping off his tears she said: "Let there be no more tears from your eyes. I'll live, come what may... I'll live for you."

Thilakavathi, a staunch devotee of Lord Siva, told her brother Marul Neekiar of the several games and miracles of the Lord and made him believe that Saivism was the only true religion in all the seven worlds. He too became a Saivite

When Marul Neekiar grew up to be a young man, he decided to lead the life of an ascetic like his sister, devoting all his hours to the service of Lord Siva.

Things took a different turn when he came into contact with the Jains. He began to read avidly their sacred texts, developed a great liking for the religion, and soon became an exponent of that faith.

"What are you up to? We are born Saivites. And to change one's faith or religion is like ignoring one's own mother. It's not that you should hate that religion but you should love yours more," advised Thilakavathi.

Marul Neekiar simply smiled. Having become a convert, he separated from his sister and went away to live with the Jain monks. At the monastery he was given the name Dharma Senar, and he began to preach to the masses the essence of the Jain faith and did his best to convert many a Saivite to Jainism.

Separation from her brother, his conversion to an alien religion and his preachings made Thilakavathi run to Lord Siva

For days together she sat in the temple and recited the different names of the Lord all the time meditating on Him

Apparelled in celestial beauty, Lord Siva appeared before Thilakavathi. And when she poured forth her grievances against her brother, He said: "You'll have your brother back from the Jain fold."

That night Dharma Senar felt a darting pain in his stomach. The pain was so excruciating that he fell to the ground and began rolling himself all the time holding his abdomen.

The Jains, skilled in occult sciences, tried their best to cure him of that dreadful disease. They muttered their occult prayers and drew across his limbs their peacock feathers. Several days passed. Finding it incurable they left him to his fate.

Dharma Senar felt himself near death. He sent word to Thilakavathi through a messenger. And when the messenger briefed her on her brother's ailment and his request to her to come and see him, she said: "I am helpless. All that I can do is to pray to Lord Siva and request Him in all humility to cure him. But I can't come to his dwelling place. Let him come to mine "

The messenger repeated her words to the ailing Jain, who immediately resolved to return to his native place. He rose at midnight, threw off the Jain appurtenances, the bowl and the feathers, and began his journey.

Thilakavathi sat her brother by her side and prayed to Lord Siva to relieve him of his pain. She then smeared holy ash all over his body and tossed a pinch of it into his mouth.

As he swallowed it, he felt the chronic pain subsiding gradually and then going away from him completely. Soon he was himself.

Unshakable faith in Saivism redawned upon him. He no longer called himself Dharma Senar, as he lost faith in the other religion.

He paid a fitting tribute to Lord Siva by singing gratefully of His glory.

By the time he finished reciting his songs, there came a voice from the heavenly abode which said: "I am pleased with your songs. Let them live forever on the lips of my devotees. And hereafter you'll be called Thirunavukkarasar*."

72. FAITH CONVERTS

Relieved of his chronic stomach-ache, Thirunavukkarasar devoted all his waking hours to composing songs on Lord Siva, his Saviour.

* "Thirunavukkarasar" literally means "Supreme in speech"

Siva is all knowledge
 and Sciences to me.
 I desire none but Him.
 My tongue can utter only His name,
 for Lord Siva alone
 Can show the virtuous path.

Like the fire concealed in wood,
 like the ghee in milk,
 So is Lord Siva, the Omniscient.
 Place the prop of Love,
 Pass round the cord of affection
 and churn.
 The resplendent Lord
 Will surely bless your sight.

Thirunavukkarasar was not at all surprised when the king's men arrested him at Thiru Athikai, a temple-town. In fact, he had expected it to happen at any time

The districts of South India, north of the river Coleroon, were during the period under the sway of the powerful Pallavas. The king who ruled the Tamil kingdom at that time was a Pallava king named Kadavan. He was a Jain.

Thirunavukkarasar was brought to the court of King Kadavan on the charge that he had deserted the Jain faith and become a convert to Saivism.

King Kadavan stared at the deserter full in the face.

The learned mystic, whose faith was now firm and sure, chortled and infuriated the king by singing thus:

We are slaves to none.
 Death we fear not.
 Hell has no place for us
 for we know not sin.
 We will bow to none
 but to Lord Siva.
 Joyous are we
 to shun misery.
 There is none to equal
 Lord Siva, the greatest.
 To Him alone, O King,
 We are eternal servants.

“Throw him into the burning lime-kiln for his insolence,” howled the king.

The king's command was readily obeyed. But everyone was surprised beyond measure when they saw Thirunavukkarasar coming out of the kiln unscathed.

King Kadavan was unable to believe his eyes "If fire can't touch him, give him a cup of hemlock, and kill him."

Thirunavukkarasar drank the poison. But the unexpected happened. He sang several hymns in praise of Lord Siva and the poison didn't affect his body.

King Kadavan was unable to believe his eyes Fretting and fuming, he told his men: "What fire and poison couldn't do, my elephant will. Bury him neck deep in sand and let the royal elephant kick his head off his neck."

As the elephant approached, Thirunavukkarasar sang hymns in praise of Lord Siva and sought His help to rescue him from the sturdy legs of the animal

The elephant raised a foreleg in an attempt to kick off the Saivite's head. But it moved back a little, turned and ran for its life. Only the elephant knew what had put it to flight

"Huh!" the king exclaimed, flabbergasted at the miracle-worker

Wishing to make one more attempt to do away with Thirunavukkarasar, he had a heavy stone fastened to him and had him thrown into the depths of the sea.

But before the boat that had carried Thirunavukkarasar could return to the shore, the friendly waves and the helpful stone brought him there

And on reaching the shore he sang some of the most beautiful and impassioned songs enshrining his strong faith in Lord Siva.

The Pallava king lost all hope. He understood the greatness of Thirunavukkarasar and his strong faith in Lord Siva. He gave up Jainism and became a Saivite.

History speaks of King Kadavan, a one-time Jain converted to the Saivite faith, demolishing all the Jain monasteries and temples in his kingdom and building with their riches a magnificent temple for Siva at Thiru Adhikai called Gunathara Vicharam

(More legends on the way)

P. RAJA

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Aspects of Sri Aurobindo, by Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna), published by The Integral Life Foundation, U.S A., 1995. pages 275, hard-bound, price Rs. 75.00. Available from SABDA or the author.

THE usual tendency of a reader is to hurriedly peep at the list of contents of a book, with no patience to pause in sensitive reception of its vibrations, its total appeal, the atmosphere it carries. There is nothing meritorious about this habitual tendency except perhaps that the utilitarian nature of man feels self-justified.

In the case of the present book, one feels at the very first sight almost irresistibly caught by the presiding presence of Sri Aurobindo in the picture on its cloud-blue '*paridhāna*', the enfolding wrapper, called commonly the jacket. Even the title of the book, "Aspects of Sri Aurobindo" lies subordinately below that 'presence', not calling the viewer's attention. The name of the author, consistently, is missing in front, it stands aside on the spine.

This certainly is not to dilate on what is commonly called the 'get-up' of the book, which of course carries its own importance. Being attracted by the 'presence', one gets ready to enter into the contents within the book

The contents are a collection of more than thirty articles of different lengths, written by the author from time to time in various contexts, some as fresh themes, quite a few as responses to others' writings, many as letters in clarification, some as recollections or as rejoinders, and so on. Each article speaks for itself, carries its own freshness and evinces the author's profundity of thought along with his literary alertness. All of them bear the stamp of Sri Aurobindo's Vision of Life and Reality, his mission and his promise of a supramental Future.

The themes of the articles are varied: philosophical, literary, psychological, spiritual, educational, historical, cultural. Yet, over all, one feels that the author is intelligently academic while carrying his own convictions, persuasively critical in his discussions, thoroughgoing in examining others' positions, philosophic in his thought and creatively expressive in his appreciations. The wide spectrum of themes naturally occasions the necessity and the scope of specific attention to every article individually and, although most of the articles are marked by the quality of authenticity and conviction, there is no dogmatic note of finality anywhere denying altogether the scope of further discussion. On the contrary, almost every article opens such a scope. It may not be out of place to refer to a few in particular. Referring to each and every one would be rather out of proportion, even though interesting.

The article "*Sri Aurobindo and Plato*" is a short but compact essay, mentioning Sri Aurobindo's appreciation of Plato while exceeding him in his

Integral Vision of Life and Existence. The piece commences with a line from a poem of the author himself:

‘Seer-suns beyond the gold of Plato’s brain.’

And it runs like an exposition of the implied meaning and significance of the truth so poetically expressed. The caption of the article prepares one with an expectation of an elaborate study of the two great seer-philosophers which, of course, would be a sizable thesis, obviously out of the present scope.

“*The True Teilhard and the Essential Sri Aurobindo*” is a caption that apparently suggests an elaborate thesis which the author in his short essay has compressed into two perspectives: One, Teilhard’s Christic pantheism or rather pan-Christism for universalising Christian spirituality with a sense of futuristic evolution towards a synthesis of the Creator and the universe, “Teilhard’s tendency to cosmicise Christ and Christify the universe...” (p. 31), carrying its inherent shortcomings, since, one might add, such a position is rather made up inasmuch as it is neither supported by the Christian Faith nor able to stand in its own right independent of Christ and Christianity—it simply offers a fascinating perspective to appeal to the trend of universalism and futurism. The other perspective is Sri Aurobindo’s intrinsically spiritual metaphysics centred on the “Supermind” as the key and the origin of the entire creation and the *raison d’être* of its progressive evolution through all the developing stages towards the inevitable consummation into a divine and divinely fulfilled Future, “Perfection” being “the inherent destiny of all evolving forces.” The author brings the two perspectives together at points where comparative evaluation becomes easy.

“*Sidelights on the Aurobindonian Truth*” contains the text of a letter from Shri Krishnaprem (Prof. Nixon) to Mr. Koske and a ‘Comment’ on that letter by Amal Kiran. The letter from Shri Krishnaprem is apparently a response to many questions on Sadhana, Spirituality and Sri Aurobindo’s Teachings, from his own Vaishnava standpoint, his moorings and experiences, wherein his attitude is quite apparently marked by self-convinced Vaishnava faith coupled with apologetic leaning towards Sri Aurobindo, his intellectual acumen supporting both. The ‘Comment’ of Amal Kiran appreciates the sincerity of Krishnaprem’s faith, but he brings out the importance of Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga and all its spiritual implications, including the significant role of the ‘Guru’, making it most clear that Sri Aurobindo is to be approached as Sri Aurobindo, without missing any truth of his integrality.

“*Dr. Mahadevan and Sri Aurobindo*” is a ‘note’ on Dr. Mahadevan’s radio-talk on Sri Aurobindo as a national broadcast during Sri Aurobindo’s Birth Centenary Year. Dr. Mahadevan’s philosophical moorings or his commitments being what they were—advaitic and absolutistic—his reservations vis-à-vis Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Philosophy, his ‘*pūrṇādvaita*’, reconciling the Eternal

Spirit with the phenomenal change and the Infinite with the finite, stood in tune with the rigoristic logic of sheer and utter absolutism and its uncompromising tradition. That, however, became an occasion for our author to bring home the synthetic character of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and invite the attention of academic philosophy to the possibility and advisability of philosophy's freedom from its conventional sets in order to quest for Truth in the light of Sri Aurobindo.

About a dozen of the articles are Amal Kiran's letters in response to philosophical inquiries or seekings for clarifications or doubts etc. Some of them like "*Sri Aurobindo's Enlargement of Spiritual Metaphysics*", "*An Aurobindonian Christian*", "*Sri Aurobindo's Supermind and the Ancient Indian Scriptures*", "*Sri Aurobindo's Supermind, Causal Consciousness and 'Turiya'*", "*Supramental Avatar and Physical Transformation*", deal with spiritual truths, ontological or experiential, and, in some way or other, they refer to the well-established spiritual heritage of India, dealing with or discussing 'Spirit', 'Supermind', 'Purushottama', 'Avatar', etc. It is evident that an intellectual maturity in philosophical discipline and a still greater maturity in sadhana-oriented discipline of reason, the Yogic *buddhi*, would be the requisites for the understanding, appreciation and discussion of the relevant issues, without which a reader is likely to enter into unmanageable confusion, particularly of philosophical jargon. Correspondence between inquiring and responding intellectuals or scholastics on subtle metaphysical issues is certainly of absorbing interest, but, perhaps, reserved for only a few properly developed minds. Looking to the common discursive mentality, one starts feeling the importance of the Buddha's response in silence. With regard to subtle truths which are beyond the mind's approach, what will be Sri Aurobindo's advice?

"*A Note on Sri Aurobindo's Siddhi*" would create a sense of 'surprise' or, rather, a sense of suspense as to the import of "siddhi" from context to context in Sri Aurobindo's life, except, perhaps, the "certain" idea that "Sri Aurobindo had different goals" "at different times". One might unnecessarily interpret that every 'goal' was simply tentative. Could that be a sound and an acceptable conjecture with regard to the supramental "siddhi" too? The reader feels left in the lurch by "having no clue". The 'Note' would perhaps serve its purpose by the subtle suggestion that the import of "siddhi" is in the Yogic consciousness of Sri Aurobindo himself, and a mental account of it is neither possible nor warranted.

"*The Ashram's Sixty Years*" offers a review in the author's personal glimpses of the Ashram life as a steady yet eventful movement led and inspired by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother towards a new Future, a supramental Destiny of the terrestrial life. It is full of flashes of brilliant reminiscences by Amal Kiran, with vivid and living accounts, making the reader feel he has himself participated in the divine drama that has been the 'Ashram', promising the fulfilment of the Divine Plan.

In “*A Masterpiece of Distortion*” and “*Mr. Alvares and Sri Aurobindo*” our author, sharp and alert and thoroughgoing as he is, makes unsparing rejoinders—one to the presumptuous ill-informed careless mind in self-deluded authority in ‘spirituality’(?), Rajnish, announcing that Sri Aurobindo is incapable of spiritual experiences because of his logicity, and the other to Mr. Alvares writing in the ‘Quest’ mischievously, perversely twisting Sri Aurobindo’s expressions into his vulgar design to impress that Sri Aurobindo’s Thought does not merit credence. Both of them are cut down to size in Amal Kiran’s rejoinders and none can escape.

The whole book makes very interesting reading. One starts appreciating the aspects of the author’s genius while offering to present the ‘Aspects of Sri Aurobindo’.

The quality of production of the book, its paper and printing and binding etc. are really commendable, its price considerably low.

H. MAHESHWARI

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Seventy-ninth Seminar

23 April 1995

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF SRI AUROBINDO'S AND THE MOTHER'S TEACHINGS

MY JOURNEY THROUGH SRI AUROBINDO'S POETRY

Speech by Menaka Gupta

As I grew up in the Ashram I was gradually introduced to Sri Aurobindo's poetry. My first encounter with his poetic work was at the age of 9. My English teacher had asked me to learn the poem *Invitation* by heart. The echo of its first few lines is still fresh in my mind. I quote:

“With wind and the weather beating round me
Up to the hill and moorland I go.
Who will come with me? Who will climb with me?
Wade through the brook and tramp through the snow?”¹

Such an invitation to plunge into the revelatory deeps of Sri Aurobindo's poetry was irresistible and almost unconsciously I had discovered a great treasure. As the years went by I got numerous chances to plunge deeper into this ocean, and each time it was a fascinating new experience. I choose this occasion to share with you some of the most memorable glimpses of our Master's poetry which I came to have during my last nine years in school.

The invitation to a grand journey had been made in the most powerful way and I was not even aware that the journey had begun! The next poem that left a distinct memory behind was *A Tree*. I quote:

“A tree beside the sandy river-beach
Holds up its topmost boughs
Like fingers towards the skies they cannot reach,
Earth-bound, heaven-amorous.

“This is the soul of man. Body and brain
Hungry for earth our heavenly flight detain.”²

I remember very well that this was my first introduction to the concept of man and man's soul. The charm of the poem lay in the simplicity of expression. As a child, this beautiful six-line summary of man's state of existence didn't reveal anything to me, but something else has stayed on, so that today I can comprehend better the last two lines of the poem.

The next poem that comes to my mind is *Who*. The impact of this poem was remarkable. I had learnt the poem with so much enthusiasm; it was one of those rare occasions when my teacher didn't have to face the usual resistance against learning poems by heart. Each line of this poem left a definite impression behind. The question posed by Sri Aurobindo in the first stanza roused my curiosity greatly. I quote:

“In the blue of the sky, in the green of the forest,
Whose is the hand that has painted the glow?
When the winds were asleep in the womb of the ether,
Who was it roused them and bade them to blow?”³

And as Sri Aurobindo went on to give the answer himself, I was simply left wonder-struck by the exquisite beauty of this particular idea. It said:

“All music is only the sound of His laughter,
All beauty the smile of His passionate bliss;
Our lives are His heart-beats, our rapture the bridal
Of Radha and Krishna, our love is their kiss.”⁴

After reading *Who*, I also realised that for the first time the idea of a higher power or God was put forth in a manner that brought in me a sense of true admiration and a firm belief in the word 'God'. I also found that for the first time I was thinking about what kind of person was He, who was able to control everything that happened and who was at the heart of everything. And each time I read these lines I am left more deeply touched than before.

It was at the age of 15 that I studied *A God's Labour*. Its rhyme and rhythm, the sound of its words, were reason enough to learn this long poem by heart. Some of it I understood and some of it I didn't. But certainly I was left with a feeling of grandeur and depth. I quote:

“He who would bring the heavens here
Must descend himself into clay
And the burden of earthly nature bear
And tread the dolorous way.”⁵

There seemed to be a challenging call to adventure and at the same time there

was a dead-end without an apparent answer. I quote:

“A voice cried, ‘Go where none have gone!
Dig deeper, deeper yet
Till thou reach the grim foundation stone
And knock at the keyless gate.’ ”⁶

It was not until I came across the following lines that I knew there was an answer and that in some mysterious way we here have a part to play in it. Sri Aurobindo says:

“Like flames to the kingdoms of Truth and Bliss:
Down a gold-red stair-way wend
The radiant children of Paradise
Clarioning darkness’s end.

“A little more and the new life’s doors
Shall be carved in silver light
With its aureate roof and mosaic floors
In a great world bare and bright.”⁷

A God’s Labour had taught me something about the work of God. But after reading the poem *God* I had a vaster image of this word. I quote:

“Thou who pervadest all the worlds below,
Yet sitst above,
Master of all who work and rule and know,
Servant of Love!

“Thou who disdainest not the worm to be
Nor even the clod,
Therefore we know by that humility
That thou art God.”⁸

This was the most beautiful picture of God I had ever seen! *Baji Prabhou* and *Vidula* were the next milestones in my journey through Sri Aurobindo’s poetry. For the first time I was confronted with such powerful language, such strong and bold emotions. I didn’t know that a human figure could be so inspiring and its character so elevating.

Then one by one I read his plays and found them no less gripping than a novel. They contained all the human emotions and difficulties, but raised to a height at which everything sounds noble and grand and powerful leaving no sign of pettiness.

Today, in my first year of *Knowledge* I have finally come face to face with Sri Aurobindo's greatest poetic work—the legend and the symbol—*SAVITRI*. In the past years I had grown more and more familiar with Sri Aurobindo's poetry. But after having begun *SAVITRI* it seems to me that what is to be known is endless and I haven't even advanced a step in comparison. This epic poem is said to be the epitome of Sri Aurobindo's poetry, but for me it is the pathway upon which I shall continue my journey.

The invitation was made, the journey has begun, but its destination is still unknown to me.

References

- 1 *Collected Poems* (Cent Ed , Vol 5), p 39
- 2 *Ibid* , p 47
- 3 *Ibid* , p 40
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.*, p 99
- 6 *Ibid* , p 101
- 7 *Ibid* , p 102
- 8 *Ibid* , p 63