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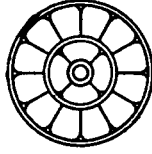
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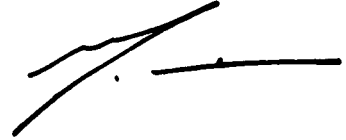


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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A TALK BY THE MOTHER

TO THE ASHRAM CHILDREN ON 3 JUNE 1953

“Freedom and fatality, liberty and determinism are truths that obtain on different levels of consciousness.”

Questions and Answers 1929 (28 April)

What are these different levels of consciousness?

I HAVE already spoken to you of the different planes of consciousness. Well, on the material plane, purely material (when separated from the vital plane), it is an absolute mechanism where consequently all things are linked together; and as I was saying the other day, if you want to find the cause of one thing or what is the result of a thing, you will find another and yet another and you will make an entire tour round the universe. And it is like that, everything is absolutely mechanised. Only, in this purely material plane, there can intervene the vital plane, and it already does intervene in the vegetable kingdom. The vital plane has an altogether different determinism, its own particular determinism. But when you introduce the vital determinism into the determinism of the physical, that produces a kind of combination that changes everything. And above the vital plane there is the mental plane. The mental plane also has its own determinism where all things are linked together rigorously.

But that is the movement which could be called “horizontal”. If you take a vertical movement, the mind descending into the vital and the vital descending into the physical, you have there three determinisms that intervene and naturally produce something altogether different. And where the mind has intervened the determinism will necessarily be different from the one where it does not intervene; that is, in the higher animal life there is already a mental determinism which intervenes that is altogether different from the determinism of the vegetable plane.

Above these planes there are others—above each plane there are others, following one another right up to the highest plane. The highest plane is the plane of absolute freedom. If in your consciousness you are capable of passing through all these planes, so to say in a vertical line, and reaching the highest plane and, by means of this connection, of bringing down this plane of perfect freedom into the material determinisms, you change everything. And all the intermediaries change everything. Then because of the very changes from level to level, it gives altogether the appearance of complete freedom; for the intervention or descent of one plane into another has unforeseen consequences for the other plane, the lower plane. The higher plane can foresee, but the lower ones cannot. So, as these consequences are unforeseen, that gives altogether the

impression of the unexpected and of freedom. And it is only if you remain consciously and constantly on the highest level, that is, in the supreme Consciousness, that there you can see that, at the same time, all is absolutely determined but also, because of the complexity of the interlinking of these determinisms, all is absolutely free. It is the Plane where there are no more contradictions, where all things *are* and are in harmony without contradicting one another.

In the lower planes can't one say what will happen at a particular moment?

That depends. On certain planes there are consciousnesses that form, that make formations and try to send them down to earth and manifest them. These are planes where the great forces are at play, forces struggling with each other to organise things in one way or another. On these planes all the possibilities are there, all the possibilities that present themselves but have not yet come to a decision as to which will come down. . . Suppose a plane full of the imaginations of people who want certain things to be realised upon earth—they invent a novel, narrate stories, produce all kinds of phenomena; it amuses them very much. It is a plane of form-makers and they are there imagining all kinds of circumstances and events; they play with the forces; they are like the authors of a drama and they prepare everything there and see what is going to happen. All these formations are facing each other; and it is those which are the strongest, the most successful or the most persistent or those that have the advantage of a favourable set of circumstances which dominate. They meet and out of the conflict yet another thing results: you lose one thing and take up another, you make a new combination; and then all of a sudden, you find, pluff! it is coming down. Now, if it comes down with a sufficient force, it sets moving the earth-atmosphere and things combine; as for instance, when with your fist you thump the saw-dust, you know surely what happens, don't you? You lift your hand, give a formidable blow: all the dust gets organised around your fist. Well, it is like that. These formations come down into matter with that force, and everything organises itself automatically, mechanically as around the striking fist. And there's your wished object about to be realised, sometimes with small deformations because of the resistance, but it will be realised finally, even as the person narrating the story up above wanted it more or less to be realised. If then you are for some reason or other in the secret of the person who has constructed the story and if you follow the way in which he creates his path to reach down to the earth and if you see how a blow with the fist acts on earthly matter, then you are able to tell what is going to happen, because you have seen it in the world above, and as it takes some time to make the whole journey, you see in advance. And the higher you rise, the more you foresee in advance what is going to happen. And if you pass far beyond, go still farther then everything is possible.

It is an unfolding that follows a highway which is for you unknowable; for all will be unfolded in the universe, but in what order and in what way? There are decisions that are taken up there which escape our ordinary consciousness, and so it is very difficult to foresee. But there also, if you enter consciously and if you can be present up there... How shall I explain that to you? All is there, absolute, static, eternal: but all that will be unrolled in the material world, naturally more or less one thing after another; for in the static existence all can be there, but in the becoming all becomes in time, that is, one thing after another. Well, what path will the unrolling follow? Up there is the domain of absolute freedom.... Who tells you that a sufficiently sincere aspiration, a sufficiently intense prayer is not capable of changing the path of the unrolling?

This means that all is possible

Now, one must have a sufficient aspiration and a prayer that's sufficiently intense. But that has been given to human nature. It is one of the marvellous gifts of grace given to human nature; only, one does not know how to make use of it.

This comes to saying that in spite of the most absolute determinisms in the horizontal line, if one knows how to cross all these horizontal lines and reach the highest Point of consciousness, one is able to make things change, things apparently absolutely determined. So you may call it by any name you like, but it is a kind of combination of an absolute determinism with an absolute freedom. You may pull yourself out of it in any way you like, but it is like that.

I forgot to say in that book (perhaps I did not forget but just felt that it was useless to say it) that all these theories are only theories, that is, mental conceptions which are merely more or less imaged representations of the reality; but it is not the reality at all. When you say "determinism" and when you say "freedom", you say only words and all that is only a very incomplete, very approximate and very weak description of what is in reality within you, around you and everywhere; and to be able to begin to understand what the universe is, you must come out of your mental formulas, otherwise you will never understand anything.

To tell the truth, if you live only a moment, just a tiny moment, of this absolutely sincere aspiration or this sufficiently intense prayer, you will know more things than by meditating for hours.

"The Supreme Consciousness... gives to the individual in the active life of the world his sense of freedom and independence and initiative. These things in him are Her pragmatic tools or devices and it is through this machinery that the movements and issues planned and foreseen elsewhere are realised here."

Questions and Answers 1929 (28 April)

These "things in him", that is in the individual, are: the sense of freedom,

independence and initiative. You know what independence is? It is precisely the freedom of choice. Independence means the freedom of choice and initiative means the fact of choosing. First of all, one feels that one is free; and then one feels that no one can prevent him from choosing; and finally one uses his freedom to choose and one decides. These are the three stages. So these three stages: the feeling that you are free, the idea that you are going to use your freedom for choosing and then the choice—these three things I call the pragmatic tools and devices.

I am sorry, my children, all this is said in a form a little too philosophical which I do not now approve of very much. I was obliged to speak a language which now appears to me a little too complicated. But what is to be done, it was like that. I was saying that these three things, the feeling of freedom, the will to choose and the choice made are the devices that Nature uses in us to make us act, otherwise we would not move.

If we did not have this illusion that we are free, this second illusion that we can use our freedom for choosing and the third illusion of choosing, well, we would not move. So Nature gives us these three illusions and makes us move, for she requires us to move.

She, with a capital S, I said it was the Supreme Consciousness, but in fact it is Nature and it is the trick of Nature; for the Supreme Consciousness has no tricks, it is Nature that has tricks. The Supreme Consciousness quite simply enters into all things with all her consciousness, because it is *the* consciousness: and with that She tries to make all this inconscience move towards consciousness, simply, without any tricks. She has no need of tricks, She is everywhere. She is at work everywhere and She puts consciousness into the inconscience. When you light a lamp in a dark room, as soon as you turn on the electricity, the room is no longer dark. As soon as you put consciousness in, there is no longer any unconsciousness. So that is what She does. Wherever She sees unconsciousness, She tries to enter. Sometimes the doors are locked, then it takes a little more time, but sometimes the doors open, then She rushes in immediately, the unconsciousness disappears and consciousness comes—without needing any tricks or any intermediaries. She becomes conscious. But material Nature, physical Nature is not like that, she is full of tricks; she makes you move all the time, she pulls the puppet strings; for her you are so many little dolls: she pulls the strings and makes them move. She puts all kinds of illusions in your head so that you may do the things she wants, without even your wanting it. She does not require that you should want it: she pulls the thread and you do it.

That is why we quarrel at times, but that's something we do not say.

You have said here that we are "tied to the chain of Karma", but then sometimes when the Divine Grace acts, that contradicts...

Completely, the Divine Grace completely contradicts Karma; you know. It makes it melt away like butter that's put in the sun.

That is what I was saying just now. What you have just told me is another way of speaking. I was putting myself in your place and asking: There you are, if you have an aspiration that's sincere enough or a prayer that's intense enough, you can bring down in you something that will change everything, everything—truly it changes everything. An example may be given that is extremely limited, very small, but which makes you understand things very well: a stone falls quite mechanically; say, a tile falls; if it gets loose, it will fall, won't it? But if there comes, for example, a vital or mental determinism from someone who passes by and does not want it to fall and puts his hand out, it will fall on his hand, but it will not fall on the ground. So he has changed the destiny of this stone or tile. It is another determinism that has come in, and instead of the stone falling on the head of someone, it falls upon the hand and it will not kill anybody. This is an intervention from another plane, from a conscious will that enters into the more or less unconscious mechanism.

So the consequences of Karma are not rigorous?

No, not at all. In all religions there are people who have said that, who have given such absolute rules, but I believe it was in order to substitute themselves for Nature and pull the strings. There is always this kind of instinct that wants to take the place of Nature and pull the strings of people. So they are told: "There is an absolute consequence of all that you do...." It is a concept necessary at a given moment of evolution to prevent people from being in a completely unconscious egoism, in a total unconsciousness of the consequences of what they do. There is no lack of people who are still like that, I believe it is the majority; they follow their impulses and do not even ask themselves whether what they have done is going to have any consequences for them and for others. So it is good that someone tells you straight, with a severe look: "Take care, that has consequences which will act for a very long time!" And then there are others who come and tell you: "You will pay for it in another life." That, however, is one of those fantastic stories.... But it does not matter: this also can be for the good of people. There are other religions which tell you: "Oh! If you commit that sin, you will go to hell for eternity." You can imagine!... So people have such a fright that it stops them a little, it gives them just a moment for reflection before obeying an impulse—and not always; sometimes the reflection comes afterwards, a little late.

It is not absolute. These are still mental constructions, more or less sincere, which cut things into small bits like that, quite neatly cut, and tell you: "Do this or do that. If it is not this, it will be that." Oh! what a nuisance is this kind of life. And so people go mad, they are frightened! "Is it like that or rather this?" And

they want it to be neither this nor that, what should they do?—They have only to climb to a higher storey. They must be given the key to open the door. There is a door to the staircase, a key is needed. The key, as I told you just now, is the sufficiently sincere aspiration or the sufficiently intense prayer. I said “or”, but I do not think it is “or”. There are people who like one better and others the other. But in both there is a magical power, you must know how to make use of it.

There is something very beautiful in both, I shall speak to you about it one day, I shall tell you what there is in aspiration and what in prayer and why both of them are beautiful.... Some dislike prayer; if they entered deep into their heart, they would find it was pride—worse than that, vanity. And then there are those who have no aspiration, they try and they cannot aspire; it is because they do not have the flame of the will, it is because they do not have the flame of humility.

Both are needed. There must be a very great humility and a very great will to change one’s Karma.

Voilà, au revoir, my children.

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

PERSONAL LETTERS

As a certain theme has once again come up for discussion after a lapse of more than a dozen years and there is a degree of uncertainty in people's minds I am sending you a copy of a letter I wrote at the earlier time to a friend. Here it is, dated 7.3.1982:

You have declared yourself in full accord with the statement that the Ashram was for the Mother a mere scaffolding for bringing about the Supramental Manifestation of 29 February 1956 and that therefore it is now useless, especially as it has a fair number of faults like any non-Yogic institution

I believe there are several reasons why the statement cannot be accepted.

(1) Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did not need an Ashram if their job was merely to bring the Supermind to the earth. They could very well have done it on their own. The Ashram was an organic part of the mission they explicitly set to themselves of taking the whole of common humanity along with them instead of doing their Integral Yoga all by themselves. Perhaps their Yoga could not even be called Integral if it did not integrate us with them?

(2) The Mother never thought of disbanding the Ashram after the Supramental Manifestation. She looked forward not only to the Ashram's continuation as a focal point of her work but also to the continuation of the Centre of Education—and this she did even when envisaging the possibility of her own departure, as can be seen from a passage in her Collected Works.

(3) The Supramental Manifestation was in the subtle-physical of the earth, in what the Mother called "the earth's atmosphere". Surely the aim of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was not just the establishment of the Supermind there? They aimed at its manifestation in the gross-physical. Not to realise this is to mis-see their mission, or rather to see it in its incipience and not in its completion.

(4) Even in the subtle-physical of the earth the whole Supermind did not manifest. Only the Light, the Consciousness and the Force came. The Mother said that the Supramental Ananda had not come. Without the Supramental Ananda a new creation cannot take place, for Ananda is always the creative principle, using the organising principle—Supermind or Overmind—to put forth, or give birth to, a cosmos. As far as I can gather, the Supramental Ananda has not manifested up to now even in the subtle-physical. Besides, the very elements that have manifested there were said by the Mother to have been swallowed up by "dark blue waves of the Inconscient"—all the entrenched darkness of the ages—so that the new powers would have to fight their way through. Their future success is certain but the path to it may not be all smooth

and to think that already the work is done is not to think far enough.

(5) Even if all of the Supermind had manifested in the subtle-physical and its action had been unimpeded, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's purpose would not have been served without a collective Yoga going on under their inspiration. For, that manifestation by itself can do no more than ensure a future evolution beyond Mind in the long march of time. What Sri Aurobindo and the Mother wanted was not a slow evolution but a swift accelerated evolving movement by means of a direct Integral Yoga. If so, the Ashram had an inevitable part to play from the beginning—for, where else could such a Yoga be practised on the collective scale on which they insisted as much as they insisted on the individual scale?

(6) The assumed deterioration of the Ashram at present is certainly exaggerated. For one thing, there was plenty of deterioration even when the Mother was there. She was quite in the know of it but she did not consider it an ultimate bar; and she and Sri Aurobindo never thought that to take humanity forward with them—centrally in the shape of the Ashram—rather than to do the Yoga by themselves was a mistake. Defects and shortcomings were always expected by the Mother, and Sri Aurobindo has said that she never put any stress on them: positive qualities were her main concern—and I am sure they are to be found even now. To condemn the Ashram as hopeless because of certain errors and deviations is to lack sufficient insight into the very nature of such an experiment as the Mother dared—an experiment in which the outer life and its interrelations and its affairs (not necessarily in the sexual sense) pose a constant problem which the Mother was well aware of and quite patient with. The attitude needed in us is not to look upon the Ashram as hopeless but to regard it still as a promising field of the Mother's work. Her uplifting radiance definitely persists in concentrated power where her physical embodiment established the starting-point of a golden future. If complacency is out of place, so too is pessimism, and if one criticises, one would have the right to do it only if, instead of looking down on people, one feels that things are rotten not because others are rotten but because one is oneself such. Furthermore, who is ready to deem his own self irremediable? Why, then, indulge in a sense of hopelessness about others and about this collectivity of us and them, which we term the Ashram?

No doubt, physical transformation, in the way Sri Aurobindo and the Mother conceived it, is impossible without the Mother's physical presence. Hence the acute need of her return. All this talk,—fashionable with some deserters of the Ashram—of reprogramming the cells and bringing about their divinisation is, to my mind, bunkum and a wasteful sidetracking of our energies which should be concentrated on psychic and spiritual unfolding and calling, if possible, the Supramental Consciousness into our inner being and letting it have a general influence on the outer being. I know that some people believe that they are undergoing the Supramental change in their bodies. A professor at

Kurukshetra University insists that his body is being supramentalised, starting with his feet! I expressed scepticism because I saw no sign of his mind or vital receiving any illumination—a great *sine qua non*, I am sure, before something so stupendous can happen to the body. I share with Nolini the sense, to which he gave expression long ago, that physical transformation has been postponed. But that does not mean we have nothing to do now. A lot of leeway has to be made up and our sadhana can continue quite intensely and the Ashram has still a fine role to enact in the world. The idea that it is played out hits really not at “illusions” but at “realities” which are not always on the surface to see. Although self-censure at several points is certainly salutary, to say that the Ashram has already served its purpose and is now superfluous is to overlook the complex, many-sided, long-spanned vision within which the Integral Yoga was conceived.

Here is a brief answer to the philosophical points you have raised. First, “what is the value of diversity?” I don’t think any philosophy of unity-in-multiplicity ever posits “repetitions of one original pattern”. Naturally, there has to be an essential oneness within the many if unity in the true sense is to be present. But multiplicity in the true sense would be otiose if there was not to be diversity. On a diabolical plane I can imagine a single pattern repeating innumerable—a kind of regimented prolificity expressing a universal totalitarianism. On a divine plane the delight would be not only in being oneself but also in being the other—a kind of ideal democracy in which liberty goes hand in hand with equality and both are harmonised by a spontaneous and inherent fraternity. There has, of course, to be a centre around which the divine democracy revolves, but there is no monolithic government and the central one who is infinitely diversified no less than multiplied all around is *primus inter pares*, a leader of equals. Behind this plane of what we might call archetypal manifestation—Sri Aurobindo’s Supermind seen in one aspect—there is the Being and Consciousness and Bliss which is what you have termed “some primary and ultimate Unity” but which actually can be no other than a state where the democratic Divine is not annulled or contradicted but subsists in a hidden form. It is not that the multiplicity and diversity are obliterated by absorption but that the whole democratic Divine is indrawn and self-absorbed and all the manifested differences and distinctions remain unprojected and stay latent. To the mere mind which proceeds by its own light of analytic understanding, this state would seem a sheer loss of individual selves. To the Supermind where the apparent contradictions and contraries are simultaneous faces of the Real, so that we have a truth of existence such as figured in an Aurobindonian phrase like

Force one with unimaginable rest—

to the Supermind the unmanifest unity is not a pure opposite of its own play: it is

only the vari-coloured spectrum withdrawn into a repose of white light without any ontological self-loss of the former.

Even in the orthodox Vedanta the final condition of the liberated soul is called *laya*—"a quiescent abiding" in the Brahman so deeply that the soul is as good as indiscernible in the Absolute, the Unmanifest. If there is ontological self-loss, who is liberated and who realises liberation? The Mayavadin tries to evade this question by a super-subtle metaphysical logomachy, but the original Upanishadic Vedantin had no need for such sophistry as: "Ultimately there is none to be liberated and what seems liberation is itself an illusion—there being nothing except the One without a second, featureless, changeless, immobile." What you label as "a matter of dispute between East and West" stems only from the Western belief that Shankara—or in another shape Buddha—is the sum and substance of the entire spiritual experience and thought compassed in India's three or four millennia.

The point you make about a Primordial Unity expressing itself in the many and then a Consequent Unity which brings in something quite new as a result of the many actively complexifying their functions—your point here is not quite clear to me. Certainly some genuine novelty is realised wherever there is the time-process, whether in an archetypal or a phenomenal dimension. But, when in the Consequent Unity "the oneness and the manyness of the whole imply one another and depend on one another for their being and their meaning", aren't they creatively unfolding a truth already present in another manner in the Primordial Unity? Without the Primordial Unity having the potentiality or secret pre-existence of the Consequent Unity, the latter would not at all become actual. And if that is so, what appears as the One holding concealed within itself the multiple and diverse play of its own rich being would be *logically* prior to the other Unity in which the One and the Many are equally balanced and act as if constitutive of each other: in other words the Primordial Unity would be presupposed, as it were, by the Consequent. (8.4 1977)

*

You have written of the close prospect of the surgeons opening you up. But from your account of the months before this operation I can see that you had a long retrospect of having been variously opened up by the Mother. The inner discoveries you made were due not only—as you write—to the Divine taking you as seriously as you had taken yourself as a sadhak. They were due also to your having taken the Divine more seriously than before. Something of the angel in you woke to the Divine in an exceptional way and the Divine—paradoxically—rewarded you by waking you in an extraordinary manner to something of the devil in you. God's grace lies as much in making the darkness within us visible as in making the potentiality of light in us more and more an actuality.

And the darkness becomes visible because a greater light from God has been shed on our human condition. Recently I had the occasion to write to a friend about the Yogic consequences to us when the Supermind manifested in the earth's subtle-physical layer on February 29, 1956. At the same time that our sadhana got eagle-wings to soar nearer the Sun of Truth we developed eagle-eyes to look deeper into what—adopting Coleridgean phraseology—I may dub strange regions

Where Alph the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

All that we may consider our Godwardness seemed lost there and hideous appetites, distorted desires, perversely grinning Pishachas appeared as parts of ourselves. Many sadhaks were appalled by the sudden disclosure of unsuspected depravities. The Mother explained it as the work of the new illumination which was more penetrating than anything brought so far to bear on the double nature of man.

I have written of Pishachas no less than perversities. You too have mentioned “creatures. within us, hissing, squeaking, chirping, roaring, grunting or growling”—“creatures who had once crawled in the primeval slime” and “who continue to live” in our being because “we have emerged” from them. You are speaking metaphorically, but actually we have sub-beings in us with a semi-human form. In the days when I used to get out of my body and explore subtle non-material planes I once saw getting out at the same time a most silly-looking person with an awkward gait and literally “squeaking” voice. I felt so ashamed to know that he was a part of my complex make-up. Surely he was not the central Me but some identification with him must be taking place when a markedly silly impulse rises in me and luckily gets curbed and rejected before I make a fool of myself.

You have written of “a great love for Sri Aurobindo which unaccountably wells up apropos nothing at all and brings tears to my eyes.” And you add: “I don't know what is happening to me.” Further you express your wonder whether the “psychic” has anything to do with it. This “emotion” which has come “on a number of occasions” and leaves you “surprised” marks in my view the supreme seal on your sadhana. The true, the quintessential “You” has not only made his presence felt but also recognised himself for ever as linked in deepest love to Sri Aurobindo the Source of your soul, the Lord of your life. You have unmistakably found your destiny and the discovery has expressed itself in what a poem of mine has called

The longing of ecstatic tears
From infinite to infinite.

It is true, as you say, “that the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was, truly speaking, the Yoga of the World” and indeed there is “an entire universe of sadhana contained in seven simple words of Sri Aurobindo: ‘Nobody is saved unless all are saved.’ ” It is this truth at work in the dream and the deed of our Gurus that makes their Ashram so different from the other Ashrams in India. The latter welcome choice seekers: the former throws its doors wide open to seekers of diverse kinds. Once the Mother was asked if she would accept a scoundrel in the Ashram. She said “Yes”—and meant that if a particular scoundrel had a tiny bit of turning towards Sri Aurobindo and her, she could work through that slit for the inner being to peer out, not only for his good but also upon the whole world of scoundrelism and create slit after slit in that multitudinous darkness. Sri Aurobindo has said too that if he accepted none save developed souls the entire purpose of his mission would be foiled, for his work is universal and every type of human being is needed for such a work. Just as he and the Mother were not content to embody the Supramental Consciousness in themselves but wanted it embodied in others as well, so too they did not envisage a limited circle of disciples: they were set on creating a new race out of the stuff which all humanity is made of. And this venture had its spiritual logic in their realisation that the Supermind was at the bottom of the cosmos no less than at its top: there is an evolution towards the top because there is an involution at the bottom and it is inevitable for Nature to grow into Supernature. To put it another way: spiritual attainment represents not a pulling down of superior powers to hold the lower faculties in abeyance but an evoking of a divine light inherent, though deeply hidden, in what seems an intractable undivineness. God is the secret *dharma*, intrinsic law, of Matter and not merely a *siddhi*, a spiritual acquisition foreign to Matter to be imposed on it. In harmony with this basic truth the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother moves towards its fulfilment, taking into its scope the involved universal Godhead calling out to be set free in every man.

In response to this movement of the Integral Yoga each of us who is devoted to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother should give himself up to them as a centre of manifestation at the same time that he is a centre of concentration. Of course ambition to be a divine instrument must be completely avoided: we are not meant to be Gurulings under our Gurus. What is to be developed in us centrally is that Presence which, while being given whole-heartedly to the Divine, is a portion of the Divine come down as part of the evolving cosmos, as the head and front of the cosmic evolutionary process. The adverb I have used—namely, “whole-heartedly”—is not just a literary sign for “complete self-giving”: it is also a psychological pointer suggesting what in us is to be the principal motive-power of our sadhana: the heart in its wholeness—the heart which in its innermost recess knows itself to be a child of the Divine Mother and in its outermost aperture feels a spontaneous affinity to all the other children of the same

Supreme Creatrix. This twofold heart, with its rapturous root within and its felicitous flower without, is to be the chief guide in the Aurobindonian Yoga—at once luminously individual and radiantly communal—surrendered altogether in the first place to the One above all and, because this One is also all, surrendered unambitiously in the second place to the One's multiple self-expression of collective movement.

Thus the heart with its twofold function—more accurately its double unfoldment—is what had a sudden quickening in that experience of yours. No doubt it was always behind your devotion to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but now it appears to be coming into the forefront to move you rapidly forward after moving you to tears of dedicated love. Lucky guy to have the Rose of God blooming so close even in far-off Bloomington, U.S.A.! (7.11.1990)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

FROM LIGHT TO LIGHT

SUNSET glories and sunrise splendours sandwich the night,
Thrilling the darkness with the dreams of light.
Swinging forwards from the Sun to the Sun
Night, seen aright, is a challenge of secret fun.

Our birth too rocks us from light to light;
Descending, we only rise to greater height.
Memory, though dim, fills us with hope
Even when we can merely seek and grope.

K. B. SITARAMAYYA

LIMITATIONS OF GURU-DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP IN INTEGRAL YOGA*

FOLLOWING the usual traditional spiritual systems, all those who enter the spiritual path and undertake its discipline accept a guide who in India is called the "Guru". The Guru is regarded as the representative of the Divine, and complete surrender and unquestioning obedience to him is required of the disciple. The Guru on his part takes up the entire responsibility for guiding the disciple and for his progress on the spiritual path.

In conformity with this familiar tradition, the followers of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, almost invariably, call them their Gurus. But in the Supramental Yoga, which aims at an integral union with the Divine, this Guru-disciple relationship is incomplete because it is only a partial and limited relationship which, if exclusively adhered to, would shut up the sadhak's realisation in a narrow groove and stand in the way of his larger, many-sided and more intimate relations with the Divine. Therefore in the Integral Supramental Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, it is not usual to limit the relationship with the Divine only to the Guru-disciple type, even though, if someone feels a need for it, he is not prohibited from temporarily adopting it. Sri Aurobindo himself has clearly pointed this out in the following letter to a sadhak:

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

The same direction has been given briefly by Sri Aurobindo in another letter:

"It is not usual to use the word Guru in the supramental yoga, here everything comes from the Divine himself. But if anybody wants it he can use it for the time being."²

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In most cases the Guru is a spiritually realised person. But in rare cases he may be an Incarnation or an Avatar of the Supreme Divine, or “God” as he is popularly called. In such a case, it is altogether insufficient to limit the sadhak’s relation with him to the Guru-disciple kind, unless his own limited nature finds it initially difficult to adjust itself to the greater possibility offered to him by the Avatar.

In the case of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother this is especially necessary because, in the evolutionary development on earth, they have come as Avatars to manifest not a partial degree of the Divine Consciousness like all the past Avatars, but its full perfection. Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have themselves clearly said that in their present birth they have come to fulfil their Avatic mission of establishing the Supramental Truth-Consciousness in the terrestrial evolution. And, since the Supramental Truth-Consciousness is the integral Truth-Consciousness, not limited to any partial or particular aspect of the Divine, the followers of the Supramental Yoga have also to open and receive in them all the many-sided relations with the Supreme Divine. The Supramental Divine is the Sun, the infinite Source, emanating innumerable rays of Truth-Light which reveal different aspects of his plenary Consciousness, and relations with all of them have to be admitted for its complete realisation, without limiting oneself only to the Guru-disciple relation.

It is for this reason that the Mother once said that it was against her own natural inclination to be treated as Guru by those who accepted her as the Supreme Mother, even though, following the usual familiar tradition, if they wanted her to be their Guru, she could not refuse to deal with them in that limited relation, instead of in the greater, deeper and more intimate Mother-child relation which she preferred. As she herself once said:

“I am not eager to be the Guru of anyone. It is more spontaneously natural for me to feel the Mother of all and to carry them forward silently through the power of love.”³

At another place she again explains, somewhat more elaborately, why she prefers the Mother-child relation to the Guru-disciple relation:

“Until now, my spontaneous attitude was that of the supreme Mother who carries the universe in her loving arms, and I was dealing with each one as with the child from whom she tolerates everything equally; and all that the people here were doing to please me I was taking as a token of their love and I was very grateful for it. Today I have learnt that many, if not most, are looking at me as their Guru and that they are eager to please me because to please the Guru is the best way to acquire merit on the path. And then I have understood that the duty of the Guru is to encourage from each one only that which can lead him quickly

to the Lord and serve His Divine Purpose,—and I am very grateful for the lesson.”⁴

These words of the Mother carry in them a touch of deep poignancy because they reveal that most of those who accept her as the Divine Mother compel her to deal with them, not in her own natural spontaneous manner, but within the narrower limits as a Guru. In actual practice this means that while the Mother’s spontaneous tendency is to form with them the greater, deeply intimate and all-inclusive relation of the Mother with the child and bring to them all the innumerable riches of her infinite Divine Love, they insist on receiving only a small portion of it which the Guru can give. In figurative terms it can be said that while the Mother wants to flood them with the supreme splendour and sweetness of her Divine Love, they, instead of opening all the doors of their present imprisoned self to receive it, open only a small window to it. And the Mother in her endless compassion restrains her spontaneous gesture and agrees to give them what they ask for. And with a divine humility she expresses her gratitude to them for teaching her a “lesson”!

However, it is necessary to bear in mind that the mother-child relation which the Mother spontaneously prefers is not of the human type, because the Mother, though she has taken a human body, is not the human mother but the Supreme Divine Mother incarnated in a human form. The mother-child relation in its human form is a vital-emotional relation and brings in it all the discordant elements which mar the pristine purity of true love, for the human mother is expected to satisfy the child’s desires and demands and cherish a strong attachment to him. And when egoistic desire and attachment enter into any relation, love cannot be true and pure. But the Divine Mother seeks to lift up the child beyond the vital-emotional relation into the higher relation of true union in pure divine love. The sadhaks too on their part are expected to bring to her their true psychic love which responds without any vital-egoistic mixture to her divine love. The nature of this true psychic love for the Mother is clearly described by Sri Aurobindo in the following words

“The love which is turned towards the Divine ought not to be the usual vital feeling which men call by that name, for that is not love, but only a vital desire, an instinct of appropriation, the impulse to possess and monopolise. Not only is this not the divine Love, but it ought not to be allowed to mix in the least degree in the Yoga. The true love for the Divine is self-giving, free of demand, full of submission and surrender; it makes no claim, imposes no condition, strikes no bargain, indulges in no violences of jealousy or pride or anger—for these things are not in its composition. In return the Divine Mother also gives herself, but freely—and this represents itself in an inner giving—her presence in your mind, your vital, your physical consciousness, her power re-creating you in the divine

nature, taking up all the movements of your being and directing them towards perfection and fulfilment, her love enveloping you and carrying you in its arms Godwards. It is this that you must aspire to feel and possess in all your parts down to the very material, and here there is no limitation either of time or of completeness. If one truly aspires and gets it, there ought to be no room for any other claim or any other disappointed desire. And if one truly aspires, one does unfailingly get it, more and more as the purification proceeds and the nature undergoes its needed change.”⁵

But unfortunately most of the sadhaks persistently brought the wrong attitude of vital desire into their relation with the Mother and it was the cause of many serious disturbances in her and in them. Sri Aurobindo has complained of this in several of his letters to the sadhaks. To quote from one such letter:

“If it is the same part of the vital that was on the right side and has now turned against the Mother, the explanation is very obvious. It gave its adhesion formerly because it thought that by its adhesion it could make her satisfy its desires; finding its desires not indulged, it turns against her. That is the usual vital movement in ordinary man and in ordinary life, and it has no true place in Yoga. It was just the introduction of this attitude into Yoga by the Sadhaks and its persistence which has at last made it necessary for the Mother to draw back as she has done. What you have to do is to get these lower parts to understand that they exist not for themselves but for the Divine and to give their adhesion, without claim or *arrière-pensée* or subterfuge. It is the whole issue at the present moment in the Sadhana; for it is only if this is done that the physical consciousness can change and become fit for the descent. Otherwise there will always be these ups and downs in some part of the being—at least, delay, confusion and disorder. This is the only true basis for fixity in the true consciousness and for a smooth course in the Sadhana.”⁶

It is for this reason that Sri Aurobindo once advised a sadhak in a letter to avoid this error:

“But why do you want to meet her as a ‘human’ Mother? If you can see the Divine Mother in a human body that should be enough and a more fruitful attitude. Those who approach her as a human Mother often get into trouble by their conception making all sorts of mistakes in their approach to her.”⁷

It needs however to be said that though the human relation of mother and child, like all other human relations, is marred by vital-egoistic elements, it can yet be made a means of a first approach towards the true relation of Divine Love if it takes the form of an absolute ideal. This is true not only of the mother-child

relation but of all other human relations if they are changed into their idealistic forms. That is why they have a strong appeal for man's higher nature. As Sri Aurobindo vividly puts it:

“These ideals [of human love] of which the poets have sung so persistently, are not a mere glamour and illusion, however the egoisms and discords of our instinctive, infrarational way of living may seem to contradict them. Always crossed by imperfection or opposite vital movements, they are still divine possibilities and can be made a first means of our growth into a spiritual unity of being with being. Certain religious disciplines have understood this truth, have taken up these relations boldly and applied them to our soul's communion with God; and by a converse process they can, lifted out of their present social and physical formulas, become for us, not the poor earthly things they are now, but deep and beautiful and wonderful movements of God in man fulfilling himself in life.”⁸

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It is further necessary to bear in mind that the mother-child relation, even when converted into its divine equivalent, can still remain limited and exclusive because it is only one among several varieties of relations with the Divine to which the sadhak of Integral Yoga is required to open for an integral union with the Divine. But as the human mother-child relation can be helpful in its idealistic form for converting it into a relation of Divine Love, so also all the other human relations can be helpful to unite with the Divine if they are converted into their divine equivalents, for all of them have that potentiality if they are freed from their present vital distortions. So the Divine with whom the sadhak seeks to unite can be conceived not only as Mother, but also as Father, Friend, Master, Guide, Teacher and several other relations. But the true relation with the Divine is a spiritual relation and not a physical or social human relation of any variety. According to one's temperamental preference one may accept any one of these human relations and seek union with the Divine in that variety, but if one remains closed up in it, it will prevent him from opening out to other varieties, because like the human relations of love, the divine relations also are manifold. For the sadhak of Integral Yoga, therefore, it will not be enough to confine himself only to the mother-child relation; he has to open out to all the other divine relations corresponding to their human counterparts and to many others beyond them. Initially he may start with one or more of them because of the limitations of his natural temperament which feels affinity with some one or other of these possible relations, but eventually he will have to overcome all his limitations and, in an ever-expanding universalisation of his consciousness, seek to include all of them in order to realise the many-sided integral union with the

Divine and, rising beyond all of them, with the One who transcends them all. This is the necessity of the conception of Ishta-Devata or chosen deity in Indian religions and yogic disciplines. As Sri Aurobindo explains:

“By the Ishta Devata, the chosen deity, is meant,—not some inferior Power, but a name and form of the transcendent and universal Godhead. Almost all religions either have as their base or make use of some such name and form of the Divine. Its necessity for the human soul is evident. God is the All and more than the All. But that which is more than the All, how shall man conceive? And even the All is at first too hard for him; for he himself in his active consciousness is a limited and selective formation and can open himself only to that which is in harmony with his limited nature. There are things in the All which are too hard for his comprehension or seem too terrible to his sensitive emotions and cowering sensations. Or, simply, he cannot conceive as the Divine, cannot approach or cannot recognise something that is too much out of the circle of his ignorant or partial conceptions. It is necessary for him to conceive God in his own image or in some form that is beyond himself but consonant with his highest tendencies and seizable by his feelings or his intelligence. Otherwise it would be difficult for him to come into contact and communion with the Divine.”

But for the sadhak of the Integral Yoga it is necessary to rise beyond this limited relation with a partial aspect of the Divine, for it is inconsistent with the integrality of the divine union. To quote Sri Aurobindo again

“... the Sadhaka of the integral Yoga will not be satisfied until he has included all other names and forms of Deity in his own conception, seen his own Ishta-Devata in all others, unified all Avatars in the unity of Him who descends in the Avatar, welded the truth in all teachings into the harmony of the Eternal Wisdom”¹⁰

In the Integral Supramental Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, therefore, the sadhak has not only to raise his relation with the Mother from the human to the Divine and accept her as the Divine Mother though in a human form, but also not to limit that relation only to its exclusive type but include in it all the possible innumerable relations with the Divine. For, we have to remember that she whom we call our Mother also includes in her divinity all the other names and forms of the Divine.

For this reason, the term “Mother” as applied to our Mother is only symbolic in its significance. For in its essential meaning it stands for the supreme divine Conscious-Force, Adya Shakti, creative of the whole universe. As Sri Aurobindo has explained:

“The One whom we adore as the Mother is the divine Conscious-Force that dominates all existence, one and yet so many-sided that to follow her movement is impossible even for the quickest mind and for the freest and most vast intelligence. The Mother is the consciousness and force of the Supreme and far above all she creates.”¹¹

As applied to our Mother, therefore, the term “Mother” in its real sense means the ‘Creatrix’ of the whole universe. Because of this all the Powers and Personalities in the universe are her different forms. In Sri Aurobindo’s words:

“... she is the Supreme Consciousness and Power above the universe and it is by her that all the Gods are manifested, and even the supramental Ishwara comes into manifestation through her—the supramental Purushottama of whom the Gods are Powers and Personalities.”¹²

In this essential sense our Mother includes in her person all the different forms and aspects of the Supreme Divine and not only that of the Divine Mother in its usual sense which excludes all the others. All the other multitudinous forms of the Divine like Father, Master, Guide, Teacher, Friend, Playmate are her own forms which she puts out in manifestation but are in her united because she is the One Supreme Creatrix of all the powers and personalities of the Divine.

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What is said here about the sadhak’s relation with the Mother applies equally to his relation with Sri Aurobindo. Therefore, to accept him only as the Guru, as most sadhaks do, is to commit the same error as they do in their relation with the Mother. To open widely to all the greater, more intimate and many-sided relations with Sri Aurobindo, it is necessary to regard him “as the Source, the living Sun of Light and Knowledge and Consciousness and spiritual realisation, and all that one receives is felt as coming from there and the whole being remoulded by the Divine Hand.”¹³

KISHOR GANDHI

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

PIERCING my dismay
 You have pulled me
 Out of the gulf
 And dipped me
 In lucent love,
 O white ray!

You have lured me
 Back to life and light,
 You have lured me
 Back to distilled delight.

O delight!
 Pour incessant
 Your white flow
 On this crying soul
 And swim me on
 Towards my goal.

ASHALATA DASH

ABOUT WOMAN

4. MARRIAGE AND CONJUGAL RELATION

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

MARRIAGE IS a very ancient and highly lauded notion of the civilised society. Man and woman unite on the basis of this notion and tie a knot or form a centre for the society—thus bringing cohesion and sustenance to it. In Europe it has already been questioned: Is marriage so very necessary and admirable a thing? Do human civilisation and culture become totally rotten without it? One must not simply shudder at such questions. One has to face the problem, calmly consider it and fearlessly come to a solution. The wave of this problem is yet to arrive in India. Here the wave just preceding this one holds its sway on the younger generation. The question here is marriage at one's own free-will and not whether marriage is discardable, it is whether or not marriage after courtship is better than marriage arranged by one's friends and relations. The ancients opine that love-marriage between young men and women is in reality a marriage of sex, marriage at one's own free will is a wanton marriage. Only the marriage arranged by the experienced and venerable elders after carefully looking into the pros and cons, after weighing correctly the character and conduct, beauty and merits, can be—has at least in most cases the possibility to be—an ideal and most suitable union. The accord in the name of love is a temporary illusion soon dispelled and followed by a terrible discord. Are quarrel between husband and wife and divorce as abundant in India as in Europe? The moderns will assert that whatever is done independently has its value; be it sex, be it temporary illusion, it is but the creation of my independence. It is much better even to tread the wrong path independently than follow the right path in blind dependence; because here is the awakening of the soul and there its demise, here lies the thrill of life and there the peace of death. Then again, who can say that the love received and given by oneself is sex and the thing received and accepted from the hands of others is devoid of sex? When two beings unknown and unfamiliar to each other are put together, at first only two bodies, the grossest layers of the two have been placed together; there the harmony of life and mind is only an ideal, an assumption; but if two beings want to be together as a result of mutual acquaintance, then at least there exists some likeness in life-waves as also some agreement. Otherwise why should they want to be together? Then about conjugal quarrel: is it so very rare in our families? The only difference is in Europe it has erupted with an explosion while in our society it is gnawing internally, having found no outlet.

In fact marriage in our country is a social rather than a personal affair. That is to say, I marry not for my sake but for my family, my kith and kin, my society.

For this very reason the system of child-marriage is in vogue. The independence of the individual increases with age; that is why a male is coupled with a female before independent opinion and free-will find an expression in us, so that the keenness of personality gets blunted in the overwhelming current of family and society, there remains no separate existence, they are engulfed by family and society. Even if there is some scope of independence for the male, there is none for the female. One has to find a match for one's daughter before she comes of age so that she may be moulded at will in her father-in-law's house. When one comes of age one develops free-will, and once free-will is developed, one cannot be moulded at will. If everyone moves according to one's own free-will, then one can do whatever one likes, and this brings disorder in society. It is for keeping peace, order and good arrangement that society chooses my life's partner on my behalf. Thus the bride's side enquires about education and wealth of the bridegroom, the bridegroom's side looks for beauty and virtues of the bride—but does any relation exist between the harmony of heart and soul on one side and the family background, character etc. on the other? What sort of oppression is this to force one to sacrifice one's own inspiration at the altar of society's advantage, or at best for the good of society? Who is greater, society or the individual? Is it only by dwarfing the individual that society prospers? Is there no harmony between the two? Is it that only the individual has to bear the burden of responsibility, and is the collectivity there simply for making demands?

But one can say without any risk of overstatement that in reality this society or collectivity is man's. There is no independent or separate place for woman in society; all her inherent qualities and actions are prearranged to be put at the service of and for the happiness, advantage and benefit of man. If there is any being independent and living in society, that being is man; woman is as if some material possession of man. The ruling is there that a girl in childhood belongs to her father, in youth to her husband and in old age to her son—*asvatantryāḥ striyaḥ kāryāḥ purusaḥ svairdivānīsam* (Women should always be kept dependent by their men). Descartes, the great philosopher from the West, did not believe that inferior creatures had souls; the framers of our social systems seem to have the same opinion about women. Of course it can't be said that there was no arrangement for giving education to women or they were always belittled and trifled with. But whatever has been or is done in these respects seems to be out of pity or obligation, not by virtue of the strength of their own claims. In reply one can say that because of their very nature women are not worthy of independence. Woman by nature moves supported by man under his shelter. They are the weaker sex and cannot stand erect without taking support from somebody, and they have so many bad things in their nature that if men don't rein them in, they easily become wayward. Secondly, for the sake of the good of society, women should not be given independence even if they are worthy of it. For women are housewives and with them as centres family and society crystallise. If

self-assertion is allowed at the root or centre of the house, if women move according to their own free-will, then there remains nothing to be called a family, society breaks up and crumbles to pieces. A good bit of independence, self-assertion, free-will, even indiscipline on the part of man is tolerable—that does not put society into much trouble—since the activity of man concerns only the outside world; but if women grow wayward then decay starts inside society, within its very life, in its unifying joints. Now the question is whether in reality it is the inherent defect in nature or simply the result of a custom and habit that women are not, or could not, become, worthy of independence. Under compulsion of a particular system, as a result of a particular education and culture, the nature and inherent character of woman has become like this, but who can affirm that this is her eternal dharma—*eṣa dharmah sanātanaḥ*? Can't it be different under a different system and a different education and culture? And if that is possible then why can't society and family grow and function well in another system giving full freedom and independence to woman? Even if that growth and good functioning are found lacking, yet can one not question society's right of unjust oppression of a particular limb? Why should woman be deprived of freedom and independence just because of that apprehension of indiscipline? Is it a "must" to uproot and discard my own free-will completely just because I live in society, just because I am born a woman? If thus you keep one part of society vigourless and mortally wounded, you may achieve some good order and discipline, some peace in society but can you expect life, nourishment and growth?

Here one might say: then give to woman that form of education and initiation—simply shouting for independence and freedom of self will not help, and it is for this very reason that the ancient authors also urged to educate the daughters too with the utmost care like the sons. Then what is new in all that we have said? The new thing is this: ancient education used to teach the females thoroughly and meticulously this art of slavery—only an attempt to cover this slavery with high-sounding words like service, self-consecration, modesty, shyness etc. used to be there. But the very aim of the new education will be self-establishment, knowing oneself, allowing the indwelling Divine to blossom in full freedom. It may be true that education should precede freedom; but a greater truth is: freedom first, then education. A living education blossoms through freedom.

But the other side may question: has the condition of woman in society become like this, are the place she has got and the dharma she follows simply an imposition from outside, just a deceptive trick played by man? When did society start such preplanned tyranny? Can't it be said that woman gave full consent to such a system; that not only did she give her consent but she had within it the delight of her nature, otherwise how could such a system have come into being, how could this very system prevail age after age till today in country after country? Is it possible that such a big thing grew and developed based only on

illusion and falsehood without any truth to support it? Does woman want to become free and independent, is she eager to express her personality in the same way as man? Had this willingness on the part of woman been genuine, then would it not have found expression in society, in its system? Why did society become man's? Is it not because woman wants to remain as a shadow of man, to remain dependent is her independent will?

It seems that the real truth is like this. In ancient times, in a certain period an ideal blossomed according to the movement of society—under the influence of the dharma of the age both man and woman found their fulfilment based on a truth, they fulfilled society with a particular system. In the age of Sita and Savitri, woman had willingly drowned her own personality into man's, her soul used to give itself completely without reserve to nourish the soul of man. Woman was the giver and man was the receiver. Woman did not realise or want to realise, nor even feel the need of, any separate existence of her own without man. That was the very dharma of that age. We are not going to discuss the intricacies of the problem such as: why and in which stage of evolution of society or for expressing what inspiration and truth of the human-soul was dharma like that? We shall only say that in those days the relation between man and woman was the result of a living ideal, a real dharma within their selves, and the system of society too put forward a live frame for its practice. Afterwards that ideal, that dharma gradually verged on extinction but the system remained unaltered; not only that, in order to keep up that declining ideal and dharma somehow, the system was hardened with trivial details. The relation, which was at first natural and joyful, later turned only into habit and duty. At the outset what woman used to give willingly and with joy, and man also used to take as a gift of worship, later man started taking it as a claim and woman also started giving under the spell of ignorance and prejudice. Why did it become like that is not the question which needs to be asked, but that such a thing is not healthy, that a change is needed for the respective fulfilment of man and woman, for the good of the society, not only so, but that another truth, another dharma, another ideal is unfolding itself breaking down the old and worn-out frame, is to be felt and perceived.

That thing is the awakening of personality in man along with the awakening of the same in woman. The truth fulfilled by woman as a mere shadow of man is a thing of the past. That woman will have a body of her own, will cast her own shadow, is the thing of the future. The vindication that woman has a truth of her own irrespective of her relation with man is the main problem of the present age. Society has to solve this problem, man also must come to help in this regard. In order to upset the ancient system there will be a great disorder in the society, things will be topsyturvy and be crumbled to pieces, man will be divested of his eternal right to many a happiness; but the citing of all these reasons in order to stick to peace and contentment as the ultimate ideal will not only fail to be an act of prudence, it will also not be possible either.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SOCIETY

EDUCATION is as old as time and as new as the marvel of the rising sun. According to Rabindranath, the implications contained in words like love, religion, art, literature, patriotism and friendship surpass all definitions. Even the most deep, learned and revealing explanations about them leave room for many more things to express. This is true for the word education as well. An attempt to give a precise and distinct definition of it is somewhat like trying to fathom the mystery of the sea by a diver's plunge.

The pioneers of human progress throughout the world, in all branches of thought, namely politics, science, sociology, economics, ethics, religion and spirituality, have contributed their views on the subject. They have tried in their own way to unveil the secret meaning of it and to realise it in themselves. At the same time to make its significance dawn on the head and heart of humanity they have also taken recourse to diverse means: press, platform, friendly talk and advice and revealing influence and inspiration. But still it appears that all has not been told about it or whatever has been stated in the past needs to be restated over and over again, since the central and highest part of their observation, realisation and teaching has yet to materialise.

The modern age is, more or less, the age of utility. As a result greater importance is given nowadays, almost in all affairs, to the aspect of utility and less to the subjective and inner side. This has been more so on account of the State idea having coloured the mind and action of the world at large. There is no harm in it, because the prosperity gained by the individual, the nation or the world, whether by the successful working of the State or otherwise, has a fundamental value of its own. But to judge everything by the standard of material prosperity and to neglect the subjective side is a gross error. Specially with regard to education such an error carries immense repercussions on the communal life. The existence of the State is indispensable or unavoidable in the present phase of humanity. But the State idea and the State do not mean the same thing.

The point will be clear if the motives on which the State idea takes its support are briefly discussed. The motives are these. First, it is the State which will assure and safeguard the economic and other basic interests of the individual and the community. Then, it is the good of the collectivity, the benefit of the community for which the individual should live, not for his separate egoistic interest. Lastly, the good working of the State, its efficiency and organisation and the management by it of all vital institutions will bring about the necessary progress and perfection of the individual and society. These notions are true to some extent but are altogether mixtures of truth and falsehood and it will be dangerous to pursue them to the end, unexamined by illumined vision and thought equipped with the knowledge of the deep and complex truth of Nature.

Particularly in India whose culture is profound and varied and where the people still consciously feel the living spiritual breath of their ancient forefathers, the State idea should not reach its culmination.

The life of a developing community may be compared with a growing garden of various fruits and flowers, each having a different colour, smell and taste, and the guard of the garden may be compared with the State or any other administrative machinery. The impression created by the sight of the garden is mainly of beauty, fragrance, greenness and the sense of a living growth, whereas the vision of the guard brings before us things like bow and arrow, stick and sword, rifle and bullet, a heavy face with a beard and a big turban.

The presence and active help of the guard are essential for the garden. It is he who will look after its unhampered growth, prevent theft and plunder and will be useful to it in many respects. But there is a limit to the scope of his usefulness. He has very little to do with the actual growth and development of the trees and plants. This work automatically goes to some other agencies.

The free gifts of nature, earth, rain, air and sun are the main sources from which they will derive help according to their needs. But at times additional artificial help is also required for the successful fruition of the plants' life. Such help can be given only by those who are adepts in the line, who have knowledge of the plants' life and nature, their external requirements and also their inner demands for tender care and subtle understanding. This task in relation to the growth and development of the human community comes under the jurisdiction of education. Naturally such a task is beyond the capacity of a guard since he lacks the requisite skill, knowledge, subtleness and adaptability. So when the question of controlling education by any administrative authority comes up, the above factors should always be taken into consideration.

The supporters of the State idea will, no doubt, deny such an analogy and in fact there is some ground for them to do so. They will perhaps, in the first place, say that it is a mistake to see the State separately from the community. For, it is the community itself which is the elector of the organisers of the State, whereas the garden is inert and therefore has no say regarding the appointment of the guard. Secondly, it is not a just proposition to compare the learned and efficient organisers of the State with a mere uneducated guard. All this is true but partially and not fully. A little more intimate observation will provide us with something truer which is not apparent outwardly. Sri Aurobindo's view on the matter will clarify the obscurity. "The organised State is neither the best mind of the nation nor is it even the sum of the communal energies. It leaves out of its organised action and suppresses or unduly depresses the working force and thinking mind of important minorities, often of those which represent that which is best in the present and that which is developing for the future."

It seems, then, that however learned and efficient the organisers of the State may be, whatever diversity of understanding and clarity of vision they may have,

they do not represent the overall mind and will of the nation nor have they the realisation of the National Soul. Why it is not so is a different problem and will require a lengthy explanation. For the present topic let it be taken for granted that it is not possible with the means which are employed nowadays towards the formation of a State. But it is certain that under the present condition of the State, the individual and the community are bound to suffer the imposition of some collective aims that are thought out by a few or more of the ruling persons, and that may not be in accord with the true spirit and nature of individual and communal development. That is why Sri Aurobindo says, "The State is a convenience, and a rather clumsy convenience, for our common development; it ought never to be made an end in itself." The same statement is applicable to any other machinery which stresses uniformity rather than development.

The importance and scope of action of the State are great and manifold. Even in the field of education it is and can be of immense help but that should be only in certain matters. Thus in removing illiteracy on a large scale from the common people, the State, with the resources and powers entrusted to it, is the only capable and efficient authority. It can also diminish or abolish the economic and material difficulties which stand in the way of betterment of the existing systems of education and introduction of new ones. But the State or any other similar controlling agency is unable to handle the central and actual aspect of education in the way it should be done. In educating the individuals according to their inborn taste and bent of nature and in conformity with the truth and aspiration of their being, such a control is often an obstacle rather than a help. To quote Sri Aurobindo, "... the State is not an organism; it is a machinery, and it works like a machine, without tact, taste, delicacy and intuition. It tries to manufacture, but what humanity is here to do is to grow and create." Again, "The State tends always to uniformity, because uniformity is easy to it and natural variation is impossible to its essentially mechanical nature; but uniformity is death, not life."

From the above statements we catch a glimpse of what are the essential qualities necessary for conducting an educational system and the drawbacks in its way and also the fact that its real function is only to help the individuals grow and unfold their latent powers, possibilities and capacities, which finally will account for the real progress of the community.

Individuals are the standard-bearers of progress in the society. The seed of advancement lies dormant in their hearts and, when it germinates, it is they who energise the collectivity with new ideas, thoughts and activities. A check on their free and natural growth by any mechanical authoritative intervention is harmful to the community and to humanity as a whole. Man is not only a mind, life and body. He is mainly and essentially a soul and the mind, life and body are the soul's instruments. Expression of the soul's qualities through the perfected instrumentality of mind, life and body is the opportunity offered to him by his

birth in this world. Therefore a perfect educational organ will always take cognisance of all these strata of human personality and will arrange for their training in such a way that none of them are over-emphasised nor any of them neglected. The result will thus be a balanced, harmonious and integral development of all the parts with the natural variation of qualities according to the individual's soul principle. But this is not all that an ideal system will strive for. It will also give due attention to the aspect of each one's relationship with his own people and nation and also humanity at large.

The most basic and central theme of true education is laid down above. As regards its practical implementation, no country in the world appears to be so ready yet to give a due consideration to it as India. India's vision of the secret meaning of the world and existence is congenial to the purpose. She has a mission in the world; it is to become an example of unique fulfilment and unprecedented self-perfection. It is not quite a new thing to her. The records of her past history show much of her doings in the line. But now what is demanded of her is the revitalisation of the old and the shaping of the future in the light of the material knowledge and practical efficiency of the present.

Perhaps it will not be out of place here to touch, with the help of Sri Aurobindo's writings, upon the views held by India about individual, collectivity and humanity: "India has seen always in man the individual a soul, a portion of the Divinity enwrapped in mind and body, a conscious manifestation in Nature of the universal self and the spirit. Similarly India has not understood by the nation or people an organised State or an armed and efficient community well prepared for the struggle of life and putting all at the service of the National ego, ... but a great communal soul and life that has appeared in the whole and has manifested a nature of its own and a law of that nature, a Swabhava and Swadharma, and embodied it in its intellectual, aesthetic, and ethical, dynamic, social, and political form and culture. And equally then our cultural conception of humanity must be in accordance with her ancient vision of the universal manifesting in the human race, evolving through life and mind but with a high ultimate spiritual aim."

This then is the ideal of education and culture in India. To achieve it her Spirit, perceptibly or imperceptibly, is always at work. So the children born in India must from the beginning of their education be made fully conscious of their great cultural inheritance. To render this possible, infinite care and precaution should be taken to chalk out their educational programme. There may be differences of opinion regarding the work on account of different tastes and preferences. The differences may be either in respect of the actual subjects to be taught or with regard to the medium of language for teaching. Here also we may resort to Sri Aurobindo's writings on education and, in so doing, enter into the details of the subject, but for the present we shall conclude by giving a short reference only:

“The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil’s mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself....”

“The first attention of the teacher must be given to the medium and instruments, and, until these are perfected, to multiply subjects of regular instruction is to waste time and energy. When the mental instruments are sufficiently developed to acquire a language easily and swiftly, that is the time to introduce him to many languages, not when he can only partially understand what he is taught and masters it laboriously and imperfectly. Moreover, one who has mastered his own language, has one very necessary faculty for mastering another....”

“The mother-tongue is the proper medium of education and therefore the first energies of the child should be directed to the thorough mastering of the medium. Almost every child has an imagination, an instinct for words, a dramatic faculty, a wealth of idea and fancy. These should be interested in the literature and history of the nation....”

“It is God’s arrangement that they should belong to a particular nation, age, society, that they should be children of the past, possessors of the present, creators of the future. The past is our foundation, the present our material, the future our aim and summit....”

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

(The first four quotations are from *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Chapter IV, and the remaining from *A System of National Education*, 1970 Edition, pp 2, 13, 14 and 5)

ON THE THRESHOLD

MANY wings are yet tethered,
Flights are not yet finely feathered,
Many blinkers are yet to drop,
My eyes await purer vistas
And warmer lights.

Soon sun after sun will rise and set
On receding horizons
And every night will have
Its own harvest moon.

Each dewdrop will sparkle
With hidden laughter
At the humour in the fragrance
Of every blossom.

And then I shall see strings of light,
Gold and pale blue hues
Weaving patterns of life
Within and without.

Every kiss and blow,
A stumble and a caress
Will tickle and tingle and thrill
With Your touch.

For I will be on the threshold
Of living in You,
My life a clear bright shadow
Of Your Presence.

DINKAR D. PALANDE

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of January 1995)

BETWEEN the 6th and 22nd of June 1908 the Bomb case was heard five or six times. During this period a dramatic event took place. While the preliminary trial was going on in the District Magistrate's court one of the accused, Narendra Gossain, became an approver, *i.e.*, in return for a promise by the Government that he would be given full pardon, he agreed to make full confession of all that he knew and to appear as a witness for the prosecution.

After the trial had begun in the lower court, the prisoners found some time to converse either in the Prison Van or at tiffin time; otherwise they were kept in separate cells. There were jokes and pleasantries when they were thus occasionally thrown together, but Sri Aurobindo himself was generally taciturn. Gossain would try to edge towards him, and try to make him talk, sometimes popping very suspicious questions. It was now found that the egregious Shamsul-Alam was occasionally holding secret conversations with Gossain. In the jail while Naren was with other accused persons his evil motive was not known to anybody. Sri Aurobindo narrates the events in an amusing way:

“At first no one allowed Gossain to guess that his designs were known to all. He too was so stupid as to be unaware of this for quite some time, he thought he was helping the police quite secretly. But after a few days it was ordered that instead of solitary confinement we would have to live together; because of this new arrangement we used to meet and talk throughout the day and night, and the thing could not be a secret much longer. At this time one or two of the boys had quarrels with Gossain. From their language, and the unpleasant behaviour of everybody else, Gossain could see that his intentions were not unknown to anyone. When later he gave his evidence before the court, some English newspapers reported that this had caused surprise and excitement among the accused persons. Needless to say, this was entirely the reporters' fancy. Days ahead everyone had known the nature of evidence that would be offered. In fact, even the date on which the evidence would be given was known from before. At this time an accused went to Gossain and said: ‘Look, brother, life here is intolerable. I too would like to turn an approver. Please tell Shamsul Alam to arrange for my release.’ Gossain agreed to this and after a few days told him that a government note had come to the effect that there might be the possibility of favourable consideration of the accused's appeal. After which Gossain suggested to him to eke out some necessary information from Upen and others, for instance, the location of the branches of the secret society and its leaders etc. The pretended approver was a man with a sense of humour, a lover of fun, and, on Upendra's advice, he supplied a number of imaginary names to Gossain, and said that among the leaders of the secret society were Vishambhar Pillay in

Madras, Purushottam Natekar at Satara, Professor Bhatt in Bombay and Krishnajirao Bhao of Baroda. Gossain was delighted with this and passed on this reliable information to the police. And the police too rummaged the whole of Madras, and came across many Pillays, big and small, but not one that was Pillay Vishambhar, not even half a Vishambhar; as for Satara's Purushottam Natekar, he also seemed to keep his identity safely hidden in deep darkness; in Bombay a certain Professor Bhatt was found, no doubt, but he seemed a harmless person and a loyalist, there was no likelihood of any secret society using him as a cover. Yet at the time of giving his evidence, Gossain, depending on what he had heard earlier from Upen, offered such ringleaders of conspiracy as the imaginary Vishambhar Pillay, etc., at the holy feet of Norton and strengthened the latter's strange prosecution theory. With regard to Bir Krishnajirao Bhao the police perpetrated a typical hoax. They produced the copy of a telegram sent by some Ghose from the Manicktola Gardens to Krishnajirao Deshpande of Baroda. The people of Baroda did not know of the existence of anyone answering to that name, but since the truthful Gossain had spoken of a Krishnajirao Bhao of Baroda, then surely Krishnajirao Bhao and Krishnajirao Deshpande must be the same person. And whether Krishnajirao Deshpande existed or not, the letters mentioned the name of our respected friend, Keshavrao Deshpande. Hence Krishnajirao Bhao and Krishnajirao Deshpande must surely be one and the same. From which it followed that Keshavrao Deshpande was a ringleader of the secret conspiracy. Mr. Norton's famous theory was based on such extraordinary inferences."¹

"To believe Gossain, one had to accept that it was at his suggestion that our solitary confinement had been done away with and we had been ordered to stay together." He had said that the police had arranged it like this and kept him in the midst of the accused with the intention of drawing out secret information about the conspiracy. Gossain did not know that his new business was known to everyone long before, when he started to ask questions about those who were engaged in the conspiracy, and the whereabouts of the branches of the secret society, about patrons and contributors, about those who would now be in charge of continuing the secret activities etc. I have already given examples of the kind of answers he received. But most of Gossain's words were false. Dr. Daly had told us that, by persuading Mr. Emerson, it was he who had brought about this change in our accommodation. Possibly Daly's was the true version; afterwards on hearing about the change in arrangements the police may have imagined this a likely gain. Be it as it may, everyone, excepting me, was extremely pleased at the change. At that period I was unwilling to be in the midst of a crowd, for my spiritual life, *sadhana*, was proceeding at a rapid pace. I had tasted a little of Equality, Non-attachment and Peace, but these states had not yet been fully stabilised. By being in company, with the pressure of other men's thought-waves on my unripe young ideas, this new state of being might suffer, or

be even washed away. In fact, it did happen like that. Then I did not understand that for the fullness of my spiritual experience it was necessary to evoke opposite emotions; hence the Inner Guide, *antaryāmin*, had suddenly deprived me of my dear solitude, and flung me into the stream of violent outward activity.”²²

Sri Aurobindo had plenty of opportunities of observing his companions in adversity. Most of them were strangers to him, but he was delighted to see the leaping light in their eyes and their general buoyancy of temperaent. Sri Aurobindo relates: “Looking at these lads, however, one felt as if the liberal, daring puissant men of an earlier age with a different training had come back to India. That fearless and innocent look in their eyes, the words breathing power, their carefree delighted laughter, even in the midst of great danger the undaunted courage, cheerfulness of the mind, absence of despair, or grief, all this was a symptom not of the inert Indians of those days, but of a new age, a new race and a new stir. If these were murderers, then one must say the bloody shadow of killing had not fallen across their nature, in which there was nothing at all of cruelty, recklessness or bestiality. Without worrying in the least about the future or the outcome of the trial they passed their days in prison with boyish fun, laughter, games, reading and in discussions. Quite early they had made friends with everyone, with officers, the sentries, convicts, European sergeants, detectives, court officials and without distinguishing between friends and foes, the high and the low, had started to tell stories and jokes. They found the time spent in the court-room quite tiresome, for in that farce of a trial there was very little that was enjoyable. They had no books with which to beguile the time, and talking was forbidden. Those of them who had started doing yoga, they hadn’t so far learnt how to concentrate while in a crowd, for them passing the time proved quite difficult. At first some of them began to bring books with them, this was soon followed by others. Later on one could see a strange spectacle: while the trial was going on, and the fate of thirty or forty accused persons was being wrangled over, whose result might be hanging or transportation for life, some of these accused persons without as much as glancing at what was happening around them, were absorbed in reading the novels of Bankimchandra, Vivekananda’s *Rajayoga* or *Science of Religions*, or the Gita, the Puranas or European Philosophy.”²³

“Naren relates how he had met friends of Jatindra Nath Banerji in 1905, how they had told him of a secret society whose leader was Aurobindo Ghose, how he came in contact with Aurobindo’s brother Barin and Bhupendra Nath Dutt around the time *Jugantar* was launched in 1906. Along the way Naren identified Aurobindo, Barin and Hem Das, whose mission to France he revealed. He spoke of the early days of *Jugantar*, of Aurobindo’s arrival in Calcutta, and of his meetings with him, Subodh Mullick and Charu Chandra Dutt. He gave detailed accounts of the failed dacoity in Rangpur in 1906 and of a planned dacoity in Bankura a year later. While he spoke the prisoners stood

silently, unable to express their feelings except spitting on the floor. During the lunch break however they 'chatted merrily with the police sergeants as if nothing had taken place.'

"For five days Naren told the Magistrate everything he knew about the society's organization and activities. His revelations caused a stir in Calcutta. Never at a loss for a cliché, Hemendra Prasad Ghose observed that 'truth is strange-stranger than fiction' and wrote that the approver's confession 'reads like a romance'. Many thought it to be nothing more than that; but there can be little doubt that it represented the truth as Naren knew it. Mindful of the Magistrate's warning that his pardon would be withdrawn if he said anything false, he does not appear to have told a deliberate lie. To be sure some of his information was incorrect.... As promised he incriminated not only those on trial but scores of others, some of whom were promptly arrested. Indra Nandi and Nikhuleswar Roy Maulick were hauled in the day Naren began deposing. At the time of his arrest Indra was asked what had happened to his hand. He explained that it had been amputated after a cast iron safe had fallen on it. The police, who had learned of the College Street explosion, were not deceived. In the weeks that followed Jatindra Nath Banerji, Bijoy Bhattacharya, Provas Deb, Haridas Das, and Balkrishna Harikane were rounded up. These seven, together with Debavrata Bose and Charu Chandra Roy, who had been arrested a little earlier, and Satyen Bose, who had been convicted under the Arms Act in Midnapore, were formed into a second batch of accused. Their hearing was put off until the first batch was disposed of. In the meantime they joined the others in Alipore jail."⁴

"... Norton addressed the court: 'I have the honour to apply to the Court under Section 137 of the C.P.C. to tender pardon to Narendranath Gossain for his turning approver. We believe that Narendranath Goswami, the accused, is going to make a full confession.... He ought to be released on bail and kept apart from other prisoners.' This was followed by some discussion between Norton and the court concerning the discharge of the approver, for he could not be an accused and a witness at the same time. When this talk was over Naren was produced. 'All the prisoners stood up and heard him in breathless silence.' His sell-out had been expected but the naked fact of his betrayal was still a shock. The court asked the approver: 'Are you willing to disclose truly everything about the conspiracy against the State and about every person whether as a principal or an abettor?' Naren answered, 'Yes, sir, I shall disclose all that I know.' There followed more discussion between Norton and Birley on the technicalities of Naren's pardon. During this interval the approver 'kept looking downwards' as the prisoners glared menacingly at him. Never daring to look 'any of his comrades in the face', Naren 'went on stroking his moustaches.' At length the Court announced that he was discharged. Sworn in as a witness he began his deposition."⁵

Nirodbaran reports: "However, this did not save him. Two of the revolutionaries, Kanai Lal Dutt and Satyendranath Bose had already decided that for this act of betrayal Gossain must pay with his life. They arranged to send word to him that they would like to turn approvers, and a meeting was accordingly arranged in front of the jail dispensary on the morning of August 31. Here, whilst they were engaged in conversation, suddenly shots rang out. Gossain was seen running away chased by Kanai and Satyen who were themselves being pursued by the warders. More shots were fired and Gossain was seen to fall into a drain by the sides of the pathway along which they were running. He was dead. By this time Kanai and Satyen were overpowered and in the midst of tremendous noise and excitement they were immediately removed and segregated. Both were sent up for a summary trial and since neither made any attempt to defend himself, both were sentenced to death. They died like heroes, mourned by all true patriots. There can be no doubt that Gossain's death had a decisive effect on the entire trial. He had already made several damaging statements which might have seriously jeopardised Sri Aurobindo's defence and created other great complications. Gossain would certainly have been a key witness but with his death the Prosecution was debarred from producing his statements as evidence since the Defence would have no opportunity to cross-examine him on the witness stand. Thus, legally, the statements stood invalidated."⁶

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References

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- 2 *Ibid* , pp 104, 105
- 3 *Ibid* , pp 94, 95
- 4 *The Bomb in Bengal*, by Peter Hechs, pp 181, 182
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- 6 *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, by Nirodbaran, pp 93, 94

CHAMPAKLAL'S DEAR AUNT MOTIBA

EVERY time I see Motiba I remember my childhood days, my grandmother, her care and affection; like her, Motiba always caresses and blesses me with all her love and affection.

Every phase of life has its own charm, so does old age if one knows how to see it. It is a charm that radiates humility, tender disinterested love, dedication and total surrender. Motiba is a true symbol of it. She is pure-hearted and simple. Champaklal used to remember his "Dearest Foiba (aunt) with love and respect."

She arrived in the Ashram on April 4, 1926 and has been there ever since. She was one of the twenty-four sadhaks who were present at the time of the Descent of the Overmind on November 24, 1926.

The Mother fixed her birth-date as January 27. January 27, 1995 marks her centenary. Even at this age she does all her household work and sometimes cooking too. Short of sight and hearing, she says with a smile: "How can I blame my eyes and ears? They have served me so well all these years."

I have always enjoyed asking Motiba questions about herself and her life in the Ashram to which her pat reply would usually be: "I don't remember much, my memory has faded. I will try to tell you whatever I can..." Some parts of this interesting conversation are given below in her own words.

Will you please tell me about your childhood or early years before you came to the Ashram?

My father's name was Nathuram. My mother's name Mooriben and surname Tarwadi. We were Modh Brahmins. My father used to read the Puranas and do Yajnas and Havans. He being a priest, our economic condition was quite ordinary. Our family deity was Galleswar Mahadev and we worshipped Krishna also. Our family has witnessed several times the wonderful and precious blessings of Galleswar Mahadev.

I lost my father at the age of six and got married at eight. My mother died within six months of my marriage. I went to my in-laws when I was fifteen and became a widow the next year. My husband Amthalal suddenly fell ill after returning from Bombay and died at the age of twenty-five on Mahasivaratri. My five sisters died one after another. I was the youngest daughter of my parents. My younger brother Mafatlal too passed away at the age of eighteen. I was terribly shocked by these frequent deaths of my near and dear ones and gradually I lost all interest in life. Champaklal was very dear to me but he had already settled in the Pondicherry Ashram.

How did you decide to go to Pondicherry?

After Champaklal had settled permanently in Pondicherry I decided to go there. I wrote a letter to Sri Aurobindo, asking for his permission to come over. I had a darshan of him and the Mother in a vision when I was in Patan. In that vision, I saw Sri Aurobindo walking continuously in the room where he used to walk always and the Mother standing on the steps of the house's staircase. Champaklal talked to the Mother about it and about my wish to stay in the Ashram. I had already sent my photograph. It would be interesting to know how things got arranged for me.

It was decided to get Champaklal engaged to my sister-in-law. But Champaklal was firmly against it and did not want to leave the Ashram. The relatives sent me with Champaklal's brother Kantilal to explain the situation to him and take him back to Patan, but instead I stayed back in the Ashram!

Did your relatives try to force you to go back to your house?

Yes, I received many letters, messages and even telegrams. Finally Sri Aurobindo wrote a letter to them and then they never called me again. Let me show it to you.

Sri Aurobindo's Letter

“Motiba is quite happy here and she is progressing very well in her sadhana. If she goes away from here, the progress will be stopped and much of what she has gained may be lost. An intensive and concentrated sadhana once begun has to be persistently continued in the right atmosphere. If it is kept up only for a short time and then dropped for another kind of life in which the concentration is diffused and weakened, there is no likelihood of fruition. For this reason we would disapprove of her departure ”

What work did the Mother give you?

Initially ironing of clothes. I was helped by Datta, the English lady who had accompanied the Mother here. Then gradually I was given washing of clothes too. I had the privilege of washing Sri Aurobindo's clothes twice a day and this way I got his darshan also twice a day. I went to Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's bathrooms in the morning to collect the clothes for washing and in the evening took back the cleaned clothes. The Mother always gave me a sweet smile. I went to Sri Aurobindo's room in the evening to keep his dhoti there. Initially I used to place it outside his room. Later on, the Mother permitted me to place it inside. Those days Sri Aurobindo kept walking up and down in his room. As soon as I opened the door he would switch on the light and I would place his dhoti inside.

After his accident, I had to wash heaps of clothes every day. Once I fell ill and went to the Nursing Home. The Mother used to enquire about my health every day. When I came back from the Nursing Home, I went to the Mother. She blessed me saying: 'You will remain like this.' To me it meant that I would be active even in my old age, and that has come true with the Mother's Grace. I am working and moving around today.

After Sri Aurobindo's samadhi, Champaklal did not eat for five days. The Mother herself made him drink a glass of juice. I went to Sri Aurobindo's room every day for meditation after he had left his body. Our gracious Mother always allowed me to sit as long as I wished.

What other work was given to you?

We had no servants in those days. There was only self-help. I cooked for myself and Champaklal's youngest brother Bansidhar and prepared some food for Sri Aurobindo also.

What did you prepare for Sri Aurobindo?

Bhajias (pakodas) made from ajwain leaves, potato-vadas and small sweet pudlas (pancakes). He liked the pudlas very much and used to eat a good number of them at a time. Of the bhajias, potato-vadas and puris, he used to eat only two or three pieces. Once he got some kidney trouble and the Mother stopped him eating the pudlas. I made pudlas without sugar, but he did not like them. At about 4 p.m. I carried to his room walnuts, cashewnuts, almonds and raisins fried in ghee.

Once I presented to him a handkerchief woven with golden thread. He used to keep it with him on the darshan days.

Did you practise meditation during your stay in Patan?

Yes, I was meditating, I was reading the Gita and doing japa also. Once Lele the Maharashtrian yogi visited our house. He advised me to read 'Bhaktiyoga', the twelfth chapter of the Gita. He never ate the food prepared by people. He used to take fruit only. Once he stayed at our neighbour Ramlal's bungalow and said to him, 'If Moti prepares the food, I will eat it.' I then prepared food for him. Champaklal and Lele took lunch together.

Did you have any spiritual experience with Lele?

Yes, I saw light on his head when I first met him.

Any other experiences?

Yes, I had many experiences but I can't explain them to you. My experience of seeing light started at the age of seventeen. I saw light when my younger brother Mafatlal expired in Patan.

When Champaklal left his body in Jantral I saw light and heard his voice saying 'Foiba, I am leaving.' When Bansidhar was ready to leave for Jantral, he was hesitant to break the news of Champaklal's demise to me, but I said to him, 'I know it'.

I had an experience in the playground one day before Sri Aurobindo left his body. I had gone there to see the temple of the Mother arranged by the children, but I could not enjoy the programme. There was a constant feeling that Sri Aurobindo would leave his body soon.

Will you tell me about your experiences of Darshan days?

Darshan day! (*Motiba's face was charged with joy.*) How can I describe something indescribable? When Sri Aurobindo put his hand on my head, I felt a deep peace. His touch was soft, velvety, feather-like. I did not like to lift my head.

Such is our Motiba. A life full of dedication and steady sadhana for the last sixty-eight years. She is the first member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram to complete one hundred years. May she live longer! My humble salutations to Motiba on her 100th birthday.

ROSHAN DUMASIA

MUSINGS ON PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

(Continued from the issue of January 1995)

3. THE HOLOCAUST OF THE MOTHER

ON February 1, 1914 the Mother identified herself with the immanent aspect of the Divine which constitutes, pervades and creates this mass of humanity, which is all, in all, above all, yet is away from all, different from all. Then in supreme compassion she turned her gaze towards earthly beings and wrote in her diary:

... identified with Thy divine love, I contemplate the earth and its creatures, this mass of substance put into forms perpetually destroyed and renewed, this swarming mass of aggregates which are dissolved as soon as constituted, of beings who imagine that they are conscient and permanent individualities and who are as ephemeral as a breath, always alike or almost the same, in their diversity, repeating indefinitely the same desires, the same tendencies, the same appetites, the same ignorant errors.

This repetitive and revolving mass and its prime product humanity—plunged in the shadowy depths of ephemeral desires—which mostly lives for the moment, in the moment. Devoid of any broader vistas of idealism and any aspirations for greater heights, it is stuck in a sort of time-cleft, from which it cannot escape. This, in short, seems to be the outcome of the human travail of millenniums—though, as the Mother notes,

... from time to time Thy sublime light shines in a being and radiates through him over the world, and then a little wisdom, a little knowledge, a little disinterested faith, heroism and compassion penetrates men's hearts, transforms their minds and sets free a few elements from that sorrowful and implacable wheel of existence to which their blind ignorance subjects them.

Sometimes when a hero like Arjuna comes on earth, suddenly faint hearts become leonine, a new vibration of bravery sets new parameters for self-sacrifice and endurance. A Saint Jerome appears on the scene and spontaneously thousands renounce worldly life to follow the path shown by him. A *vibhuti* like Vivekananda descends on the earth and man attains a new capacity of self-realisation and, aided by his stupendous *tapas*, the downward pull of inertia and *tamas* is greatly lightened for the earthly creatures. Or an Avatar appears and brings down a new consciousness on earth. When Buddha, whom Sri Aurobindo calls "... in his action the most powerful personality that we know of as having

lived and produced results upon earth.”¹, came amidst us, millions—kings and commoners alike—got suffused by the glow of his stupendous renunciation. They left their homes and hearths to follow in the illustrious footsteps of the greatness descended in their midst. When such descents of Grace take place, for a small epoch, the worldly *Maya* loses to the Lord many of its subjects.

But has it ever been enough? The general consciousness of the earth and its creatures expands with each such descent and, no doubt, many new elements of divinity are added to the collective consciousness. Due to the greatenings brought by these descents; the sort of bravery which previously had been possible only for a hero, is today displayed by many an ordinary soldier or officer. The renunciation which was practised by a rare saint in bygone ages is now followed by legions of people in support of their causes, howsoever misguided they may be. (The Koraish affair took place only yesterday in America, when ordinary men and women gladly laid down their lives for a charlatan and now there are a hundredfold more fanatics ready to die for their Holy Wars than those involved in the Crusades of the Middle Ages. Even though an Avatar or a quick succession of Avatars like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Sri Ramakrishna, greatened the earth consciousness considerably, yet the Ignorance, the *avidyā māyā*, too, seems to be increasing in compound proportions. The greater the descents, the greater the backlash from the nether worlds. They have called to their aid the entities of the vital worlds. These hordes of hell today wander freely on the earth. The world is in the grip of a mad violence. Wars are raging everywhere. An intense intolerance for the other’s point of view, belief and faith has sparked conflicts and wars in each corner of the globe. To kill and annihilate those who dare to differ from one’s premises seems to be the order of the day. Man has become seized by a demonic need for wholesale destruction and genocide.

Fundamentalism and fanaticism rule the hearts of a large part of humanity. There seems to be no end to the localized wars being waged in several parts of the world, each conflict being more bestial and ferocious than the other. Anarchism holds sway over large parts of civilization. The result is an unprecedented increase in depravity and violence, perverse cruelty and sadism, so much so that sometimes one fears to live and to breathe. Truth and goodness are pushed to the wall.

Then, the question arises naturally: has the sacrifice of the hero, the *tapasyā* of the sage, the travail of the past Avatars been in vain? What did they leave undone or half-done for the condition to be so seemingly bereft of hope, and beyond redemption today? Is there no way for man to escape this lowly round of lives, here on the earth? Is there no cure for civilization’s multitudinous ills?

Hope surely there is, remedy there is. But for that a new self-sacrifice was demanded on the part of the Divine. This is the purpose of the descent of our Divine Mother on earth.

Sri Aurobindo has revealed the imperatives behind her coming:

... moved by the mysterious fiat of the Supreme to work out something that was there in the possibilities of the Infinite, she has consented to the great sacrifice and has put on like a mask the soul and forms of the Ignorance. But personally too she has stooped to descend here into the Darkness that she may lead it to the Light, into the Falsehood and Error that she may convert it to the Truth, into this Death that she may turn it to godlike Life, into this world-pain and its obstinate sorrow and suffering that she may end it in the transforming ecstasy of her sublime Ananda. In her deep and great love for her children she has consented to put on herself the cloak of this obscurity, condescended to bear the attacks and torturing influences of the powers of Darkness and the Falsehood, borne to pass through the portals of the birth that is a death, taken upon herself the pangs and sorrows and sufferings of the creation, since it seemed that thus alone could it be lifted to the Light and Joy and Truth and eternal Life. This is the great sacrifice called sometimes the sacrifice of the Purusha, but much more deeply the holocaust of the Prakriti, the sacrifice of the Divine Mother.²

This then is the reason of the Mother's descent on the earth. Let us for a moment try to understand the nature of this sacrifice. The Mother has said that it took Mahasaraswati a thousand years to collect the elements to prepare her mother's womb for her conception and birth. Yet throughout her ministry of 96 years on earth, she let her sacred and divine body suffer all the diseases and degradations possible on earth and she did it on purpose, deliberately. Realising the enormity of this task of redeeming the life on earth, of bringing and establishing a Poise of Consciousness, which would conquer darkness, disease and death, this reign of Falsehood which has been the mode of life here, at least in this Kaliyuga, she wrote in her diary on February 1, 1914:

But how much greater a splendour than all that have gone before, how marvellous a glory and light would be needed to draw these beings out of the horrible aberration in which they are plunged by the life of cities and so-called civilizations! What a formidable and, at the same time, divinely sweet pussance would be needed to turn aside all these wills from the bitter struggle for their selfish, mean and foolish satisfactions, to snatch them from this vortex which hides death behind its treacherous glitter, and turn them towards Thy conquering harmony!

The one thing needed, to bring this splendour, glory, and light on earth, was her total identification with Matter and its resultant inertia, decay and death. Thus only could life be transformed by the power of Divine Love. Our sweet

Mother made this supreme self-sacrifice. On February 2, 1914 she wrote in her diary:

O Lord, I would like to be so ardent a love that all lonelinesses may be filled up by it and all sorrows soothed.

O Lord, I cry unto Thee: Make me a burning brazier which consumes all suffering and transforms it into joyous light irradiating the hearts of all!...

Grant my prayer: Transform me into a brazier of pure love and boundless compassion.

Her wish was granted. Consequently she suffered in her body all that can be suffered by a human body singly, as well as all the collective ills of humanity. Once she revealed that she suffered the pain of each of the concentration camp victims. Such was her total identification with the material body that in her later years she would sometimes cry out in pain, and the cry would be heard by her children in the Ashram courtyard. In the last months of her life her body functions began to fail. Like ordinary human beings she had to take medicines and even painkillers. Surely if the Mother needed painkillers it was the whole universal pain crying out through her to be healed. Nolini Kanta Gupta has written:

Medicine in the Mother's body is not for changing the body—helping its metabolism, but for the body to change the medicines so that these may acquire new properties. Indeed all that her body takes in, even as food, tends to undergo this divine chemical change. This forms another line of the process of transformation of Matter.³

Here it is important to note what the Mother has said in this context:

And you know, you can arrive very well at an almost absolute freedom with regard to your body, so much so that you can feel nothing, nothing at all. But I no longer have even the right to exteriorise myself, just imagine! Even when I am quite unwell or things are quite difficult or even when I am left a little quiet, that is to say, at night, and I say to myself, "Oh, to go into my blissfulness"—it is not permitted. I am bound there (*Mother touches her body*), it is there, there that it is to be realised.⁴

Thus the Mother, although possessing supreme powers, sacrificed herself to the utmost. She let her body suffer because only thus—in ways we cannot fathom—she could help her evolutionary work: the ultimate divinisation of Matter. Her mental and vital sheaths were already transformed. Now she was

letting the physical face the Supramental Force with whatever consequences that Force demanded for the future of the earth. Her body held the essence of all bodies and even of the Earth-body itself.

This conscious and total sacrifice by the Mother is the only way for the redemption of humanity and the Mother, consciously, paid the full price by sacrificing herself. And if some part of humanity, sizable or small, will be saved from the destructive Furies bent on leading it to self-destruction, it will be the result of this total and conscious self-sacrifice of the Mother

And if one day, as surely it will, immortality becomes the ruling principle on earth, if the powers of Godhead flower in earthly beings, if life becomes an ascent from light to greater light, an endless progression, it will be because of the Holocaust of our sweet Mother.

(To be continued)

SHYAM KUMARI

References

- 1 *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Vol 18, p 29
- 2 *Ibid* , Vol. 25, pp 24-25
- 3 *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol 6, p 34
- 4 *Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 11, p. 8

ESSAYS ON THE MAHĀBHĀRATA (IX)

(Continued from the issue of January 1995)

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

AFTER her strong-worded attack on Yudhiṣṭhira's policy of forgiveness, Draupadī hits at another aspect of his nature, his absolute adherence to the *dharma*: "In this world a man never obtains virtue (*śrīyam*) with Law and gentleness, if this insufferable disaster overtook you, Bhārata, which neither you did deserve nor these august brothers of yours!" The miserable state in which Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas find themselves, seems to prove that Yudhiṣṭhira had followed a wrong inspiration in his action. But this argument is unfair from a philosophical point of view, for it presupposes that right action always entails comfortable living. Unlike Sītā, Draupadī is not able to reconcile herself to living an ascetic type of life in the wilderness. She is a woman in revolt, moved by the desire to return to her palace and play the role for which she was born. If we find Damayantī or Sītā surrendering to their husbands and quietly suffering whatever hardships come to them, Draupadī never for a second accepts her fall from the position of a queen. Yudhiṣṭhira's obsession with his *dharma*, which seems to make him blind towards her fate, is a constant provocation for Draupadī. The following quotation sums up her whole bitter reaction towards his attitude:

Then as now they knew that to you nothing was dearer than the Law, were it life itself. Your kingdom was for the Law, your life was for the Law, and the Brahmins, elders, and Gods knew it well. *You would, I think, abandon Bhīmasena and Arjuna, the twin sons of Mādri. and myself, before you abandoned the law.*⁴⁶

There is something strikingly true in Draupadī's remark. We cannot forget, after all, that it was only due to her own intervention that they had left the assembly hall as free persons after the first game of dice. This is now perhaps one of the worst moments in Yudhiṣṭhira's life. During the game he was half paralyzed and everything around him was just like a mad dream. Now he is fully conscious and Draupadī places a mirror before him and attacks the very ideal which is the foundation of his life: a strict and absolute adherence to the *dharma*.

After having attacked Yudhiṣṭhira personally, Draupadī proceeds with a broadside on the *dharma* as such. She quotes a well-known principle: "The Law, when well protected, protects the king who guards the Law, so I hear from the noble ones, but I find it does not protect *you*." Indeed, Yudhiṣṭhira was a just king and he took proper care of all his duties. He treated everyone in a right way and did not despise inferiors. The rituals were properly performed, the Brahmins

honoured, the priests richly remunerated. In spite of his excellent performance, Yudhiṣṭhira has come to grief: Where is Dharma now to protect him who is in such misery? This state of things makes Draupadī adopt a fatalistic perspective in the following text. Since one cannot observe any such rule or system in the world that righteous people are rewarded with happiness and prosperity, whereas the evil are punished with misery and poverty, one must assume that everything depends just on the sweet will of the 'Creator' (*dhātr*).⁴⁷ Draupadī's philosophical discourse can be taken as a classical formulation of a divine determinism. The passage is marked all through by its high philosophical standard as well as a great number of well-chosen similes, all of them meant to illustrate the involuntary character of man's movements and actions: man is like 'a wooden puppet', like 'a bird tied to a string', 'a pearl strung on a string', 'a bull held by the nose rope', 'a tree that has fallen from the bank into the middle of a river':

It is the Lord Creator alone who sets down everything for the creatures, happiness and unhappiness, pleasure and sorrow... These creatures, hero among men, are like wooden puppets that are manipulated; he makes body and limbs move. Pervading like ether all these creatures, Bhārata, the Lord disposes here whatever is good or evil. Man, restrained like a bird that is tied to a string, is not master of himself; remaining in the Lord's power, he is master of neither himself nor others. Like a pearl strung on a string, like a bull held by the nose rope, man follows the command of the Creator, consisting in him, entrusted to him. At no time whatever is man independent, like a tree that has fallen from the bank into the middle of a river. Man knows nothing, he does not control his own happiness or misery; pushed by the Lord he may either go to heaven or to hell. As straw tops fall under the force of a strong wind, so all creatures fall under the power of the Creator, Bhārata. Yoking himself to deeds noble and evil, God roams through the creatures and is not identified. This body they call 'field' is merely the Creator's tool by which the ubiquitous Lord impels us to action that ends in either good or evil.⁴⁸

If one adopts this viewpoint, then everything is God's *līlā*. In Draupadī's words: "Joining and unjoining them, the capricious blessed Lord plays with the creatures like a child with its toys."

Provided that this is so, one can only wonder why the Lord is so careless with his creatures, allowing the evil Duryodhana to live his luxurious palace life, while the Pāṇḍavas are suffering in exile, concludes Draupadī. "I condemn the Creator, Pārtha, who allows such outrages." If God is responsible for everything, rather than man, and if evil fruits go to the doer of evil action, then God himself "is tainted by the evil he has done". Or else, if this law is not true (if evil does not pursue its doer), then "mere power is the cause of everything, and I bemoan powerless folk!"

Draupadī ends her long discourse with this uncomfortable conclusion: either God is guilty and responsible for the evil that has befallen the Pāṇḍavas and

herself, or else there is no moral law in the universe and everything is just a question of power. Then Yudhishthira is to be blamed because he is powerless.

Before we proceed to present Yudhishthira's response to Draupadī's "beautiful, well-phrased and polished" speech, we may note that there is a logical mistake in her argument. For if God disposes everything, if he makes man good or bad, happy or unhappy, then it is not the Pāndavas' merit that they are good nor Duryodhana's fault that he is evil: God has assigned these roles to them. Consequently, there is also no reason to expect reward for the one and punishment for the other party, for if there is no scope for personal freedom, for a good choice or a bad choice in life, then there cannot be any question of 'deserving' anything, be it luck or ill-luck, happiness or unhappiness. Only one could blame God for the existence of evil and suffering as such. This is another philosophical problem which is not under discussion here. But how does Yudhishthira react towards Draupadī's manifold allegations? Is the evidence against his policy of '*dharmaḥ kṣamā*' not too strong?

In his answer we find Yudhishthira not in the least shaken. He defends uprightly his principle of loyalty to the *dharma* under all circumstances. It is to be pursued for its own sake, not for its fruits. Yudhishthira's speech has a classical ring in it, a noble philosophy of life finds expression in well-chosen terms. We find that the *dharma*rāja is nowhere else so sovereign and convincing as in the following passage:

The words you have spoken and we have heard, Yājñasenī, are beautiful, well-phrased and polished; but what you are saying is heresy (*nāstikyam*). *I do not act in quest of the fruits of the Law, I give because I must! I sacrifice because I must!* Whether it bears fruit or not, I do... according to my ability, what a person who has a household is beholden to do. I obey the Law... not because of its rewards, but in order not to transgress the traditions and to look to the conduct of the strict. By its nature my mind is beholden to the Law. He who wants to milk the Law does not obtain its reward⁴⁹

Yudhishthira tells Draupadī that it is dangerous to reject *dharma*, because in that case man becomes an animal, he "ends setting up himself as the standard". Great seers such as Vyāsa, Vasīṣṭha or Nārada found perfection through following the Law. Law is the only 'ship to heaven' If it is not obeyed, man goes to hell. Moreover, it is not true that practice of *dharma* does not bear fruits. Yudhishthira cites Draupadī's own birth as an example: she and her brother Dhṛṣṭadyumna were born after a *yajña* which was performed according to the prescribed Law. However, the fruition of one's own acts, good or evil, is not always clear and visible, it is often mysterious "The wizardry of the Gods is obscure," comments Yudhishthira. Nevertheless, one should not have doubts, for

“this is the eternal Law: that acts yield fruit.” Yudhiṣṭhira concludes his rejoinder by telling Draupadī that she should not censure the Lord of all beings. but stand humble before him by whose grace man attains immortality.

With this sincere and convincing statement of his life-philosophy Yudhiṣṭhira has put Draupadī on the defensive. She quickly asserts now that she did not intend to censure the Lord, but that she was just speaking out of deep grief. Even while continuing with her complaints, she takes a different line of argumentation this time. She does not accuse Yudhiṣṭhira any more of his strict adherence to the *dharma*, but propounds a philosophy of dynamic action in general terms. All creatures that are born must act, only “rocks and the like live without acting”. Through action man maintains himself and sows the fruits that are to be harvested in the future. “We do not know of anyone making a living in this world without work.”

Draupadī goes then into the philosophies of fatalism and accidentalism. Both these philosophies may lead to a rather passive attitude in life, since either everything is pre-determined and will happen anyhow, or else everything happens by chance which makes a human effort to control events of life equally futile. If one would follow one of these two views, one would therefore go to perdition sooner or later. What is important, says Draupadī, is the spirit to act (*karmabuddhi*). Her observations are quite valuable:

The man who believes that everything in the world is fate and the one who professes that it is chance are both apostate; it is the spirit to act that is extolled. He who obediently sits by fate and sleeps happily without acting, that hedonist of malicious spirit will sink like a jar in water. Likewise, the believer in chance, who, though capable of acting, fails to act will not keep his seat too long and live as long as a feeble man without a protector.⁵⁰

In the following passage Draupadī gives a highly developed philosophy of the law of *karma*, of action and its fruits. Basically, her position is that man determines his own present and future by his own effort and action. If a man is lucky and things come to him, it would be wrong to say that it was just chance. Whatever man obtains, whether it be from chance (*hathāt*), ‘divine luck’ (*daivāt*), nature (*svabhāvāt*) or his own work (*karmanah*), all this is actually the fruit of previous works. The function of the Creator (*dhātṛ*) is to distribute the fruits of what men have previously done. So far Draupadī’s philosophy is quite clear. We have here a viewpoint of human freedom for action with an element of divine intervention regarding the arrangement of the consequences of one’s action. But then Draupadī swerves back into her previous philosophy of absolute determinism when she says:

When a man does anything, whether good or bad, know that it was

ordained by the Creator, arising as the fruit of acts done before. In any act this body is but the tool of this Creator and as he moves man, so man acts, helplessly. The Great Lord, who enjoins us to this or that task, makes all creatures act, Kaunteya, whether they want it or not.⁵¹

After some short discourse on the virtue of well-planned action Draupadī discusses the philosophical issue of determinism and accidentalism. She makes a distinction now between three different viewpoints: 1) those who believe that everything happens by chance (*hathena*); 2) those who hold that things happen by fate (*diṣṭena*); 3) and the viewpoint that everything is caused by human effort (*pūruṣaprayatnayam*). Others again are not satisfied with any one of these positions. Actually, we can only perceive the chain or series of events (*santati*), without knowing exactly whether a particular happening is actuated by fate, chance or immediate human effort. Draupadī offers then a kind of synthesis:

Some come from chance, some from fate, some from one's own doing; and it is thus that a man gets the fruit, there is no fourth factor involved: so profess capable men, wise in the principles.

After this clarification Draupadī quotes Manu to return to her proper concern, reminding Yudhiṣṭhira of the need to undertake something: "The act has got to be done!"

The work has to be undertaken, says Manu; the work has to be undertaken without regard to its fruits, adds Draupadī in the spirit of the Gītā. If man sits idle, nothing will happen. He has to contribute his own effort and then wait for other circumstances to collaborate towards success or failure. The outcome is not decisive, his effort as such alone counts. She cites the example of a farmer who ploughs the earth, sows the seed and then waits for the rain. Even if the monsoon does not come, nobody will blame the farmer for a bad harvest. Similarly, Yudhiṣṭhira should take up the challenge and fight for the kingdom:

Suppose we fail, it will nowhere be held that it is our own fault; this is what a wise man keeps in view, and he will not blame himself for his failure. If the result is not achieved, Bhārata, even though you have acted, there is no cause for despair; for there are two outcomes to an act. There is success and there is failure; but failure to act is a different thing.⁵²

Draupadī expounds a sublime philosophy here which prepares well for the Gītā's teaching of disinterested action. She mentions at the end of her discourse that this teaching was imparted to her father (Drupada) by a Brahmin and that it was first propounded by Brhaspati. Unfortunately, Yudhiṣṭhira does not give his

opinion on her statements this time, because Bhīma happens to join Draupadī at this stage in her campaign for war, using strong and merciless arguments which we will summarize by giving a few quotations from his long speech:

“While we looked on in obedience to you, our kingdom was stolen, and even Śakra could not have taken it, protected as it was by Arjuna and his Gāṇḍīva.”

“It was a mistake that we did not strike down the Dhārtarāṣṭras but waited on your command, and the mistake is now hurting us ”

“You are Law, and crying Law! You emaciate yourself always with your vows; but is it possible, King, that despair has prompted you to the life of a eunuch?”

“A Law that is a scourge for both ourselves and our allies is a vice, King; it is not Law, it is wrong Law!”⁵³

Bhīma then starts a long discourse on *artha*, *kāma* and *dharma*. But we consider this discourse a later interpolation because it does not fit at all into his emotional outburst. His deliberations are here of highly theoretical and academical character. In the same way, Yudhiṣṭhira’s answer (starting at 35.1) is of a doubtful origin. He says here that he planned to take away the whole kingdom from Duryodhana by gambling. We pointed out earlier that this too looks like a later addition, presumably by a poet who was not in close touch with Yudhiṣṭhira’s real nature. Therefore, we will not go into this lengthy answer in which the Dharmarāja insists on keeping his promise to stay in exile and waiting for better times.

After Yudhisthira’s (probably unauthentic) rejoinder, Bhīma resumes his lecture and tries once more to goad his elder brother into action:

There is work to be done, tiger among men: why sit there like a lazy python? You have wit, courage, knowledge, and birth! You who want to conceal us—do you want to conceal the Himālaya with a handful of straw?

This time Yudhiṣṭhira uses a strategical argument in his rejoinder. He points out that the Kauravas have powerful heroes on their side and they are backed by a number of allies. Droṇa, Bhīma and Kṛpa will not hesitate to fight for the Kauravas, even though they have equal feelings for the Pāṇdavās. “They will doubtless earn their royal rice-ball ” Yudhiṣṭhira believes the Kauravas cannot be defeated. He is especially worried over Karna’s superiority in archery. The boisterous Bhīma is silenced by these arguments. Then suddenly Vyāsa appears on the scene and consoles Yudhiṣṭhira. He proposes to impart to him a secret knowledge (*vidyā*) called ‘conjunction’. Afterwards Yudhiṣṭhira should give the knowledge to Arjuna who would make it fruitful by approaching Indra and

Rudra to obtain powerful weapons from them. With these weapons he would be able to achieve great exploits. Vyāsa gives the Mantra to Yudhiṣṭhira who repeats it again and again. Later he imparts this knowledge to Arjuna and sends him to the heavens to approach the Gods for military help. Here ends the story of Draupadī's and Bhīma's debate with Yudhiṣṭhira.

The initial starting-point of our enquiry in this chapter was a comparison of the principles of forgiveness and revenge. In between we also had a valuable discourse on determinism and accidentalism in which Draupadī expressed her despair over the injustice in a world where bad people prosper while righteous citizens suffer untold hardship. At the end we find Yudhiṣṭhira yielding under the combined pressure of Draupadī and Bhīma, giving up his mere philosophical approach of pacifism and responding with practical arguments. Then finally Vyāsa helps him overcome his anxiety by giving him a powerful *mantra* meant to enable Arjuna to acquire greater strength from the Gods. Thus the debate ends with some kind of compromise: action there will be, but only later, at a proper time. In effect, Draupadī's arguments for *tejas* have been justified by Vyāsa who provides practical help in this direction. Yudhiṣṭhira surrenders to his grandfather Vyāsa as later he surrenders to his cousin, Kṛṣṇa. The trend of the Mahābhārata is quite clear: pacifism is a worthy philosophy, but it needs to be left behind if an acute situation demands it. *Adharma* must not be allowed to prevail.

(To be continued)

WILFRIED HUCHZERMAYER

Notes

46 Mahābhārata, 3 31 4-6

47 V Buitenen translates *dhātṛ* by 'Placer', but I have substituted 'Creator' in this text.

48 Mahābhārata, 3 31 21-30

49 Mahābhārata, 3 32 1-5

50 Mahābhārata, 3 33 11-13

51 Mahābhārata, 3 33 20-22

52 Mahābhārata, 3 33 46-47

53 Mahābhārata, 3 34

THE IMPONDERABLES

IN the great Trojan War it was the *moira* of Achilles to die soon after he had killed Hector. There was a choice available to him no doubt, and he could have avoided this fate of his by not fighting; but then he would have lived, though for long years, an unfamed, even an inglorious, life. Imagine also then for a moment that he would have actually preferred to do so, with more love for his life than for winning the glory and renown of a conquering hero. The result of the Trojan War could have been different and there would not have been the splendid dawn of Greek Reason. There would not have been Aeneas sailing to distant lands and founding the manifold majesty of the Roman Empire; surely the world-events would have taken some other turn. Does that make Achilles's action crucially pivotal in yoking Ilion to Hellas, in bringing Europe and Asia together in the early hour of civilisation? Or is it that history is absolutely linear in its unfoldment of sequences, creating its own apt heroes and its own moulders and shapers of destiny? But Homeric Fate is impersonal, and "changes not nor falters", and is mightier than even the Olympian Gods, and embodies a universal principle in all earthly and heavenly operations.

This Fate looks cruel and oppressive, relentless in its functioning, unmindful of the individual's sentiments and hopes and longings. Virgil saw in it the hostile will of the gods and Spinoza came to the conclusion that for us there is no such thing as free-will. Or else, *à la* Omar Khayyam,

The moving finger writes, and having writ
Moves on; not all thy piety nor wit
Can lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.

In this governance of Necessity nothing is left to chance and if it appears to be a chance there is a design behind it which works its way out with assured certainty in spite of all the baffling circumstances. Call it Fate, Necessity, Destiny, or by any other name, it is the supreme Logos, which in its wisdom sees the final Good and arranges in the dynamism of its movement whatever is necessary to accomplish its purpose. This Logos, or the Vedic Ritam, is the creative Truth unfolding in the universal and in the individual, recognising the characters of their respective laws, the Law of the supreme Reality as an aspect of manifestation here. Therefore, there is nothing arbitrary and a play of possibilities is allowed its full sway only for the enrichment of that willed Truth-urge in it and through it.

Does it then mean that Achilles could not have but participated in the Trojan War and killed Hector, notwithstanding his known death afterwards? Was his *moira* connected somehow with the supreme Logos preparing to bring

together Iliad and Hellas—the universal truth-rhythm determining and determined by the individual truth-rhythm? In fact, we should posit three wills—the individual's, that of universal Nature, and the will of the supreme Logos. In the ultimate analysis the last is the determinative but it has also to accept the other two in its modalities. It is this process which makes history non-linear, a mathematical function involving innumerable parameters with their own push or pull and with their own conflicting demands and claims, an interaction of a complex and almost unresolvable kind. If so, then, personalities and episodes may look speciously magnified, as if blown out of proportion, and their role and their importance inconsequential or else only puppetal. Yet that is not true and the Mahabharata makes the point rightly that fate cannot be fulfilled without human effort. Each individual carries his own law and the supreme Logos or Will appears through his destiny which he foresees and in which he afterwards exercises his free-will. When there is a difference between the two, the result is—in Biblical language—the Fall.

That was Adam's tragedy. No doubt, Satan was successful in tempting Eve with his many wiles and sweet persuasive arguments; his cajolery and his inveigling her with charmed words achieved what he had set out to do. He wanted to take revenge upon the Almighty and the one way that he found to be practical and effective was to "waste his whole creation or possess" by seducing the new race called Man. He discovered the weakest link and started working upon it. The strategy was flawless and the guiles were impeccable, though darkly so, and were sure in their intent and result, like the leap of a beast on its victim. When he found Eve alone in a part of the garden, he made her eat the fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge; yet, innocently enough, she offers the same to Adam and he, though first amazed at her act, "resolves through vehemence of love" to eat it and perish with her. The penalty for eating this fruit was the penalty of death and they are made to vacate this glorious Paradise for their transgression of the command. Temptation may be pardonable but disobedience has to reap its disaster. Adam's mistake was that he did not align his free-will with that of God's. He was forewarned of a possible danger and of the consequences following it. Ultimately, however, his "vehemence of love" proved to be calamitous, bringing "into this World a world of woe". Adam was torn between two loyalties and perhaps it is good that he proved—thus initiating this new race of Man, faithful to his spouse rather than to God.

Had Eve not fallen to temptation, there would not have been a world of woe in this World. But the issue of disobedience is more serious. At this juncture Adam had two options: forgo Eve in obedience to the command and leave the consequences for the Almighty to sort out; or else accept the penalty of death. He exercised the second, sacrificing the state of blessedness in favour of love as if the two were now incompatible with each other.

But then was this Fall planned as a part of the creation of "a new race called

Man” according to the ancient Prophecy? Through Adam’s destiny did the Will of God work? Certainly, the possibility of the Fall was anticipated at one particular stage and warnings were issued accordingly; guards were also put to see that no intruder comes to spoil this World without woe and without death. But the “entrance of Satan could not be by them prevented”. It was as if the envisaged possibility was allowed its full sway to exhaust itself. If there is “a special providence in the fall of a sparrow”, then how could this Fall remain unprovidential?

There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we may

and therefore we need not be taken aback by this inevitable; it is only then that the ransom for Man’s disobedience could be paid; it is only then that, as an act of unsurpassable grace, the Son of God would incarnate himself here and, satisfying the ends of divine Justice, redeem this creature’s mortal lot. That is how Milton would explain or rationalise to Man the not-so-mysterious ways of God. The story of *Paradise Lost* runs in a single strain towards its end and there are no puzzling imponderables in it, no too anxious moments to hold our breath back in stupefaction or exasperation. Nor are there deeper or subtler thoughts or poetic echoes calling us to widening realms of mind or to the loveliness or grandeur of another aesthetic world, for instance, as that of Valmiki. His style is grand, his voice is an organ-voice, his verse has a powerful architecture, his theme involves great actions and great issues on a universal scale; in spite of all this his epic lacks, as Johnson would say, human interest and is cold and the warmth of emotion is never touchingly genuine—at the most there is “he the faltering measure felt”. It is the success-story of a modern commercial establishment engaging highly efficient management and financial system and gifted and competent professionals pursuing the ends of manufacturing technologies; there are no imponderables in it and no ultimate depths are stirred and all is matter-of-fact data-based analysis and faculties occupied in justification of the rational approach, taking care of the risk-factors too. Milton writes essentially with the poetic intelligence, but even there fails to convince us always. Thus when Adam—he appears to be a contemporary Adam always puzzling, and puzzled—raises the question of celestial motions involving the conflict between the geo- and the helio-centric astronomies, Raphael pulls him up and exhorts him to inquire of things more worthy of knowledge:

To ask or search I blame thee not, for Heav’n
Is as the Book of God before thee set,
Wherein to read his wondrous Works, and learn
His Seasons, Hours, or Days, or Months, or Years,

This to attain, whether Heav'n move or Earth,
 Imports not, if thou reck'n right, the rest
 From Man or Angel the great Architect
 Did wisely to conceal, and not divulge
 His secrets to be scann'd by them who ought
 Rather admire... (Book VIII)

Milton thus easily escapes the wrath of the hostile Church but leaves for us a poor Adam who prefers to abandon perplexing thoughts that "interrupt the sweet of Life". This Miltonic Adam could not have but fallen. In the process, by building such a measure of Man, he scales down considerably his otherwise "convincing" Satan, or the Almighty himself as the jealous possessor of all the secrets. He raises the question of "Fixt fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute" but it gets "in wandering mazes lost"; he makes us believe that Necessity and Chance approach not his Almighty and that what the Almighty wills is Fate. That sounds somewhat strange when the Arch-Enemy is present and is active with his guiles and with his machinations. There ought to be imponderables in the creation at such a stage and their non-recognition is to build up facile faith or else offer soporific reasons to rationalise the ways of God to men. That is the problem with mental poetry and, though there are at times "Those thoughts that wander through Eternity", the soul of sheer aesthetic delight languishes and remains unsatisfied. High-pitched expressions and loud arguments cannot be a substitute for the "inspired and inevitable word" that carries with it the breath of another sun-bright world to enliven and illumine our quarters from all the directions. The Rishihood that grasps the imponderables in their revealing creativity is absent in the poet of *Paradise Lost*.

In contrast with this is the Rishihood of the poet of the Gita. It belongs to the order of solar beings who always drink the sweet and sparkling waters of divine Saraswati; his is a sonship that by its native right possesses the luminous Word and it is this Word's revelatory light that he throws on problems of this world as well as on the occult-spiritual workings of universal Nature. Consider then the imponderable on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The two armies are standing in fierce array and the call has been given and the frightening conchs have been blown. But suddenly Arjuna is seized by a sense of despondency; he sees his respectable elders and teachers and his intimate kith and kin on the other side and, against the law of his nature, his heart shrinks from this "holiday of fight". He is rebuked for his unmanly mood of grief and pity and is told in no uncertain terms that he must immediately discard this unAryan recoil from his duty as a fighter. Arjuna must exterminate the enemy. Is it because the Time-Spirit has already done it on a subtle plane? And what happens if Arjuna refuses?

What we witness on the battlefield is that the charioteer of the hero has

assumed a terrible Form of Dread, *rupam ugram*, with the splendour of a thousand suns and with countless arms and stomachs and mouths and eyes and has no beginning and no end. He has already shaken the worlds, and killed the warriors, and caused panic and terror in the hearts of men. The Spirit as the creative Destroyer reveals to Arjuna his fiercer aspects even as he declares: "I am Time the waster of the peoples arisen and increased whose will in My workings is here to destroy nations. Even without thee all those warriors shall be not, who are ranked in the opposing armies Therefore, arise, get thee glory, conquer thy enemies and enjoy an opulent kingdom. By Me and none other already even are they slain, do thou become the occasion only, O Savyasachin. Slay, by Me who are slain, Drona, Bhishma, Jayadratha, Karna and other heroic fighters; be not pained or troubled. Fight, thou shalt conquer the adversary in the battle." (*Essays on the Gita*, p. 370) Arjuna did not seem to matter for the result and yet he was necessary as a pretext, *nimitta*, for the Time-Spirit's work. This particular aspect of Krishna's Avatarhood in the most unusual form of Dread, bright with a thousand suns, has already accomplished the task of destroying all that opposes his Will and of consigning the Past to flames. But the action is done in the occult and the battle on the physical plane has yet to be fought. Although of a secondary nature, yet this battle is not a shadow battle, and there are imponderables to tilt the scales one way or the other. Towards that purpose the Avatar in the human form has to devise his instrumentation and work out his methodology. If destruction of evil is one aspect of the Avatarhood, its other aspect is to arrest the decline of Dharma, the truth-values that govern human conduct, the order of life based on fundamental principles of the spirit, the deeper harmony that supports creation. He has to establish a yet higher level of consciousness as his true work leading towards the fuller manifestation of divinity in the terrestrial organisation. In this divine work Arjuna has a certain role to play and his true soul cannot plead despondency when the good for the Kshatriya is to fight the righteous battle. The warrior-prince has to pick up the bow and shoot out deadly arrows at the foe and vanquish him. The reward of an opulent kingdom has already been offered to him and his shirking from the duty would mean forfeiting his own honour and incurring the sin of a good job not done. Plenty of spiritual metaphysics is also put forward to dispose of the ethical argument abhorrent of killing one's own preceptors and one's own kith and kin, what Arjuna in his depressed state considered to be a dreadful act, *ghoram karma*. His Aryanhood cannot sag at the moment of truth, when engaged in *dharma saṅgrāma* or the holy war in which the abiding values of existence themselves are at stake; it is his responsibility, a bounden duty, to defend these when threatened with being trampled by the retrograde forces of the universe. Nor can this mood of abandonment be considered to have come from heaven, nor can it lead to heaven, "this dejection, this stain of darkness of the soul in the hour of difficulty and peril". It is foreign to his nature, to the creed of the heroic

fighter, and therefore more harmful to him than he can assess or perceive. He would slay his own soul in the process. The Avatar has therefore to take care of both the aspects: on the occult plane exterminate powers and personalities that support and prolong falsehood and on the physical, recognising the necessity of the instrument, solve his difficulties and encourage his participation.

But the real question is. In the scheme of things has a possible situation of the chosen instrument not rising to the occasion been anticipated and an alternative figured out to meet the contingency? That is the imponderable of the Gita and, though the spirit as the Destroyer has already slain Drona and Bhishma and Jayadratha and Karna, the slain would remain in a state of half-animation because the hand that should strike them on the battlefield refused to do so; though slain, the action of slaying has yet to happen. If this participation from the chosen instrument is not forthcoming, does then the work of the Avatar get frustrated? In the event of such a happening, does he carry some other plans of operation because he must accomplish that for which he did loose himself forth into birth? Or else is there an aspect of some transcendent Design in the entire action attending to each and every minute detail—an elaborate working of the supreme Necessity or glorious Ananke, leaving nothing to Chance?

What happens if Arjuna succumbs irretrievably to the weakness of human nature in spite of the assuring words of his divine Guide and Friend to whom he has surrendered fully, in whom he has taken refuge as a disciple and from whom he seeks enlightenment in his genuine Aryan moments? Arjuna missing the soteriological opportunity of fighting as a Kshatriya may not be quite important, but the concern is of the Avatar's work!

But the Avatar does not come as a business manager with schemes and alternatives and contingency proposals, loaded with ifs and buts and attaching different weights and measures, discarding now one possibility and promoting then the other. Such an anthropomorphic view will be the superposition of our ideas and standards on the One who is ever free in his vastest and swiftest movement in the working of his supreme Nature, Para Prakriti. With whatever intention he comes here, he comes with the necessary Truth-Force and looses himself forth in the play of the cosmic possibilities, he plunges into these flood-streams and accepts all circumstances and takes on him their burden, and their oppositions too, and meets their counter-currents, and in the dynamism of this Truth-Force, the Will he has put presently into the operations, accomplishes his tasks. They may seem to us wasteful and not very efficiently performed and meandering through the mazes of life full of accidents and full of uncertainties; but they have finally the authenticity which does not belong to this world of doubt and despair but to the world where the truth-rhythm, the working of the Vedic Ritam, carries in it the inevitability of its intended consequences in all these terrestrial modalities. The issues then belong to Nature and God and are operationally carried out through the instrumentation of the apt and receptive

individual: through his destiny the ends of the supreme Will are in time met and a new order in things established. That should be the purport of the appearance of the Avatar.

Does the Avatar accomplish all that for which he takes the human birth? Such a question assumes particular importance when he has to depend upon the capabilities and limitations of his brave and elite instruments, the *avant garde* of the spirit. Whatever be his demands and needs, the Avatar has to grant complete freedom of will to his chosen or desirable hero with the possible choice of even refusing his gifts and boons so dear to one in life, here or elsewhere. But, in the event of Arjuna refusing collaboration, Krishna, without doubt for his own great reasons, surely would not retract from his work and return to his supreme Abode unfulfilled. He has to find some other way out; he has to find some other person though that person may not be as well qualified as Arjuna and though the work may not perhaps be as well done. Would it then not imply that whatever was achieved with Arjuna's willing collaboration had on it also the stamp of his limitations and imperfections—that the Avatar did not really achieve all that he could or should have? Is there such a stigma of the instrument's limitations and shortcomings on the Avatar's work? But, luckily, his work and its results do not depend upon the willingness or otherwise of man, to change whom he really comes here; he has no illusions about man's littleness and his incapacity to participate in any decisive way—he is needed not so much to promote the Avatar's effort but rather to receive its fruits in the form of greater light, truth, joy and harmony in his life, and for these he has to be ready and receptive. On the contrary, if he turns out to be a tool in the dark hands of the hostile forces, opposes and offers resistance, then his destruction is certain as was invited by the Duryodhana hordes in the War of Righteousness.

But when it comes to the general and wider question of radical transformation of humanity and earth-nature, the issues are somewhat different. The Avatar of the Gita was not immediately concerned with them and with humanity's collaboration; in a way of speaking, these considerations were not of such a priority on the agenda. The principle of approach, however, remains unaltered. There is no imperative, for instance, that the present human civilisation should be preserved—and certainly will not be if there is opposition and resistance to the supreme Will—and human nature allowed to perpetuate itself in its stupidity. Change it must and the only choice that is available is whether it will be "by destruction or a new construction". That is the new imponderable—not quite of the Gita but of the Avatadic concern all the same. If the three elements—Man, Nature and God—have to come into a fuller and enlarged play, with the possibilities of the joyous divine manifestation in the terrestrial matrix, then the concerns change in a most significant manner; they become more sharp to encounter yet sharper challenges. They have to tackle the ubiquitous Past that has a firm, in fact a strangling, grip on the individual's

conduct as well as on the collectivity's. As the individual rises in the scale of development his importance and his difficulties also grow in a baffling proportion. And in the case of the collectivity this entire Past seems almost to be ineffaceable; it stands as an adverse and atavistic Force on the path of progress. Indeed

Hard is it to persuade earth-nature's change

and neither is the task of the world-redeemer easy. The imponderable then stares at us again, magnified to the cosmic dimension with the possibility of either destruction or new creation. Another moment of crisis has arisen and another Avatar has to arrive on the scene. In this context it should also be recognised, as pointed out by Sri Aurobindo, that though historically Krishna, the eighth Avatar according to the Puranic description, precedes Buddha, actually in terms of his spiritual contributions it is the other way round. The tenth and the last Avatar, Kalki, has to carry farther this work initiated by Krishna and bring it to epiphanic fulfilment in the earth-process. Will this involve new imponderables? It must, as long as the Past is present.

In Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* there are a couple of absorbing imponderables: the first meeting of Savitri with Satyavan itself and then the visit of Narad to Aswapati's palace to make known that the death of Satyavan would take place one year after their marriage. There is also the Vishada Yoga of Savitri with moments of anxiety when in the mood of utter dejection she forgets her inner mission, the work for which she took the human birth. The fated day is approaching fast and Savitri has not yet gathered the necessary strength, by doing Yoga and discovering her soul, to meet the doom waiting at her doorstep. But she hears a Voice commanding her to get ready and face the cruel enemy and overpower him with her divine Might. She, however, is in too human a state, like Arjuna, and pleads that there is no use in seeking help from the unconcerned gods of heaven and that her strength has been taken away from her. The Voice does not give up and reminds Savitri that she had come with "a mandate from eternity" and that the kindled power in her body should not fail. Savitri accepts the command-like advice and begins her Shakti Yoga. The imponderable is: what if she had not begun it? She had come here as a labourer of God and, had she ignored the command of the Voice, she would have returned to God with her task undone. This task undone would have meant a great failure in the Creation itself and would have invited another Pralaya or Dissolution. But there was seated in her inner being the Power who immediately understood the far ominous implication of this weak moment, the unAryan moment, in Savitri's humanhood; it at once came forward and answered affirmatively, thus saving the situation. Here it looks as though adequate precautions were taken against the possible contingencies, with the threefold

involvement of Savitri in the assigned divine task. It may also seem as if the human Savitri was coaxed, as was Arjuna, into action; however, there is a very fundamental difference between the two individuals. In both the cases the supreme Will had to work itself out through the destiny of these individuals, but in one it was the temporary buckling of the human spirit while in the other it was the humanity put on by the divine soul that had to be removed.

In the Narad-imponderable the question that has to be asked is: If Narad had not visited Aswapati and made known the year-later death of Satyavan, would not an altogether different sequence of events have been there leading to an altogether different result, something other than what was intended? Was there any causal relationship or imperative in this visit of his? Was he in any way instrumental in this future death of Savitri's lover? Perhaps her lover would not have died had he married someone else. But if the Satyavan-Savitri meeting was a destined meeting, then the heavenly sage can be absolved of the charge of bringing that death here or of having his hand in it in some way or other. What is important to recognise is that he knows Satyavan's death is, for some mysterious reason, intimately connected with his marriage with Savitri; he is also more specific that only twelve months are given for Satyavan and Savitri to be together as a married couple before the arrival of the doom. This knowledge of the doom's arrival acts as a driving force and, impelled by a great and luminous positive urge, he himself rushes, without wasting a minute, to make it known to the most concerned. The purpose is to "steel" the will of Savitri in affirming her love and in her resolve to carry out the work for which she took this human birth. Would it have failed if Narad had not come? Certainly, his coming acted as a sure catalytic agent but its absence would not have altered in any way the final outcome. The importance of Narad's action lies in aligning his own will with the supreme Will and participating in it in a more dynamic manner; he contributed his mighty bit by making a truth-perceived choice and by putting himself on the side of the divine Shakti. He became her good instrument.

The destined meetings of the lovers in the thick Shalwa woods is the most perfect imponderable in *Savitri*. If Narad's visit is shrouded by the working of inscrutable Fate, we see in the present instance an element of incomprehensible Chance coming into play, but Chance operating with an utmost precision of the Mysterious.

The golden bride Savitri goes from place to place riding her carven car; her father has bidden her to make a search on her own for the life-partner who would awaken her heart to its true meaning of happiness in the complementarity of each other. She travels through lands and kingdoms and countrysides, and through wildernesses, visiting the royal palaces or sacred holy places or hermitages of the ascetics rich in tapasya. On this long road she is always driven by some inner prompting, even while she is attentive to the thousand voices of this multi-hued world. But the end of her journeying is not yet in sight. Day after

day and month after month she travels on with hope and expectation in her breast to find the one who, according to her inner conviction, surely dwells secret in some conclave of the king-seers. These king-seers have fulfilled themselves in a life of hectic speed and are now engaged in search of a sunlit world radiating bright peace. Savitri hastens through the deep mystical lands and offers obeisances to the high-souled hermits and seers and sages, they who in their hearts carry "the splendour that has lit the suns" and who by their spiritual practices support the movements of the gods bringing benignances to this afflicted earth. The hills and valleys are serene and emeraldly rapturous in their presence and it is through it that Savitri's hope journeys, like a true cherished dream. Along the riverbanks listening to quiet music or across the trance of lush happy fields

Or mid green musing of woods and rough-browed hills,
 In the grove's murmurous bee-air humming wild
 Or past the long leaping voice of silver floods (p. 379)

she speeds on in her quest which seems to be a part of the timeless Unknown itself. The expectant joys of the morning and the diamond-pure intimations of the noon and the sentinel guards of the night companion her burdened soul ever along. The fateful orbits of life are traced, and the desire questions silent gods, and the pondering thought is puzzled at the studied indifference of the bright Beyond. Her search is tireless but

Still unaccomplished was the fateful quest;
 Still she found not the one predestined face
 For which she sought amid the sons of men.
 A grandiose silence wrapped the regal day. (p. 385)

But then arrives the day of wonderment, as if bringing from the bright Beyond a sudden vision of the glowing imponderable. And Savitri too arrives at the destined place which "sheltered a dim and screened felicity". Circumstances have conjured up this spot and

Here first she met on the uncertain earth
 The one for whom her heart had come so far. (p. 393)

But while she was moving across the luxurious green fields, what she admired most was the "bright harmonious scene", without the least inkling of the tremendous moment about to arrive. Her outer mind was absorbed in the beauty of the surroundings and, as usual, she would have simply left the place unmindful of the great Event standing invisibly in front of her.

So might she have passed by on chance ignorant roads
Missing the call of Heaven, losing life's aim, (p. 395)

so might she have lost the golden opportunity, oblivious of the secret design behind the tapestry of these apparently mundane happenings.

But the god touched in time her conscious soul. (p. 395)

Suddenly there appeared in the sky the mystic dawn of a world-transforming miracle, with the power to cancel all the blind uncertainties of this existence:

Her vision settled, caught and all was changed. (p. 395)

That was the hour which most concerned her, and us, and the benign god in the nick of time managed to step into it. If the settling down of Savitri's vision on Satyavan is a remarkable fulfilment of the Mystery, his own arrival at the spot is equally a charming curious aspect of the design of destiny. Although familiar with all the parts of his surroundings, this is not the place generally frequented by him, and on that particular day and at that precise hour he just happens to be there. The cross-section of interaction of the lovers in space and time is extremely small, almost vanishingly negligible; but that was enough for the shaping hand to seize it and take charge of the entire future. That is the planned wonder. Satyavan, who is a Veda-knower and one who had acquired direct knowledge by identification with the noble elements of Nature surrounding him in all sublimity, and who will soon identify himself with Savitri's soul, is prompted to receive the arriving Goddess in his little world of pristine happiness; he too had no inkling of the approaching miracle:

That day he had turned from his accustomed paths;
For One who, knowing every moment's load,
Can move in all our studied or careless steps,
Had laid the spell of destiny on his feet
And drawn him to the forest's flowering verge. (p. 394)

The watchful god is already there in wait to perform in one eternity-making moment his faultless life-and-light-charged love's trick; the vision settles and all is changed to recreate the world in the birth of the flame of love:

Arising to a hymn of wonder's priests
Her soul flung wide its doors to this new sun (p. 395)

and he, haunted by the "miracle of a perfect face", suddenly undergoes a

metamorphosis wrought by that beauty and recognises that a new divinity is now invading his lonely life; they are lost in each other to gain each other.

The meeting of Satyavan and Savitri is an event of capital importance in the evolutionary progress of the earth-consciousness. But

A look, a turn decides our ill-poised fate (p. 394)

and everything starts appearing suspect. Is there then Accidentalism in this coming together of the great spirits now incarnate here to initiate, by vanquishing Death, the work of difficult and laborious physical transformation? Is it governed by a series of glorious coincidences? In the wideness of this world and in the multi-streaming flow of time the eventuality of such an occurrence could be almost zero-like, and yet there seems to have been an exceptionally accurate fine-tuning of necessity and circumstance to produce the aimed result. There is in this tenuity a kind of loaded mathematical precision. The instant Savitri's gaze fell on Satyavan, and following it his on her, she recognised their soul-identity that had existed through births immemorial:

Her inner vision still remembering knew
A forehead that wore the crown of all her past,
Two eyes her constant and eternal stars,
Comrade and sovereign eyes that claimed her soul,
Lids known through many lives, large frames of love. (p. 396)

But there was the incomprehensible occult Possibility sitting on the fence and it could have jumped on either side. If the occasion had been missed, if what had to happen had not happened at the flick of the moment, then all their long association of ages would have been set at nought. Or is it that it had actually happened in some earlier attempt, in some distant bygone era, frustrating the high intended objective? But certainly this time it seems to have come full-prepared.

In the unfoldment of the epic of Savitri's task there is no place for happenstance; indeed, if we have to attribute her meeting with Satyavan to a series of happy coincidences, then surely Chance has been exploited to good purpose by the smart God of Love. To put it in somewhat mythological terms, we must in fact say that supreme Tyche has intervened most opportunely in the matter and brought out the long-sought miracle. Aristotle considered Tyche to be a force with the efficacy of fulfilling a possible intention and to be distinct from the working of an automaton or a free-wheeling desire or random will. Tyche cannot fail. And in the Satyavan-Savitri advent the intention is born of the One who knows "every moment's load". And there is the watchful god alert in the Shalwa woods not to miss the chance. And there is the irresistible destiny of

the two exceptional lovers enduring the passage of aeons that are themselves the great powers emanating from the supreme deity. If, therefore, the efficient cause of the meeting is to be traced anywhere, it must be in Tyche as the unrevealed Possibility of the Transcendent let loose with an infallible Power of Effectuation into the ignorant domain of a million conflicting possibilities. It has asserted itself here, and now, through the destinies of Satyavan and Savitri. Call it Tyche or the Pure Logos or the Truth-Gnosis or the Vedic Ritam, it is at once the Vision and the Power of the dynamic Divine in manifestation. When that supreme Vision with Power is set in motion of a great creative Harmony, then perhaps what we can perceive of it, among all appearances, is at best a divine Imponderable.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

CHRISTALIS

by

GEORGETTE COTY

(Continued from the issue of January 1995)

A Caller from Begonia

I STRETCHED my arms, inhaling deeply the fresh evening air with that special smell the garden gives out after a long-missed rain. It was my habit to inspect our little garden to look at the shrubs and flowers that had shot up miraculously from the ravaged earth, bringing us their message of renewed life. Raindrops were still weighing down the tips of leaves like ear-rings. The flowers had already drawn their curtains for the night and I felt that it was time for me to do the same

I must first bring out that struggling little begonia from inside, I thought; this moisture will do it a world of good. The poor thing had already missed the rain, being indoors. I had been nursing it back to life and had placed it on the table near the window, where I liked to work at night during the summer. Growth gave me the feeling of life's regeneration and every evening I would watch its progress. During the last two weeks it began to grow some fresh, crispy leaves.

"I am going to take you outside for the night," I said to it. "The air is still moist, and you will be able to get a good refreshing drink." Somehow I never lost the habit of talking to flowers and plants, much to the amusement of Julian. "One day," he remarked, "you are going to get an answer from one of those flowers and will win a Nobel Prize for having taught them to talk!"

"Of course they talk," I joked. "It's just my bad luck that I cannot hear them."

Having lifted the pot, I noticed a bit of hair amidst its leaves and carefully, tried to pull it away.

"Ouch!" said a small voice, "that was not nice."

Startled I looked around me. "Who spoke? That little piece of hair did not, as it is dead," I mumbled to myself.

"I did not think you were silly enough not to know that everything is alive," came the chirpy little voice again.

"Yes, I know that, but it is not often that things talk to me," I said apologetically. "I always knew that plants could talk, even though I never heard them myself."

The crickety voice replied, "I am not a thing, but a person. Small but very handsome and it is your own fault if you haven't heard 'things', as you call them,

talking to you before. Are you sure you listened with care? Anyway, stop fussing and pulling at me and let us get acquainted. And pray, do be more gentle, I am not at all big like you.”

‘Well,’ I said to myself when I had discovered where the voice had come from—‘let’s, it will be the first time I have become friendly with a bit of hair’—but said nothing. I was sure that I was talking to myself, not an unusual thing for me to do these days.

My eyes opened wide when I saw two tiny green legs, each looking like a capital ‘M’ emerging from within the folds of the begonia’s leaf, followed by the rest of a body. They landed on a leaf. Facing me squarely, two tiny black eyes, like miniature pearls, looked at me intently. He was a very handsome person indeed and his beautiful eyes never left my face. I did not know why or how, but I felt a vibration of love coming from them. I was quite overcome and responded with equal emotion.

He stretched to his full size upon delicately folded legs to impress me, I had the feeling. His slender body supported an almost transparent head, dominated by those black shining eyes. On the top of his head were two antennae-like transmitters, no thicker than the breadth of a hair, which is what I must have mistaken them for, when I tried to remove one. I had the wonderful feeling of waves of affection coming and going between this tiny being and myself. My whole heart opened up to this incredible creature.

“There! Now we meet again,” his gentle voice said warmly. “Oh? Have met before? Well, greetings then, you are not a stranger here. Do remain with us please. All the lovely flying and humming creatures have left our gardens, I fear that they are gone and I miss them so. It seems to me that I too have seen you before, but so many things happened and sometimes I hardly remember what it was like before. You know about it, I suppose?”

I was careful not to scare him away, so I said no more but simply inquired, “May I know what you are called? Somehow I can’t remember that either.”

“That is because you never looked at me properly before, or took the trouble to ask. Many of my people from the Green Kingdom used to live in your foliage and taught you melodies whilst you slept and you made words to them and sang to the flowers and to your little child. You sang nicely, so we brought you new melodies. That was when my people were welcome on this earth, but now they are not here, nor do I hear you sing any more.”

“True,” I said, “how true, yet I would like so much to sing again, my little friend. But what am I to sing about? The words have lost their meaning and I am left without a song. It makes me sad.

“Today, mind you, we sang about the rain and joy with the children. I wish you had been there. We were truly happy and all the children laughed. But this is not often. Sometimes I wonder where all the songs have gone. Will we ever find them again?”

“Do teach me melodies, won’t you please, as your people did before—and perhaps I shall find new words to them. Then, maybe, the flowers will return and the bees and the butterflies, and even the birds. I do miss them terribly and the children need sweet songs. I hope you have many friends,” I added cautiously, “and you will bring them here ” Did I not know well enough that the poison in the air and the soil killed most of the insect world?

He hung his head and looked away “No, not many friends any more,” he said quietly, “I wonder if I can find even one. I am very lonely, you know, being alone like this.”

“Sweet, dear friend, how I sympathise with you! So many of my friends are gone too, and I am also very lonely sometimes But we must not feel this way, we will make a new and a better life. Won’t you help me?” I implored, trying to take his thoughts away from his sadness.” You haven’t told me your name and I simply cannot remember it.”

With considerable pride he lifted his little head and, looking at me, replied, “Mantis. You people called us Praying Mantis and it’s true, we do pray and do much good by it. At least we used to.”

“Why, of course, Mantis, how silly of me not to have recognised you at once. You love people, is that right? I read once that you pray for them too? They are in great need of it, but I take it that you know that already”.

“I know many things,” he replied “We used to pray for sun after winter and for rain when the earth was dry. We prayed for people, whom indeed we loved, so that they would not get sad or ill. They should have learned to love, but they turned foolish and did many stupid things.”

It was my turn to look away and hang my head, I felt the tears burning in my eyes. I must not make him more sad, I thought, so I bent down, as if to pick up a piece of paper lying on the floor and brushed my tears away.

“I am sure that you will find many of your friends and when you do, will you please tell them how very welcome they are in this place?”

“Oh, but I am looking day and night. You don’t think I am idle when there is so much need, do you? Your heart is pure, that is why I came to talk with you. And now I will give you a song.” With that he began making the sweetest tune and, though he never gave words to it, I heard it in my heart

“The wind bloweth West
The wind bloweth East
Let the sea rise to meet the groom,
The prince of the Sun rideth on the East.”

The melody was strangely beautiful and the words rang in my head. “I know this song,” I thought. “But from where? Whence came this melody, what am I remembering? This rhyme, too, seems to be alive somewhere in my memory.”

Lost in thought and deeply stirred, though I knew not why, I looked up questioningly, but he was gone. In the dim light, I searched the plant, carefully inspecting every little fold of the begonia leaves, but he was nowhere to be found.

“Mantis, little friend, won’t you come again and sing to me?” When no reply came, I knew that he had urgent work to do. He had gone in search of his people, in search of a friend so that he would not have to live all alone in this world... and I prayed for him as he had prayed for us in the past.

“O, God of the Praying Mantis, may your child of love find his mate, may he find life anew as all creatures must do, when new life is to be made in place of the old.”

*

Eden for the Praying Mantis

Many weeks had passed since my meeting with the little person from the Green Kingdom and it became part of my routine before retiring to look for him amidst the leaves. I sang to Christopher the song he had taught me, not quite understanding why I felt so good and elated each time I sang it.

“How do you like this tune?” I asked him, wondering what his reaction would be.

“Very much, Mother, I think it is beautiful. You used to sing me songs like this when I was little, and I loved them. I often wondered when you would sing like that again, but I didn’t like to ask. You were so busy.”

“I am so sorry, darling. This is like meeting again someone you were looking for, don’t you think?”—and to myself I added: it’s like meeting yourself and your child after having lost almost both.

But for his six young years, Christopher and I were friends and faithful partners in all our activities. These little pointers to his inmost thoughts were a revelation to me and I gladly welcomed them.

This was one of those long summer afternoons, stretching languidly into the evening hours. I saw him busying himself in the backyard, shovelling the soil with a little toy shovel that he had found somewhere. He was digging round the shrubs and what looked like remnants of some flowering plants. Trying to bring the garden back to life was our favourite pastime. He came in and called me looking very serious—I could tell from the tone of his voice that he wished to tell me something of importance.

“Mother Lilly”—as he called me affectionately—“I think someone wishes to talk to you. Will you please come out into the garden?”

“Why, certainly,” I said following him, but I saw no one there at all.

“I thought you said that someone is here to see me, Chris.”

“Well, what I said was that someone wanted to talk to you. But it is the

same thing, so please come over here.” With that he took my hand and led me out to where our most healthy-looking plants lived. Some of the begonias looked particularly well, we called this patch the recovery ward. I looked at him perplexed, but his face disclosed nothing.

“Over here, Lilly. You have a visitor asking for you. My Mummy,” he said patronisingly, “you do make a funny face when you are surprised,” he chuckled. “Well, won’t you look closer?”

“Is there a flower?” I asked hopefully, looking over practically every leaf, when I saw something shining among them. As if by instinct I moved close towards it, when I . . . “Why, Mantis! Oh Mantis, it is you! Thank God you are here, you have come back! How wonderful! How simply very wonderful!” Then turning to Christopher to see if he would not think me quite funny now, then back to the little one, I said joyfully. “This is my son Christopher,—darling, this is Mantis, who used to know us before.” Two voices chuckled back at me, now saying almost simultaneously: “Yes, we know each other already.” and “but of course, we know each other.”

“Well, that is splendid! Chris darling, I had no idea that you too...”

“What?” he interrupted—“talk to creatures of different sizes? But doesn’t everyone? It must be lonesome for them if they have no one to talk to, Mummy, in a true way, that is.” “Yes, it must be,” I said. What can he know about that yet, how very lonesome one could get in a world where most communications become a mechanical thing. But let me not think of this now. Here is life and joy before me.

“Mantis, I searched for you everywhere after you had disappeared, I became concerned as the weeks went by. Well... just a little, but I knew that you were lonely and had to find your people, or at least one friend. How I prayed that you would, tiny one.

“Each night and morning I looked for you among the begonia leaves, amidst the gently coiling tender ones. I peered into their velvety privacy, hoping to find you there. I asked each leaf many times—‘Have you not seen my little Mantis?’ For you were sure to return and I hoped that no harm would come to your little person.

“Dear Mantis, you are very precious to my heart. Now that you are back and that you and Chris know one another we will have such a happy time. But you must be hungry, please forgive me for not having asked before, what do Mantis people eat? What would you like best?”

“I too am happy to be back here. It is true that my size is small but I do love very much. . . this place... and you, dear singing mother, and I so much love Chris. As for your kind hospitality, well, I do need very little space and all the food I eat I can find in your garden in abundance. Besides, I changed my eating habits completely. I cause no harm anywhere. Nature is very generous and you wouldn’t even miss it, truly you wouldn’t.”

“Miss?” I mused half to myself—“No, I no longer miss things, you know. It is only love that one misses really and that is here again, isn’t it, darlings?”

All the while the question was in my heart, but I held it back. Had my little friend been able to find others to share his life with him as we did? Is there at least one other of his kind left to grace this earth of ours once more? Much as I hoped, I did not dare to inquire, lest I should cause him sadness, so I kept silent. His lovely eyes held mine, shining with rays of hope and joy, and for me that was enough.

“Christopher, won’t you please join us? I am afraid that your surprise so overwhelmed me, that I could not stop talking. You seem very busy over there yourself. What’s that you are saying? I cannot hear you, dear, or were you not talking to me? Well then, whom are you talking to? Hmm?”

Hop! Mantis took off as if a wind blew him elsewhere, so I went over to Christopher and put my arms around his shoulders.

“Come, darling, let’s go in and see what we can prepare for supper, shall we?” He put his curly head against my side and, leaning against me, gently lifted his finger, pointing to the bush in front of him. He smiled with mischief.

“Well, here is your visitor! Can’t you see yet?” He burst out laughing, as if it were the biggest joke, then pointing to a leaf, still giggling: “Look, Mummy, look!”

My heart took a leap. “My God, is this true? Why, this is marvellous, simply marvellous, Mantis, little friend, so you have found someone. I am so happy!—I cannot tell you how happy I am.”

Two, no—four shiny black eyes as tiny as the smallest of beads beamed at me and Mantis with considerable ceremony nodded continuously and said finally:

“This is Mantilla, my lovely friend and bride”... Then shyly lowering his head and hiding his eyes from us, he admitted—“It was not easy... I was desperate... alone and a little sadder each day. It is true that I have found you both, but it is not the same as having someone your own size to talk with. So I searched and called day and night. Then, by the great love of the Green God, one day we looked at one another face to face—in a half-dried strawberry patch, not far from here. May we both stay here?”

Came the reply of my Christopher, before I could even catch my breath. “Of course you can, my mother and I will be happy to have you with us.” Then to me quietly—“Come Mummy, let us leave them now. I think they might want to be alone.”

“True, my darling, you are quite right. Let us go in and get ready for a little supper and be off to bed. This is a truly happy event. Our lives have grown richer today...”

Staying on Earth, Calling to Heaven

With the passing of years and the seasons that bring new melodies to life, we were managing quite well and earth itself responded in kind to our harmonised efforts. Bits of growth shot from the ground, vegetation offered itself to us assured of our care, without abuse. I firmly believed that this budding growth was largely due to the gentle tending of the children, who gave themselves to the task with conscious, loving attention. There was rapport between them and the green things. They had grown conscious of one another and when some of the trees had shown new shoots here and there, their joy and ours were truly from the heart.

“Soon we will have not only vegetables in plenty, but also berries to eat,”—I told every one—“and maybe the year after, fruits from the trees.”

A jubilant cry was the response to such an important announcement—“and flowers too?” they asked.

“To be sure, to be sure! Just speak to the plants gently, they will smile back at you and bring you much happiness. You will see!”

In our economy we scrupulously avoided any kind of waste. The tiniest dry leaf or any other organic matter was precious to us, not only for enriching the soil, but as fuel. A bit of cardboard, pieces of wood collected from anywhere, became a source of wealth. How much more rewarding to the spirit was this economy, than the careless, throw-away habits that previously caused us so much loss in the end.

Well, an end came of it and now we called to heaven in earnest for guidance, so that we might not repeat the wrongs of the past.

If our lives were given to a variety of duties necessity demanded, I gave myself to them with full devotion. In these intense times nothing less would suffice. In my contact with the children I tried to smile at all times and they responded with far more warmth than I could give them. Their hearts were pure, unsoiled, save for the heavy memories of the past. Their need of dependable love and affection were as great as was their trust in us. What else could heal their wounds, their losses so greatly suffered?

And if they needed us, we needed them more. No amount of love given to them, or received in return, was too much. As if love itself were the magic potion needed to heal all the wounds. For we were orphaned too in so many ways. The absence of loved ones—though we never spoke of it—lay heavy upon our hearts. The parents who lost their children, left to carry on without the smiles and kisses that would have been theirs and were so sorely missed... The old, bereaved of theirs for support... Only the love of heaven could embrace to uplift us, and the need to lavish care and affection all round was a gift of healing grace to everyone.

To look back at the past was altogether unbearable. and if flashes of its

events attacked our minds—as if by the edict of an unwritten law—they were banished forthwith.

But the grace of God offers a veil of forgetting, without which life would be impossible to bear at times of great crises, and the fire of hope gives strength to build a new life.

I made up a little prayer for us which we uttered at the outset of our days and at the end, made sweeter by the many-keyed voices of our children:

“Love Supreme, who made the earth green
 And the sky blue above,
 Who made me and my friends one loving family,
 May I not cast my glance back:
 Let me forget what was not done well before
 May we look towards your will
 In all things, as it should be
 May heaven’s greatness and good
 Come down to me
 And may I grow toward it
 To meet your loving grace.
 Sweet love of heaven,
 Come to me.”

*

If the day’s activities belonged to where we stood, the needs of our existence on earth—the nights brought stars as shining lanterns to our dreams and aspirations for the future. There is no life without hope, without great dreams that bring out the best of man and make him create things of such worth as were put into him by the Creator himself—I thought.

We understood this now, as indeed many other things we learned. One pondered much about the knowledge gained of the abyss with its dark, cruel depth, we so intimately paced. Was this the secret passage? Did it lead to light, when prayingly we called to heaven to free us and searched for the sky?... And now slowly we became a unit of a new kind of awareness that came not from the mind. Many times, after the children were put to sleep, we sat in silence, and our world was at peace. In this tranquillity, we uttered no invocations, no chantings, but let our spirits soar to where silence created its own harmony.

Seated on the barren floor, connecting earth to sky... impregnated by this union, a new world held us, waiting to be born. A different happiness was mirrored in half-shut eyes, quiet smiles.. in inner bliss.

Entranced within this circle, held in its spell, the world was made more beautiful with promise and hope.

(To be continued)

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

(Continued from the issue of January 1995)

51. THE SERPENT'S GIFT

HE was lean. His rib-cage was sticking out. His eye-sockets resembled the mouths of two volcanoes. His cheek-bones were prominent. His cheeks seemed to kiss each other inside the mouth. He was tired.

The choultry-keeper looked down on the standing skeleton of a man and asked: "What do you want?"

"Allow me to spend the night inside this choultry. It's chilly outside and I doubt if my fragile body will be able to withstand the cold," replied the lean and haggard-looking man.

"Who are you?"

"I am a poet. They call me Madhurakavi."

"Madhurakavi, eh!" giggled the choultry-keeper. "Honey-tongued poet!... Your poems are as sweet as honey. And that's what your name means, eh! But you look as though you have not eaten for years. I wonder why you poets waste your time in composing poems. You can't make a living by composing poems. One has to sweat for one's food. You are a useless fellow; useless to yourself and to others. You don't deserve any sympathy from me."

"You need not give me food. It's enough if you shelter me just for a few hours. I'll leave this choultry by daybreak."

"Not a minute more," growled the choultry-keeper. "Now go in and choose a corner. Sit, sleep, dream, compose poems or do whatever you want... but don't ask for food."

Madhurakavi plodded his way into the choultry. An orchestra of snorings welcomed him. In the dim light of a hanging lantern he searched for an unoccupied bed. No straw-bed was vacant. He looked around. In one corner he found space enough to sit and stretch his tired legs.

Taking the utmost care not to stumble on any sleeper so as to avoid getting abused, he moved towards the corner, sat and stretched his legs. He couldn't shut his eyes, for hunger was gnawing at his entrails.

He held his stomach in his hands and sang

Like my inseparable shadow
you have accompanied me, O my poverty!
By tomorrow you'll be an alien to me.
When I reach Thirunindravoor
and meet Kalatthi, patron of poets,
you will have to take to your heels.
Till then be with me.

The song disturbed a man restlessly tossing in his straw-bed. He sat up. He was disturbed because he was the patron referred to in the song. Yes. He was Kalatthi.

Kalatthi was a noble in the court of a king up to a few days earlier. He had never said 'no' to anyone who approached him for any sort of help. For poets he had a soft corner. And poets who met him once didn't meet him again, for they were given enough to last a life-time.

But what drove Kalatthi, the patron of poets, to seek shelter in a choultry?

It was the jealousy of the king, whose court he had adorned. More respected and more honoured than the king, Kalatthi became the talk of all the Tamil-speaking lands. Unable to appreciate the encomiums showered on one of his nobles, the king took away Kalatthi's wealth and banished him. And Kalatthi had no way but to leave his country with nothing save a dhoti on.

"My God! I've nothing to offer to this poet wallowing in poverty. By daybreak when he sees me showing him my empty hands, his heart might break. O God! Show me a way!" mumbled Kalatthi.

He was staring into space through the nearby window. And the bright moon that had just emerged out of the dark clouds betrayed a cluster of anthills just around the corner.

"Well! That's the way," said the one-time patron now reduced to a pauper. "I must die, for I can't stand the sight of a disappointed poet," thus muttering he moved out and reached the anthills.

He slipped his right hand into the mouth of an anthill and awaited his death.

Anxious minutes passed. But no snake bit his hand. He pushed his hand further down. He felt someone cool kissing his hand and placing something chilly on his palm.

Kalatthi pulled out his hand, and opened his palm. His eyes widened. What a gift from the serpent! It was a Nagaratnam.¹

"Nagaratnam!. . . Nagaratnam! The serpent's gift to me," Kalatthi shouted in glee. He ran into the choultry and found Madhurakavi. Placing the serpent's gift on the palm of the poverty-stricken poet, he asked: "Madhurakavi! Is this enough to put your poverty to flight?"

52. COW-SON

Sali decided to leave her husband once and for all. It was during his absence she fell prey to her lust. Shame gnawed at her as she felt life pulsating in her womb.

Sali, the wife of a renowned brahmin scholar of Varanasi in the North, was

¹ A priceless gem of dazzling brilliancy supposed to be found in the aged snakes of a certain variety. It is believed that the snake leaves it on the ground and searches for its prey in the light thrown out by this gem, which is endowed with several virtues, and swallows it back.

beautiful both in body and in mind. Her relationship with her husband was quite normal. Yet who knows what havoc fate will play in one's life? What other reason could she assign for losing her chastity?

"Penitent life. That is the only solution to cleanse myself of my sin," she said. With a determined heart and ready to move on foot she walked out of the door.

Once outside, Sali had no destination to reach. She allowed her legs to carry her to the place of their choice.

She was not quite sure about the total number of days she had walked. But by the time she reached the South and passed through a wood in the Chozha empire, she began to have labour-pains.

Sali's boy-child was cute. But his mother scornfully looked at him as if he was the very embodiment of sin. Leaving him to the mercy of Nature, she resumed her journey to her unknown destination.

In the darkness of the wood, the newborn was all alone mewling on Mother Earth.

A sleeping cow, awakened by the cry, went near the babe. Taking pity on him the animal jettied out its milk into his wee mouth.

The babe drank its fill and the cow continued to nurture him for a week or so, till one day a brahmin couple passing through the wood noticed the babe and his animal 'mother'.

The couple looked around. Finding no one they went near the babe. He was sweet and charming. The childless couple were eager to hold the baby in their arms. The cow moved aside perhaps indicating to them that they were free to take the child away.

Elampoothi, the brahmin, took the child in his arms and passed him on to his wife. Smiling a smile of gratitude, she asked: "What shall we call him?"

"Āputthiran",¹ he said.

"Āputthiran... Āputthiran," they called him in unison, and carried him joyfully home.

There were tears of joy in the cow's eyes.

The babe grew up to be a child of five.

Elampoothi was not at all surprised to see his adopted son treat the animals with kindness. The animals, especially cows, reciprocated his love for them.

One day Āputthiran found a heifer getting groomed at the backyard of a brahmin's house. Its horns were painted and flowers of different hues strung together ran around them. A garland of flowers adorned its neck.

"Why are they beautifying that heifer?" asked Āputthiran.

"Only to be sacrificed," replied Elampoothi.

"And what is that for?"

1 Ā = cow; putthiran = son

“Only to appease the gods.”

“Do gods thirst for blood? What sort of gods are they? I can’t believe such a cock-and-bull story.”

“Well, my son! That is in our tradition.”

“Can’t we change it?”

“Can be done... But who will take that risk?”

Āputthiran stood silent for a while and then said to himself: “Let me take it.”

He waited till it was dark. The entire village was asleep. Āputthiran tiptoed his way towards the brahmin’s house and found the heifer tethered to a tree-trunk.

He looked around. But for an aged brahmin sleeping on a nearby coir cot, nobody was seen. Snorings of different pitches flowing from inside the house spoke to him about the number of sleepers.

Untethering the heifer he began to run pulling the animal by its rope. The heifer as if it had understood Āputthiran’s intentions moved with him as fast as it could.

The sleeper on the coir cot woke up to answer a call of nature. To his dismay he found the heifer missing. He yelled and roused the entire household.

“Oh! We are bound to incur the wrath of the gods,” said one.

“Yes! Yes! We are in for trouble,” said another.

“The heifer must be found at all cost,” shouted another.

“Move... move... follow its hoof-prints,” commanded yet another and led the way.

The brahmins rushed following the hoof-prints of the heifer. And before it was daybreak they caught the heifer and the ‘thief’.

“You son of a dirty cow! Why did you steal this sacrificial heifer? No god would pardon you for your sin,” so saying the leader of the brahmins thrashed the boy black and blue.

Āputthiran began to wail.

The heifer jumped, lowered its head and butted the brahmin leader in the stomach. His entrails fell out.

As the leader dropped down dead, the heifer disappeared into the nearby wood.

The disappointed brahmins looked daggers at the boy.

“That heifer,” said the boy, “is a creation of God, like you and me. What right have you to kill it in order to appease a god? No god would thirst for blood and if he thirsts for blood he is no god then.”

“Blasphemy,” remarked an aged brahmin.

“Ostracize him for his words,” said the brahmins in unison.

Āputthiran was ostracized. Elampoothi too had no way but to obey the orders of his community.

Āputthiran found himself in the streets. Hunger drove him to beg for food
And the wily brahmins offered him cowdung in his begging bowl

Losing all hope of getting food, Āputthiran moved out of the village and
reached the city of Madurai.

A temple for Saraswati, Goddess of learning, sheltered him. He begged for
alms in the streets of Madurai, and offered it first to the invalids and the aged
and the uncared for, and ate whatever was left in his bowl.

One night when it was raining cats and dogs, a few poor people sought his
help. They were in need of food.

Āputthiran had nothing to offer them

“Oh, Goddess!” he said to himself, “My bowl is empty. So are the stomachs
of the poor people. What is this life worth unless I serve the needy? Pray help
me, Goddess.”

To pray for the sake of others is the noblest of all actions. Whoever thinks
‘Your need is greater than mine’ possesses the noblest of souls

Right in front of Āputthiran appeared a begging bowl.

His mouth agape, he stood wondering at the many-splendoured bowl

“That is *Amudhasurabi*, the fountain-spring of good food,” said a heavenly
voice.

Āputthiran knew for certain that it was the Goddess who spoke.

“That is my present to you,” continued the Goddess. “You will never run
short of food as long as it is with you. It will supply food perennially and you can
satisfy the hunger of the needy.”

While Āputthiran thanked the Goddess profusely, she said: “To those who
give, all is given.”

Āputthiran served the poor with food. Their hunger satiated, they blessed
him

There was a time when Āputthiran had begged for food. But now he went
about giving food. He constantly wandered in the famine-hit areas and didn’t
allow anyone to die of hunger.

Āputthiran’s fame and *Amudhasurabi*’s name spread far and near. Quite
pleased with the charitable nature of Āputthiran, Indra, the king of the Heavens,
appeared before him in the guise of an old man

“I am Indran, the God of gods. Ask any boon from me and you’ll be blessed
with it,” He said.

Āputthiran looked closely at the old man and heckled: “Boon? Why should
I care for your boon, when I am already blessed with the *Amudhasurabi*? All
that people need is food. And once the stomach is full what use are your boons?”

Indran felt insulted. “I’ll teach you a lesson,” he grumbled and disappeared

Fretting and fuming Indran reached his abode and sent down a heavy
downpour on Madurai. The rains made the fallow lands fertile and people
became extremely active. Crops grew abundantly and everyone found food.

Āputthiran and *Amudhasurabi* began to vanish from the memory of the people.

“Would you like to have some food?” Āputthiran asked everyone he met and all of them without any exception took him for a madcap.

When Āputthiran didn't know what to do with his *Amudhasurabi*, a stranger on his visit to Madurai told the boy about the famine stricken multitude in a land called Savagam.

Happy at heart Āputthiran boarded a ship destined for Savagam. But Indran's curse began to play havoc in the life of the boy.

The wind was stormy and the sea became very rough. The captain of the ship decided to anchor awhile and shelter the passengers in a nearby island till the sea became smooth enough to set sail.

The passengers were quite happy to move about in an uninhabited island called Manipallavam. The boy with his *Amudhasurabi* was lured by the fascinating beauty of the idyllic spots in the island. He moved further and further inside the island and lost his way.

By the time he traced his way back to the shore, three days had passed. And the ship was gone.

The boy wept. There was no one in the island to console him. *Amudhasurabi*, meant to satiate the hunger of the poor, remained idle.

Marooned for life, Āputthiran took his *Amudhasurabi* to a pond called Komuki. Drowning the heavenly bowl into Komuki, he said: “Appear once a year till you reach the worthy hand.”

The boy sat under a tree and began to meditate upon the Divine. Emaciated and frail he became within a few days and soon breathed his last.

Indran pardoned Āputthiran's soul and opened the gates of Heaven for it to enter.

(*More legends on the way*)

P. RAJA

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Seventy-sixth Seminar

20 February 1994

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

Speech by Sunayana Shukla

SINCE we have grown up here in Mother's protective atmosphere we cannot fully realise the great value of her life and teachings because we take it for granted. We cannot even think of another way of looking at life, because to us her way seems quite natural. But sometimes I try to imagine what it must be like to discover Mother's teachings in the middle of one's life. What must attract a person when he reads Mother's writings at a time when he does not know anything much about her? To me it seems it is her positive attitude to life that makes her teachings most admirable.

Few people turn to a spiritual guide when everything in their life is going on smoothly. It is when we face a moment of crisis that we look for help and turn to the wisdom of people who are spiritually advanced. And depending on the guidance we get at that time we can know which course of action helps us most. When we consult Mother's writings on what to do when we are faced with a difficulty, her answer, in one form or other, is that we should not run away from it, or fear it but face the difficulty and take it as an opportunity to make progress. We must take that moment of pain as a chance to overcome the weakness of our own nature due to which the difficulty has come. This positive attitude in the face of hardship is a wonderful piece of Mother's advice. And this is the crux of what I have to say.

If we say that progress is a movement towards perfection—be it in the outer or inner life, then we must admit that it is a continuous movement. When we stop to progress we regress. One cannot stay fixed in one place. We have to change, constantly. We have to move from one perfection to another.

When I think of this subject what comes to my mind is the passage from "The Hour of God", where Sri Aurobindo speaks of moments when we make great effort but it produces little result and there are others when even a little effort produces great result and changes destiny. These are moments when the Divine Grace acts, carrying us miles forward in our inner evolution. But in my experience these are also moments of great turmoil.

If one observes the events of one's life one can clearly see that there are periods when we consciously make an effort to progress and others when progress is thrust upon us, so to say. We find invariably that what seemed to be a great calamity at one point of time seems years later to be a stroke of Grace, without which we would not have been able to make a certain progress. While we are living through that period it seems to us that we are being punished by the Divine but when we look back we can only call it a great blessing, a short cut on the path of our evolution. They say the way to heaven is through hell. Seen in this perspective it seems to be true.

We human beings have an instinctive fear of all that is painful or all that requires a radical change in our way of living. Yet it is in these crucial moments of difficulty, these times when everything seems to be against us, that we can take the step that changes the direction of our lives.

We have only to look at Sri Aurobindo's own life. The one year he spent in Alipore Jail was a turning-point in his spiritual development. If we read Mother's biography we see that she too had to go through very difficult situations, so that these events could bring her to India, more specifically to Pondicherry, so that she could join Sri Aurobindo in their work together. Even the life of the Ashram has changed dramatically because of certain historically hard times. During World War II many families from Calcutta came to Pondicherry asking Mother to shelter them. It certainly upset the normal Ashram life. When the War was over Mother could not send these families back. She took this as an opportunity to change the very structure of the Ashram from a very strict community of spiritually oriented people to an open one that included the life and activities of children. If these families had not taken shelter here the School would never have started; so many of us would never have been educated here. And yet, with after-thought we can see that this was a wonderful way of bringing Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's thoughts to a much larger mass and what's more it gave some children a chance to grow up in the Ashram atmosphere instead of turning to it after acquiring years of Samskaras of another way of life.

It is the wrath of Mahakali that seems to destroy everything, but when the dust settles we realise that it was a sign of her love. She destroys to recreate.

The words of the Mother on this subject is a source of strength: "If the Lord wills for you a hardship, do not protest. Take it as a blessing and indeed, it will become so."¹

1 *Mother's Light* (compiled from the writings of the Mother), p 17