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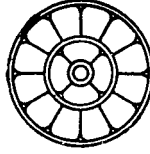
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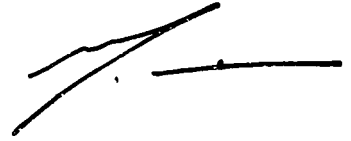
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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WORDS OF THE MOTHER

THE MIND'S MOVEMENTS

... IT would seem that in the ordinary psychological constitution of man, the almost constant function of the mind is to give an acceptable explanation of what goes on in the “desire-being”, the vital, the most material parts of the mind and the subtlest parts of the body. There is a kind of general complicity in all the parts of the being to give an explanation and even a comfortable justification for everything we do, in order to avoid as far as possible the painful impressions left by the mistakes we commit and undesirable movements. For instance, unless one has undergone or taken up a special training, whatever one does, the mind gives itself a favourable enough explanation of it, so that one is not troubled. Only under the pressure of outer reactions or circumstances or movements coming from other people, does one gradually consent to look less favourably at what one is and does, and begins to ask oneself whether things could not be better than they are.

Spontaneously, the first movement is what is known as self-defence. One puts oneself on one's guard and quite spontaneously one wants a justification... for the smallest things, absolutely insignificant things—it is a normal attitude in life.

And explanations—one gives them to oneself; it is only under the pressure of circumstances that one begins to give them to others or to another, but first one makes oneself very comfortable; first thing: “It was like that, for it had to be like that, and it happened because of this, and.. ”, and it is always the fault of circumstances or other people. And it truly requires an effort—unless, as I say, one has undergone a discipline, has acquired the habit of doing it automatically—it requires an effort to begin to understand that perhaps things are not like this, that perhaps one has not done exactly what one ought to have done or reacted as one should. And even when one begins to see it, a much greater effort is needed to recognise it... officially

When one begins to see that one has made a mistake, the first movement of the mind is to push it into the background and to put a cloak in front of it, the cloak of a very fine little explanation, and as long as one is not obliged to show it, one hides it. And this is what I call “lack of mental honesty”

First, one deceives oneself by habit, but even when one begins not to deceive oneself, instinctively there is a movement of trying, trying to deceive oneself in order to feel comfortable. And so a still greater step is necessary once one has understood that one was deceiving oneself, to confess frankly, “Yes, I was deceiving myself ”

All these things are so habitual, so automatic, as it were, that you are not even aware of them; but when you begin to want to establish some discipline

over your being, you make discoveries which are really tremendously interesting. When you have discovered this, you become aware that you are living constantly in a... the best word is "self-deception", a state of wilful deceit; that is, you deceive yourself spontaneously. It is not that you need to reflect: spontaneously you put a pretty cloak over what you have done so that it doesn't show its true colours... and all this for things which are so insignificant, which have so little importance! It would be understandable, wouldn't it, if recognising your mistake had serious consequences for your very existence—the instinct of self-preservation would make you do it as a protection—but that is not the question, it concerns things which are absolutely unimportant, of no consequence at all except that of having to tell yourself, "I have made a mistake."

This means that an effort is needed in order to be mentally sincere. There must be an effort, there must be a discipline. Of course, I am not speaking of those who tell lies in order not to be caught, for everybody knows that this should not be done. Besides, the most stupid lies are the most useless, for they are so flagrant that they can't deceive anyone. Such examples occur constantly; you catch someone doing something wrong and tell him, "That's how it is"; he gives a silly explanation which nobody can understand, nobody can accept; it is silly but he gives it in the hope of shielding himself. It is spontaneous, you see, but he knows this is not done. But the other kind of deception is much more spontaneous and it is so habitual that one is not aware of it. So, when we speak of mental honesty, we speak of something which is acquired by a very constant and sustained effort.

You catch yourself, don't you, you suddenly catch yourself in the act of giving yourself somewhere in your head or here (*Mother indicates the heart*), here it is more serious... giving a very favourable little explanation. And only when you can get a grip on yourself, there, hold fast and look at yourself clearly in the face and say, "Do you think it is like that?", then, if you are very courageous and put a very strong pressure, in the end you tell yourself, "Yes, I know very well that it is not like that!"

It sometimes takes years. Time must pass, one must have changed much within oneself, one's vision of things must have become different, one must be in a different condition, in a different relation with circumstances, in order to see clearly, completely, how far one was deceiving oneself—and at that moment one was convinced that one was sincere.

(*Silence*)

It is probable that perfect sincerity can only come when one rises above this sphere of falsehood that is life as we know it on earth, mental life, even the higher mental life.

When one springs up into the higher sphere, into the world of Truth, one

will be able to see things as they truly are, and seeing them as they are, one will be able to live them in their truth. Then all falsehoods will naturally crumble. And since the favourable explanations will no longer have any purpose, they will disappear, for there will be nothing left to explain.

Things will be self-evident, Truth will shine through all forms, the possibility of error will disappear.

(Questions and Answers 1957-58, Cent Ed Vol 9, pp. 327-330.)

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

EVIDENTLY I have survived the celebration of my debut as a nonagenarian on 25 November 1994! It was a bit of a hectic time, what with a large gathering in the spacious Dining Room of the Park Guest House and a wheelchaired Me being—as old-fashioned reporters would have put it—the cynosure of all eyes. My friends Nirodbaran and Deshpande had arranged the celebration. Nirod was asked to make an introductory speech and I had to follow up with one which might have gone on and on if I hadn't remembered that people might be waiting for nice things to fill their mouths as soon as I stopped wagging mine. There was a lot of cordiality and appreciation and I am really grateful to my "fans"—especially those who got ready on time the beautiful *festschrift* titled "Amal-Kiran. Poet and Critic", which was meant to be accompanied by a supplement with a caption which could cause me a lifelong blush: "The Wonder that is KDS".

From the viewpoint not only of timeliness but also of appraising insight, my gratitude goes amply to the contributors of articles as well as to the enterprising editors and the lavish-handed finance-providers, whose hearts and minds moved to make memorable my ninetieth birthday.

Your article with the epigraph from Horace has well touched the core of my poetic life with the words "musarum sacerdos" and taken them far beyond the priesthood of the Muses practised in the Augustan Age of Rome. It is thought-provoking that Caesar Octavius, renamed Augustus, was, as we have come to know, an early manifestation of Sri Aurobindo not as an Avatar, a direct conscious expression of the Divine, but as a Vibhuti, a leader of the age in whom the Divine works from the background. No wonder the two greatest bards Augustus had patronised were born again—Virgil as Nolini and Horace as Dilip—to be patronised by Sri Aurobindo I, who as a poet was patronised by him even more than they, am still a question-mark in connection with the time of the first Roman emperor I feel a strong affinity to Catullus with his commingling of the erotic and the wistful, and very interestingly the early verse of Sri Aurobindo himself is most reminiscent of this lyricist. Save for the jar of the girl-friend's name as compared to the dulcet appellations on Catullus's lips, what could be more in his vein than those lines in "Night by the Sea", a poem of Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge days?—

With thy kisses chase this gloom:—
Thoughts, the children of the tomb.
Kiss me, Edith. Soon the night
Comes and hides the happy light....
Love's sweet debts are standing, sweet;

Honied payment to complete
 Haste—a million is to pay—
 Lest too soon the allotted day
 End and we oblivious keep
 Darkness and eternal sleep.

We at once hark back to those unforgettable hendecasyllables:

Soles occidere et redire possunt,
 Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux
 Nox est perpetua una dormienda.
 Da mi basia mille.

Sri Aurobindo renders the three opening lines literally:

Suns may set and come again;
 For us, when once our brief light has set,
 There is one perpetual night to be slept.

The fourth line would run:

Give me a thousand kisses.

Ordinarily we would be tempted to see Catullus *redivivus* in the early Sri Aurobindo, but knowing better the personality of his past we can only say that he carried over to our time a close kinship to that poet which would tend to draw to himself whoever happened to be a new manifestation of him. Catullus died before Octavius became emperor, but part of their lives coincided in time and it is a guess worth hazarding that Lydia's victim with his passionately pathetic "Amo et odi" ("I love and I hate") was as much a literary influence on him as the master of the epic and the expert of the odes. (3 12 1994)

*

I suggested to my warm-hearted admiring friends who wanted to celebrate my ninetyeth birthday that a laudatory hullabaloo would be more fit for the hundredth year. But nobody seemed confident about my hitting a century. No Ashramite had done it so far by way of encouragement So Nirod and Deshpande couldn't cross their fingers and bide time. My grandfather bade adieu at the age of 99 years and 9 months. This record could be encouraging if we forgot that my father had taken leave of us at a mere 44. The total of the two life-spans is 143 years and 9 months. The average comes to a wee bit under 72. I have

exceeded it by 18 years. How much further is probable? A clue seems to come from a very early letter of Sri Aurobindo's whose facsimile is published in the souvenir volume presented to me by Nirod and Deshpande. The letter appears on pp. 7-8. At its end is the date in unmistakable figures: 28.2 98. Does this slip of the pen suggest that Sri Aurobindo foresaw me still alive in 1998? As the letter was written very near the beginning of my stay in the Ashram, could we surmise that 1998 is not the terminal of my experience of earth but some sort of starting-point? In that case I would have ahead of me at least as many years as have elapsed from 1928 to now: that is, 66 years! Imagine me as a $(90+66=)$ 156 years old museum-piece

What frightens me about deductions from the letter is: Would I have from 1998 onwards the same weaknesses and shortcomings that I have had to face from 1928 up till today? If Oscar Wilde's antinomian mind is to be followed, the only way to keep young is to go on repeating the follies of our youth! So are those weaknesses and shortcomings the sole means of saving myself from becoming a prize dotard? But we are not a prolongation of the Aesthetic Movement, in which Wilde participated, of the last century's closing quarter. We may be considered aspirants to what Sri Aurobindo has described to me as "the Overmind aesthesis" which sees and feels the world as the manifold play of a single divine Delight, revealing beauty everywhere—even in the most unlikely forms—and inspiring vision and word and deed shot with a significance as if gods and goddesses were playing variations of eternal things upon themes that at present spell out passages of what the Gita calls "this transient and unhappy world".

(8 12 1994)

*

My letter to all of you was meant to reach not only all your minds but also the heart and soul of each of you. For, I try to write—no matter how small the subject—from my own depths and strive to find a trysting-place in others' inmost being. The thoughts may wear an ordinary look and the words sound casual, but always the intent is from the Divine Mother in me to the same shining secret in my correspondent.

The celebration planned and executed by Nirodbaran and Deshpande took me by surprise and the substantial souvenir with its accompanying supplement *multum in parvo* ("much in little") projected the small helpless wheelchair fellow into the figure of a colossus striding across history! Both the souvenir and the supplement must be in your hands now. The photos in the former will interest you. There is the tiny tot Amal ("Kekoo" in those days) in a sailor-suit standing between his father in an English costume including the waistcoat and the inevitable umbrella for the English weather—and his mother in a stylish London-attire topped by a wide-brimmed hat bright with artificial flowers and

stuck to her hair with various pins. This picture dates back to 1910, when my parents took me to London for polio-operations on my left leg. Another picture has the same sailor-suited boy charcoal-sketched to a remarkable nicety by a pavement-artist in Hyde Park within five minutes. The next illustration catches two poets standing side by side—Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, already famous, and Amal Kiran still in the world's background but with Sri Aurobindo's grand certificate in his pocket. Harindranath looks sweetly satisfied, with a calm smile on his handsome clean-shaven front-face, a sense of extraordinary achievement happily tracing it, whereas his companion, rather lanky and somewhat taller, with a tiny moustache and a close-cut fringe of a beard, appears to strain his gaze towards a future

which lends
A yonder to all ends.

Indeed, to make both life and Yoga an endless movement of ever-new discovery is the message of Sri Aurobindo to his followers. I add the word "life" to the word "Yoga" because to an Aurobindonian the two are inseparable. Yoga to him is not a special practice set apart from the outer consciousness: an inward air has to pervade whatever he thinks, feels, says, does—and he has never to stop at any point as though there were nothing further to achieve. This look ahead is no gesture of discontent. How can one be discontented when one is exploring the Divine? But the Divine is a constant enrichment of each point reached and a constant step onward, the onwardness not a forsaking of anything but a carrying of everything into a wider disclosure of its sense in what lies beyond it.

(21.12 1994)

*

Savitri has been for all of us a beautiful series of stepping-stones from our common human moods to a mind-state of glorious vision and a heart-state of intense aspiration. When puzzled over some problem of inner or outer life, we have followed the Mother's advice to concentrate on the Divine for a moment and then open *Savitri* wherever we are instinctively led to do so and read the passage which our eyes first light upon. My own mode of consulting this massive magnificent oracle is to conjure up the face of Sri Aurobindo and appeal for his guidance through this poem with which I have the most intimate link because I happen to be the disciple to whom it was first revealed in secret in its version of 1936. Morning after morning, hand-written passages used to come to me. I would type them out and make my response in the form of appreciative comments, critical questions, requests for elucidation. Even when *Savitri* became public property originally by being quoted in my essay "A New Age of Spiritual Inspiration" in the annual "Sri Aurobindo Bombay Circle" of 1948, edited by my friend and fellow-sadhak Kishor Gandhi—even when certain parts

of the poem came out in fascicles from the Ashram Press, new matter was sent to me beforehand. One of the last letters about the poem said:

“You will see when you get the full typescript [of the first three books] that *Savitri* has grown to an enormous length. . In the new form it will be a sort of poetic philosophy of the Spirit and of Life much profounder in its substance and vaster in its scope than was intended in the original poem...”

It is this “new form” that has become for us a guide-book in times of indecision. What is even more important is that it is a magnet to draw for us further spiritual experience. What could be more vivifying to an urge to see a subtle mystical presence in Nature at the break of dawn than the lines?—

All grew a consecration and a rite.
Air was a vibrant link between earth and heaven;
The wide-winged hymn of a great priestly wind
Arose and failed upon the altar hills;
The high boughs prayed in a revealing sky.

When we feel as too heavy the sense of a long road to the Divine, the Eternal, we can get the assurance that all can change with a touch from our hidden spiritual potencies:

A magic leverage suddenly is caught
That moves the veiled Ineffable's timeless will.
A prayer, a master act, a king idea
Can link man's strength to a transcendent Force.
Then miracle is made the common rule.
One mighty deed can change the course of things;
A lonely thought becomes omnipotent.

A great push can be received towards a surpassing of our present scene of incessant turmoil within and without by the passage on Aswapati's breakthrough from his human state to an all-enveloping Beyond from where a new life could derive:

Across a wide retreating sky he glimpsed
Through a last glimmer and drift of vanishing stars
The superconscient realms of motionless Peace
Where judgment ceases and the word is mute
And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone. ..
Out of that stillness mind new-born arose
And woke to truths once inexpressible....

We are helped towards a wonderful change for which we have always aspired but without much success:

We hear what mortal ears have never heard,
 We feel what earthly sense has never felt,
 We love what common hearts repel and dread,
 Our minds hush to a bright Omniscient.

At times a deep depression enshrouds us and we wonder whether there is any hidden meaning in what seems a succession of barren days and empty nights. Then *Savitri* comes with a huge assurance which strengthens our failing limbs and forlorn thoughts:

We whirl not here upon a casual globe
 Abandoned to a task beyond our force;
 Even through the tangled anarchy called Fate
 And through the bitterness of death and fall
 An outstretched Hand is felt upon our lives...
 One who has shaped this world is ever its lord;...
 Whatever the appearance we must bear,
 Whatever our strong ills and present fate,
 When nothing we can see but drift and bale,
 A mighty Guidance leads us still through all.

Yes, *Savitri* can be and has been a many-sided support to us and a godlike goad towards

A Silence overhead, a Voice within,

a ladder of light along which our beings can move from perception after keen perception of the spiritual *vita nuova* to which we have to ascend.

It has lately been asked in some quarters: "What was it to Sri Aurobindo himself?" And a strange answer was given, based on a statement of his to Nirodbaran in 1936. The opening of the statement was: "I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension." Here the meaning was seriously taken to be that Sri Aurobindo made use of his composition of *Savitri* to rise to ever higher spiritual experiences. I was amazed at such an interpretation, an impossible one if we go beyond the opening to the sentences that follow, for the word "ascension" connotes only the lifting of the poetic expression from height to greater height, from plane to loftier plane, "towards a possible Overmind poetry", as he wrote to me long ago. The true point of the letter whose start has been misunderstood by being cited in isolation should come through from the very question Nirodbaran posed: "We have been wondering why you should have to write and rewrite your poetry—for instance, *Savitri* ten or twelve times—when you have all the inspiration at your command and do not have to receive it with the difficulty that faces budding Yogis like us." Sri Aurobindo's reply runs:

“That is very simple. I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level. Moreover I was particular—if part seemed to me to come from any lower levels I was not satisfied because it was good poetry. All had to be as far as possible of the same mint. In fact *Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one’s own Yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative. I did not rewrite *Rose of God* or the sonnets except for two or three verbal alterations made at the moment.”

One issue touched upon here gives us to believe that if Sri Aurobindo had not left his body at the end of 1950 he would have gone on revising his poem in the matter of expression, rendering the speech even more uniformly of the Overmind mint. And with the coming of the Overmind further into play there would have been a more voluminous no less than more luminous utterance. A provisional limit had been set long ago when Sri Aurobindo conceived of his epic as being “a minor Ramayana”. The Ramayana, as it is, is about 50,000 lines long. And actually this possible length was mentioned by me for *Savitri* in my book, *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*. When it was read out to Sri Aurobindo he did not demur. In a note scribbled by him apropos of my friend Mendonça’s criticism of *Savitri* and published in *Mother India* in August 1991 he refers to the same number as being presumed for *Savitri*.

Nor would *Savitri* have been only longer: it would have been recast whenever necessary in the forge of the greater consciousness which would have been at play. In one of his last letters to me (1948) Sri Aurobindo mentioned one part of his current spiritual work to be the supramentalisation of the Overmind more and more. With the Overmind completely supramentalised, a grander poetry would have come. Perhaps that too would not have been a *ne plus ultra*. Did not Sri Aurobindo write to me in 1936: “As for expressing the supramental inspiration, that is a matter of the future”? Would not this “future” have materialised if Sri Aurobindo had continued to compose *Savitri* beyond December 5, 1950? (13 9 1994)

*

I am pleased to hear from you. Your name “Monika” rings a very melodious bell, being the same as that of St. Augustine’s mother who was a partner with him in the spiritual quest. And Augustine himself was, according to our Divine Mother, a man very much like me. This pronouncement confirms my own sense of affinity with the young aspirant to monkhood who appealed to God: “Give me chastity—but not yet!”

Your very first response to Sri Aurobindo clearly shows that you sponta-

neously know him from the very inside of him, so to speak. It is as if you were made out of his substance. That is why you are moved to feel not only that he will lead you to the Divine but also that this Divine will be his own self. And the sense that you have known him for ages proves that you are touching him not merely with your mind which varies with each rebirth but with your soul which has had a long history going from birth to birth across centuries. Nor is the soul's experience of its existence confined to the long passage of time along which your inmost being has moved. This experience is as well of a contact with a reality that is outside the run of the years—an unchanging splendour of fullness that can exist even if time stopped. Actually this splendour is a state in which there is no starting of time and no stopping of it. It is distinguished by that mysterious term: "Eternal".

What I have discerned as your relationship with Sri Aurobindo solves immediately your first problem. Indeed the way you have commented on the problem shows that it is in fact no problem at all. For you say: "All the years before, I had many problems in trying to feel an intense love and longing for God but towards Sri Aurobindo I feel this love and a spontaneous will to surrender."

When such is the whole trend of your being, why bother about what your past religious condition has been? I was educated at a Roman Catholic school and college and knew several fine European Jesuits, particularly Swiss German Fathers, one of whom influenced me greatly. I am a Parsi by birth, belonging to a community which follows the religion called Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster ranks with the greatest religious figures of the past. But the moment I was touched by Sri Aurobindo both Zoroastrianism and the influence of Roman Catholicism vanished. I could not even rank Sri Aurobindo as just the latest representative of the spirituality that shone out from bygone ages. He fell outside that category, for I perceived a radical difference. Those figures founding the various religions—one and all—taught that our fulfilling end is beyond the earth. Earth-life can be radiant with God-realisation, but it cannot itself be completely divinised. Even Krishna who is the most dynamic no less than the most many-sided in his divine manifestation has still a final wistful note in speaking of the earth-scene—"this transient and unhappy world". Sri Aurobindo alone looks on Matter as potentially divine and provides a cosmic picture in which resides this potentiality because the total Divine is concealed or "involved" in Matter prior to His evolution into the plenary Spirit on earth itself. Here is a picture of a future fulfilment utterly lacking in the vision of all past leaders of spirituality. Only that seer who is in the ultimate "know" of things can talk of a complete "transformation" in which the body itself can stand forth one day as an expression of godhead in its own right.

In short, you are perfectly justified in the absoluteness of your attitude to Sri Aurobindo. If that is so, how can you raise your second question—your doubt whether Sri Aurobindo will accept you as his disciple? You are already a part of

his vast being. Your very worship of him to the ultimate degree makes you nestle in his heart for ever. You feel towards him as you do because he has already taken you up as his beloved child. And he does not make any credal conditions; he does not insist that you should first pay homage to his philosophy. Neither he nor the Mother has cared for mental beliefs as preconditions. They are for a direct personal interchange. If you are moved by them, they are satisfied about your discipleship. Even if you are stuffed full with past religious dogmas they welcome your heart's leap and deem it sufficient for you to deserve and receive all their love. It is the resonance of your substance to their substance that counts primarily with them. Whether or not your mind—packed with one religion or another—says “Yes” to their luminous presence at once is a secondary question. Do you feel like prostrating yourself or else bowing your head or at least yearning in your heart for their nearness? This is what weighs in the relationship between them and you. All your “strict Roman Catholic education” will drop away if you listen to your soul's cry. You were “taught to pray only to Jesus Christ”—but now you are not being just “taught” something else as a rival confession of faith. You are helplessly pulled towards Sri Aurobindo because, looking at his photograph, you see, as a poem of mine puts it,

All heaven's secrecy lit to one face
Crowning with calm the body's blinded cry—
A soul of upright splendour like the noon!

Now to your last question, which poses really no puzzle at all. You ask: “What is the difference between the two names: Sri Aurobindo and Sri Aravinda?” The former is the name as written by the bearer of it himself. The latter is the Sanskrit original of the former's Bengali version. I suppose that, logically, in a Sanskrit mantra “Aravinda” would figure. But, as far as I know, the Mother said: “Sri Aurobindo sharanam mama”—“Sri Aurobindo is my refuge.” Psychologically it is best to put into a mantra the name we are familiar with. A pedant may not be pleased, but our aim is to please the Divine Presence in our hearts and I am disposed to believe that he will prefer the name that has been ringing in his disciples' ears.

You wrote as a sort of apology for your pressing inquiries: “Clearness on my sadhana is so important to me.” Well, I hope I have not failed the name Sri Aurobindo gave me: “Amal Kiran”, meaning “The Clear Ray”, and I hope I have also not failed the wise saying: “Be clear, be clear, be not too clear.” This I understand to convey: “By your clarity do not deprive the hearer of the intuition that there is always a Beyond to all knowledge.” (29 8.1994)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

AMAL-KIRAN—AND APROPOS OF MY POEM “PRELUDE”

BY NAGIN DOSHI

Introductory Letter by R. Y. Deshpande to Amal

It was my mistake that I did not approach Nagin-bhai to contribute an article for the festschrift *Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic*. In fact, when he saw the book after its publication he stunned me by asking point-blank to that effect. He even told me that his association with you had been for more than sixty years and that he had benefited from it in several ways. My only plea to him at this stage was that he should still write about it and that I would request you as the Editor of *Mother India* to publish it. Nagin-bhai has done the article and I find it quite interesting, and also important, in certain respects: it touches upon a few things connected with the Supramental Manifestation of 29 February 1956 and hence could be very valuable. Please consider its publication in one of the earliest issues of *Mother India*. Thanks.

(14.12 1994)

To say anything adequately about a personality like Amal-Kiran—better known outside as K. D. Sethna—is impossible for an ordinary man like me. Still, I am attempting it because, in certain respects, he has played an important and unforgettable role in my life ever since I came to the Ashram in the year 1931.

Led by a mysterious hand Amal arrived in Pondicherry at a very early age, a little more than 13 months after the Victory day (Siddhi), 24 November 1926. The secret urge that had driven him in search of something deep and true in life had also prompted him to make this place his abode. He was here as Kekoo D. Sethna for the first few years and it was only a little later that Sri Aurobindo gave him a new name. And what a perfect name written in his own hand:

Amal .

Full name अमल किरान
Amal-kiran
(The clear ray)

. 3 September 1930 . Sri Aurobindo

How blessed is Amal that the Master wrote his name first in Sanskrit, the language of the gods, and then in English, explaining the meaning as well. I wonder if he has done so for anybody else.

I am indeed very happy that Amal has succeeded in becoming a nonagenarian and I wish that he would live a full life of a hundred Autumns as cherished by the ancient seers. My present tribute, however, is confined to some of my personal associations with him; I shall give here only a few of the several instances when he was so helpful to me. I shall particularly narrate the literary help I received from him and how he prompted me to compose a poem which, in a very mysterious way and as if prophetically, gets connected with the great Event that took place one year after its composition, that is, on 29 February 1956.

Quite some time earlier I had a nervous breakdown lasting for months and I gave up all hope of recovering fully to resume my sadhana. But Amal would visit my room often, in spite of the physical inconvenience due to his defective leg and in spite of the heavy work he always had on his hands. He would sit with me for a long time and try to dispel all my depression and despair. It was he and his editorial assistant Soli Albles who had encouraged me to publish my three-volume correspondence with Sri Aurobindo in his monthly *Mother India*; this they did in spite of some unhealthy comments by a few sadhaks in the Ashram. Without their painstaking editing of the letters, these books with the title *Guidance from Sri Aurobindo* would not have been so well-organised and successful. Sometimes to decipher correctly a word of Sri Aurobindo Amal would spend half an hour. It was this association and this help that inspired me to write some small articles of my own and that gave me an entry into the literary field.

For a time Amal was our professor of English Poetry. Once he asked all the students to write a poem as homework. Nobody wrote. He was still very patient and said, "Do you think it is so difficult to compose a poem? In our ordinary parlance also there is so much poetry." This he showed to us by writing on the blackboard how our normal speech can be poetry. He further encouraged us by saying that whatever we would write he would give us full marks! Some of us tried. He liked my composition so much that he came to my room and said, "Since you have such a talent, why don't you write poetry? I shall publish it in *Mother India*." But I pointed out to him that in my composition there were no rhymes and that all the lines were not of equal length. "We can sit together and perfect it as much as possible," he said. It was my maiden attempt and, after going through it, he said that not a word need be changed in it, I was naturally happy when he found it all right. But I was stunned when he added that he felt jealous about it. What humility for a gifted poet like him! He even published this poem in the April 1955 issue of *Mother India*:

Standing on the last horizon
 I saw a golden gate opening.
 It had no bolts, no hinges—
 Only a huge lid that looked like a sun.

Amazed I watched on, forgetting my very self.
 The opening lid made no sound,
 Only a movement of light.
 Then gushed out air the world had never breathed before.

How the whole thing happened is a great surprise to me; but a greater surprise is the Supramental Manifestation that took place later in February 1956. My second poem is also about the Manifestation and was published in *Mother India* April 1956; it runs as follows:

O Power Supreme! long-awaited Birth!
 Thou comest burdened with lotus dawns
 To the wearied limbs of patient earth.

Calmly thou comest, O lovely Light,
 To plant the Sun's immortality
 And the Moon's solid tranquillity.

Behind thee I glimpse the eternal pace
 Of thy royal Master's radiant feet.
 The Finite shall kiss the Gnostic Grace!

Soon wilt thou burst the inconscient Cavern
 And release the iron crusts of our world.
 Denied to the Gods, to Man thou art given!

It seems that things were moving fast and the atmosphere was rife for some very significant Event to take place. Somehow my “Prelude” caught it and somehow Amal was responsible for making me write it; amazed, I look at it again.

In connection with the Supramental Manifestation I recollect Amal's story. It was on 29 February 1956 that he had to go to Bombay for some work; but he was hesitant to do so as it was expected that something important would take place during that year. He asked the Mother; as she thought that it would be towards the end of March she allowed him to go as, by then, he would come back. She also told him that in case it happened, she would inform him about it. He was on his way to Bombay, travelling by train on 29 February—the most memorable Day in human history. He had retired early in his compartment, but

then he saw in his sleep a big crowd moving, one person at a time, towards the Mother. He wanted to join in. Shaking off his slippers in his dream, he woke up. Most unexpectedly he saw the Mother standing, a transparent form against the wooden panels of the compartment. He could not make out anything from that vision. After his return to the Ashram he asked the Mother about it. She replied: "I had promised to inform you about the Supramental Manifestation whenever it occurred. I came to do it."

Later, on the occasion of his birthday he requested the Mother to show him the note she had written about the experience of the Supramental Manifestation. She granted him the birthday-wish and brought the note to the evening interview at the Playground. Amal read the Mother's writing and returned the note to her, retaining fully the contents in his memory. How fortunate he always was!

One more incident apropos of the Manifestation. This was much before 1956, in the time of Sri Aurobindo. The late Dilip Kumar Roy noted that the Mother was spending several hours in the Playground. He wrote to Sri Aurobindo asking whether the Supermind was going to descend there; he even sought permission to join the Playground activity. Sri Aurobindo replied that it was not necessary for him to do so. He added that if the Supermind was going to descend in the Playground he himself would not get it as he wouldn't be going there!

And yet see the irony of events! Sri Aurobindo had left his body and Dilip Kumar Roy the Ashram when the Manifestation took place indeed in the Playground. The Mother was giving us the meditation after the Wednesday class when this happened.

The same year I met the Mother and asked her, "How is it that I was there in front of you during the meditation and yet did not know about the Descent?" But I must say that I had slipped into a trance at that time; this was in spite of her warning us not to do it in public places. And, though Sri Aurobindo had taught me to be conscious in trance, I had fallen into an unconscious trance.

Amal prompting me to write a poem and that poem having some connection, howsoever remote, with this great Event makes me feel happy; I owe that happiness to him indeed.

Towards the end of the year 1954, in what was before the gymnasium hall and what are now the office and the store-room of the Playground, the Mother spoke thus: "The next fourteen months will be critical for the Ashram." She, however, did not give any reason as to why it was going to be so, nor any indication of what was going to happen afterwards. These fourteen months ended in February 1956. Till the end of 28th of February nothing happened. Our small human mind had forgotten all that the Mother had said and then suddenly something wonderful took place. The Supermind had made up its Mind to come down on the oddest day, the extra day allotted to the year 1956, 29 February! The Mother later called this day the Golden Day. Surely Sri Aurobindo's

“strategic sacrifice”—to use a phrase of Amal’s—on 5 December 1950 had hastened the Supramental advent.

If one is not a versatile person one cannot be called an Aurobindonian. Amal is an Aurobindonian in the extreme. He must have been prepared through several lives to become so. He was in Athens in ancient times and then in Renaissance Italy and in England during the Restoration. Through these past lives he is what we see him today during his stay in the Ashram.

However, among all the great qualities and achievements what strikes me most in him is his humanness. And that is what has made him so popular here; he is full of affection and is intimate with everybody in the Ashram. Also, he is above all likes and dislikes and yet shrewd enough to detect the defects and shortcomings of others. His V.I.P.-ness does not make him feel superior to others; instead there is always a warmth and true intimacy in his manner.

What Amal had said about his birth-date—25 November—is not only interesting, it is revealing too: “I am sandwiched between the Victory Day, 24 November, and the Immortality Day, 26 November.” It must be connected in some deep way with his soul’s journey. May he live at least till his centenary and achieve the goal for which he has dedicated such a rich and integral life in a remote corner like Pondicherry.

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I READ with great interest the article you wrote to celebrate the birth centenary of our dear Amrita-da in 1995.

On the basis of Amrita's remark that Sri Aurobindo told him that *he still felt the edge of the guillotine on his neck*, you have inferred that Sri Aurobindo was Danton.

In this connection I would like to bring to your notice a conversation that I had with Nolini-da, some years before his passing.

One day, when I, a history student on whom the French Revolution had made a deep impression, came to know that Debu had been Robespierre, I became eager to know more about who was who during that period.

Therefore I went to Nirod-da and asked, "Please tell me who Sri Aurobindo was during the French Revolution?" He replied that he did not know and that I should ask Nolini-da. I went to Nolini-da and posed the question. He became thoughtful and said, "Sri Aurobindo did not descend directly during the revolution. He was directing it from behind." Then I mentioned that there was a general impression in the Ashram that Sri Aurobindo had been Danton. He emphatically replied, "No."

I hope this letter will put the record straight.

On a previous occasion while talking about the *automatic writing* experiments of Sri Aurobindo he had reminisced, "Suddenly someone came and shouted, 'Terror, red terror', it was Danton."

Then I asked him, "Who were you during the Revolution?" With great reluctance he answered, "I was the poet of the Revolution." This was André Chénier. On another occasion he revealed to me that a part of the Mother had come as Marie Antoinette and another as Empress Josephine.

SHYAM KUMARI

EDITOR'S COMMENT

Amrita's remark, with its very precise content involving Sri Aurobindo's own testimony, makes a poser which cannot easily be set at rest. Decisive light seems still wanting.

INDIA'S MISSION: A PATH TO WORLD UNION

WE have before us a transcript of X's address on the threats to secular India. The document we have received is not an authoritative and authenticated version, and errors of typography as well as transcription are discernible. Further, the context, the forum and the audience are not given. But we shall understand this to be a statement though not verbatim, yet representative of the given point of view. I seek to respond to this wider position rather than to the immediate details of the address. X is an eminent scholar of economic thought, and is acclaimed for a deep analysis of social well-being. Indeed, the address presents us with a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the recent tumultuous events in India, and a factoring of their possible causes. In any such endeavour, not every minutest detail is adduced and accounted for, such may well be an impossible task when entire histories of civilisations are involved, but a shared context and sympathy underlies the discourse wherein the main forces thrusting the situation are identified and their frontier and bourne limned. The shared context of the discourse is that of an ardent and idealistic intellectual quest for an imperative harmony for a modern India, and such is the sympathetic understanding I shall extend in my presentation. One can take issue with the choice of underpinning details that reveal the assumptions in the address dealing with the history of Indian civilisation. This I shall not do except in one or two instances. Identifying the forces at work, though a difficult task, can be accomplished with fair objectivity. But outlining their direction can only be done relative to some preferred frame of reference for possible trajectories of social evolution. We shall attempt, first, to understand the possibilities and the limits of any intellectual approach; next, to identify this preferred position from which India's social evolution is regarded in the address; thirdly, to place in context the given motive forces in the situation, and finally to comment on certain details of India's history given in the address.

The Rational Approach

A rational approach to face all the myriad challenges of existence was promoted in Europe of the 19th century. Reason, it was held, shall solve all problems besetting man, and its wonderful and incisive light shall banish the supernatural and lay bare the spirit. The rational age itself emerged in a period of European renaissance—breaking the shackles of feudalism and Christian theocracy, and proclaiming liberty, equality and fraternity for all humankind. It is without doubt to the credit of reason that the modern age has been ushered into the world.

But the rationalistic programme is inherently limited. This was shown in the domain of philosophy by Godel, of science by Heisenberg and of social science

by Arrow. Godel demonstrated that in any rational system that can represent all the integers, there exist statements that can neither be proved nor disproved. Thus, the philosophy of the rational programme was refuted by the incompleteness attending it. The agenda for the infallibility of human reason was also set back by Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. The uncertainty principle states that there is a fundamental limit on the precision of simultaneous measurements of certain physical quantities irrespective of the quality of the measuring equipment used. Thus, the hope that science shall apprehend and control a deterministic reality was demolished. Finally, in the social realm, Arrow demonstrated the impossibility of a rational constitution that guarantees maximum social welfare while at once resolving all conflicts of individual choice without resorting to dictatorship. If we understand liberty to mean that each individual has full freedom to choose possible states of the world, and equality to mean that no single individual's choice is forced on everyone, then there may be no resolution of the crisis of rationalism for society. Godel impels us to ambiguity, or belief without proof; Heisenberg to uncertainty, or (through Bell) to non-local transcendence of space-time; and Arrow to dictatorship, or a certain likeness amongst individuals—essentially fraternity. In any case, the rational programme has been roundly curtailed on the philosophical, scientific and social fronts by its own methodology. It is a deep insight that without faith, such as this irrational entity may be, there can be no resolution of this fundamental crisis of rationalism.

Secular humanism emerged in Europe as a pragmatic compromise between Rationalism and Christianity. Under the rational influence it proclaims that matter and spirit are irreconcilable, and under the Christian influence it proclaims the ideal of humanism. Through rational practices of science, economics and statecraft it enhances material well-being of society, and through moral practices of humanism it upholds the lofty ideals of liberty and equality, and a vision of human rights and dignity inalienable by the state. It is a compromise between rationalism and Christianity in the sense that reason has admitted spirit, though decoupled from matter, and has adopted humanism to give itself purpose, and in the sense that, on the other hand, Christianity has abandoned claims to exclusive ecclesiastical power over society. Arguably, this is the only compromise possible between rationalism and the semitic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam which have as a tenet God's transcendence of this world but not God's immanence in it. Secular humanism faces the same crisis, that of faith, for it has no fraternal principle that binds humankind. Secular humanism renders unto Caesar what is Caesar's, but cannot render unto God what is God's. While secular humanism accommodates the individual's spirituality it denies the spiritual basis of collective existence.

The Spiritual Approach

Yet the spirit is more deep-rooted and cannot be axiomatised away. In Hindu philosophy, a different, integrated approach is possible. Hindu philosophy accepts not just the transcendence of God but also God's immanence in the world, both at the cosmic level and at the individual level. What was a confrontation and a compromise between this-worldly reason and other-worldly faith in the Occident becomes in India an integration of reason into the seamless and all-inclusive synthesis of Hinduism. This synthesis of reason and faith we shall call *spiritual humanism*. It should be noted that this is no appeal to Hindu religion as practised at any given time, but rather the changeless Hindu spirituality is invoked.

Clearly, any philosophy that seeks to be an alternative to secular humanism should be no worse than it. And again, it is faith, not unreasoning but exceeding reason, that opens the way. The social principles of liberty, equality and fraternity discovered in Europe have as underlying spiritual principles freedom, unity and godhood: freedom of the soul from the bond of existence and action and its effects; unity of the individual souls throughout manifestation; godhood of the soul's identification with the Supreme in and above manifestation. In the end, the spiritual principle is the only fraternal and harmonising principle in this world. Spiritual humanism is no credal dogma or narrow philosophy or dry ideology, but a broad stream encompassing the spirit of all diverse existence, with all faiths and rationalities as its tributaries, merging into the ocean of All-spirit. The political state is one amongst many modes of collective existence. Secular humanism manifests in this mode alone while spiritual humanism manifests in all modes of collective existence: spiritual humanism embraces and exceeds secular humanism.

The development of civilisation in India has been a dynamic process with fluid mobility and collision between cultures. No single culture in India grew in isolation, but by action of political, economic and social forces each influenced and was influenced by the others. India also strongly influenced the spiritual, cultural and scientific development of all nations of the world, and in turn she assimilated into herself their ideologies and progress. Underlying India's development, there was always a quest for a unifying, integrating basis as a philosophy of existence and life and society, and this constituted a broad and non-dogmatic mainstream, the very fabric of Indian civilisation. By its very nature, it incorporated the extant diversity into itself—a river of many tributaries—and also by its very nature, it was constantly modified into diverse forms to meet the needs of society. All cultures have to a greater or lesser extent irrigated themselves from this stream and draped in this fabric. However, all other world cultures have either suffered major dislocations in their evolution or have made a break with their roots. But India has preserved a continuous stream

of spiritual development that can be traced back to its very genesis. Certain consolidations of this mainstream are more significant—the period of the Vedas, the period of the Upanishads, Buddhism, the independence movement. However, the process of mainstreaming was and is continuous. It does not matter what name is given to this mainstream, whether *Sanatana Dharma* or Hinduism or Vedic philosophy or Spiritual Humanism. In the measure this mainstream got encrusted in its forms, society lost its life-force. The caste system, the feudal system, rituals whose significances were lost, fatalism, are such limiting forms. These are an unfortunate effect of an inert and hardened society whose innate dynamism and seeking got diminished. We must work to eradicate them through our personal and social action so once more a dynamic and forward-looking society, not a revisionist, anachronistic and medieval one, shall emerge in India. The process of revival and mainstreaming continues and shall victoriously break through these limitations and compel the world, for it is this spiritual synthesis of reason and faith on which world union can rest.

India's Transition

In the given address of X, the path of secular humanism is the preferred frame of reference to analyse the direction of social forces in India. Inasmuch as the state thus far espoused secular humanism, despite its questionable implementation, one may have drawn comfort. Intellectual honesty demands that the state's deviation from the path of secular humanism should have inspired protest. But this was mild, perhaps because the overall direction adopted by the state was aligned to the ideals of the rational programme. Now, as it inevitably must, a spiritual possibility has risen once more for modern India. In this possibility, secular humanism must be endorsed for the state—uniform civil law, modern economic policies, scientific approach and realism in statesmanship, for we cannot choose by blind faith what reason can better—but it must not deny India's cultural and spiritual heritage. Its rational approach for the state will bring material well-being to Indian society while its spiritual foundation will bring fraternal harmony. Further, all of us participating in India's progress have to ensure that India's spiritual renaissance is not led into narrow straits—such is the demand not just of intellectual honesty, but more pressing yet, of fidelity to the spirit.

The transition to spiritual humanism is fraught with difficulty on three fronts. On one side is the opposition by rationalists, on the second, the activism of the revisionists, and on the third is the zeal of the converted. The rationalist opposition seeks to deny India's spiritual renaissance, and to rely solely on rationalism. The rationalists wish India's mainstream to dry up and end, and a new model with an exclusively rational basis to be taken up. A radical alteration of the mainstream philosophy and basis of society has happened under three

circumstances so far in the world—one, when the social traditions could not integrate modern science into themselves, two, under imperialism, and three, under ideological domination. The first can be seen in Europe, the second in Japan and the third in China. The first does not seem to be the case in India, but mild variants of the second and third persist. The rational quest, if intellectually honest, should at least counter inconsistencies of implementation; but it seems incapable of this. Any reasonable rationalist opposition must be engaged through urbane and constructive debate and absorbed into the mainstream, while all unreasonable rationalist opposition can be left to dwindle by its own contradictions. The revisionist programme seeks to reconstruct an India of the past, righting historical wrongs and restoring lost glory. This can only lead to isolation of India into some anachronistic and factional fiefdom. But harmony and world union is our compelling destiny and India's mission is to show the path to it through a new fraternity. For this, irrespective of India's history, revisionism must go. Finally, the zeal and the energies of India's renaissance must be channelled into creative efforts through each individual's personal realisation and through forward-looking and visionary leadership, to build an enduring foundation for emergent India. The process of mainstreaming is by necessity slow, and cannot be speeded up without introducing dogmatism. If done, the mainstream will be weak. This renaissance is the motive energy to counter revisionism and exclusive rationalism, thereby to hew a new path for India which the world can hark to. But the possibility of these forces degenerating into confrontation is by no means marginal and we have to be vigilant to guard against it. In particular, the full apparatus of the society and state must be brought to bear against anarchic and criminal acts, whether sporadic or organised, and whether internal or external. These seek to narrow the scope of the renaissance or derail it or divert its message. However, the essential dichotomy between secular humanism and spiritual humanism cannot be denied. India stands today before these paths and, if she is true to her nature, she shall choose spiritual humanism. It is this synthesis of rational and spiritual pursuits that alone can bring about a compelling model for future society, and however maladroitly, this is being worked out in India.

The Way Forward

These three components—revisionism, exclusive rationalism, spiritual humanism—describe India's current social modes. In the address X identifies communal fascism, sectarian nationalism and militant obscurantism as threats to secular humanism in India. But these constitute the submodes of revisionism. Worse threats to India are the ideals of secular humanism themselves, espoused in a spirit alien to and incompatible with the spirit of India, and an inconsistent implementation of these ideals by mediocre statesmen, conniving politicians and

an apathetic bureaucracy. Foreign ideals cannot be transplanted into a native soil without adaptation of both, and, if done, will lead to death of the ideal and depletion of the soil. It has happened. I suggest that the three causes identified above by X arise from this single unfortunate experiment inexactly foisted on the Indian populace. Inasmuch as no organic form was given to secular humanism, and no adaptation of the Indian spirit was made to this ideal, it is a failure of the Indian intellectuals. Spiritual humanism is for India the organic cognate of secular humanism, and it will not only harmonise India but also lay the foundation for world union. India once pioneered the path of individual liberation; India now will hew the path of collective liberation and take the world past its current stasis. Education and prosperity are recommended in the address as the cure for India's ills, and indeed such they are. However, with education and prosperity we see India choosing not just rational ideals alone, but spiritual ones too. There is a fundamental shift away from an exclusive rational programme, not in an obscurantist manner but rather in an open and inspired one. The way forward to India's future and the world's is an integral synthesis of reason and faith through spiritual humanism. Let us work to make this future enlightened and vast as well.

Seeking to attest to the benign and enlightened nature of the Mughal period in India, X quotes Sri Aurobindo, whom he identifies as a Hindu religious leader,

The Mussalman domination ceased very rapidly to be a foreign rule.

I suggest that Sri Aurobindo, who is recognised as a spiritual leader of all humanity, holds the durable foundation of spirituality on which our civilisation is based to be responsible for this process. It is always a hazard to abridge an exact writer. Yet I shall attempt to do so by quoting him from *Indian Culture and External Influence*,

... India can only survive by confronting this raw, new, aggressive, powerful world with fresh diviner creations of her own spirit, cast in the mould of her own spiritual ideals. She must meet it by solving its greater problems.. in her own way, through solutions arising out of her own being and from her own deepest and largest knowledge...

I suggest that the crisis of rationalism is the "greater problem" faced by the world, and India will solve it "in her own way... from her deepest and largest knowledge" through spiritual humanism. It would be a travesty of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual message to invoke his support for an exclusive rationalism. His passionate appeal of *Bande Mataram*, his ceaseless work for a united India and her culture and history and nationalism and spirituality, and India's place

and role in the comity of nations, and his towering and many-sided vision of a spiritual basis for world union vastly exceed the rational programme

X quotes from the 11th century account of Al Beruni, who accompanied Mahmud of Gazni, to attest that Hindu philosophy is not idolatrous,

... idols are erected only for uneducated low-class people of little understanding; .. the Hindus never made an idol of any supernatural being, much less of God...

What the motivations of Al Beruni were in accounting the Hindu position, and what the motivations are in reproducing that account, one need not surmise. But one should know with the Isha Upanishad that

iśā vāsyam idam sarvam

All this is for habitation by the Lord

and that in every bosom dwells the immanent Deity. For even spiritual humanism itself is only a bridge to something beyond, the human form and society only a laboratory of Nature, and her experiment of terrestrial evolution presses onward to superhuman goals. Without spiritual humanism we shall be her transient obstacles; with it, her conscious collaborators in the unfolding mystery of manifestation.

AKASH DESHPANDE

TWO POEMS

A SOFT CARPET

O LOVELY petals!
Petals of Love
And Surrender,
Be spread
Wide and far
On the bare ground
Of my heart.

Prepare a soft
And smooth carpet
For the timely tread
Of my Sweet Beloved.

YOU BESIDE ME

With you beside me,
All is poesy,
O my Beloved!
You bloom poesy
In me
And pluck
The Lotus
In no time.

What more
Can I offer
Than this
Lonely Lotus
From the muddy pool
Of my earthly life?

ASHALATA DASH

ON "THE PASSING OF SHAH JEHAN"*

(A Painting by Abanindranath Tagore)

I

OF all achievements in man's varied activity,
Only that has the stamp of permanence
Which bears the heart's and spirit's genuine touch,
All else is passing show of vanity or arrogance
And though there is many a fortunate soul
Born to relish all it has wished for
Power, position, love, health and wealth.
To none is given forever to live free
From trying periods of time—
Those more acute pangs caused by inner wars:
The strifes within one's own self.
For this is the inexorable law of all
Poor human lot rooted in the slime.

Such periods are the Hours of God—Hours of Truth,
When, assailed by hard and rude shocks of life
Or struck by sinister changes of fortune,
One feels lost, lonely and desolate,
Almost helpless and resourceless—
Even amidst friends or dear ones
Or in mirthful company or in glory—
Face to face with none save one's own lone puny self
And all-powerful Nature or fate's crushing weight.

'Tis then the Hamletian Hour,
When one is inevitably led to question
If all this that is makes any sense;
If life, after all, is not
An empty pageant of irresistible mirages,
A fascinating snare to imprison the being,
A hypnotic charm to lull it into sleep
On the soft bed of roses of illusory bliss,
As insubstantial as the air one breathes;
And then one is left to act or not to act

* Recast version of a poem published in *Mother India*, January 1965 See author's note at the end of the poem

In the strength or weakness of one's spirit,
The source of one's subtle, recondite will.

Such must have been Shah Jehan's thoughts
When he was still in power and the Reigning Emperor,
The sudden turn of events made of him
A tragic victim—a prisoner for life
In the hand of none other than the treacherous
Aurangzeb, the most ambitious of his many sons!

Impassive, inscrutable Nature,
Mother of Evolution and revolutions,
Cause of discords, battles and struggles,
Of accidents and coincidences,
What dire want of mad distraction
Drove you to also scatter
The seeds of Love and Compassion,
The cares of sweet ties and co-operation,
And yet provide room for self-adaptation
Amidst Life's ghastly Arena and ceaseless
Drama of daily killings and devourings
In the Lord's otherwise colourful Scenario
Of peaceful Co-Existence,
Sustained through the extravagance
Of His Dance of Creative Urge and Delight,
Held together by that magic thread:
His rich Harmony of diverse Unity?

II

Love came.
'Twas a perfect thing,
A perfect joy;
Eternity was then before the imperial lovers....
But had the Gods to thwart
Their shaping power of innocent dreams
Or Nature to mock the happy boon?

Thereafter, came the fatal hour:
Austere Death appeared
And bade the Queen to quit the King!
Quietly the Empress withdrew from life,

Leaving the anguished Emperor to ponder
The cruel, inconstant nature of things.

III

Love, disembodied, whispered:
"O Lord of my heart,
Grieve not!
Neither Mother Nature
Nor the Gods above
Nor the Demons below
Are cause of our separation.

"All mishaps, all trials and tribulations,
All snappings of earthly bonds or unions,
All deaths are but the consummation
Of our Soul's inmost, unknown, secret workings
In full consonance with the Universal Will
Of Nature's all-sustaining Force.
Misfortunes, diseases, accidents
Are mere contrivances—agents
To fulfil those secret workings,
That Universal Will
At the suitable Hour—the sealed Arcanum
Man has yet to uncover or wrest
From Nature's jealously guarded treasures
Of Occult Mysteries revealed to no weaklings
But only to a few intrepid seekers of Knowledge.

"Tarry then a while, my Love!
Thine hour to rejoin me is not yet,
Thou still hast work to accomplish!"

Thenceforward,
The King resolved to build
A monument
Whose rare splendour
Would match the measure
Of his steadfast ardour
And stand a permanent witness
To the fair and poignant tale
Of his love's pure and matchless fervour!

IV

Deep is the night,
 Pale is the moon,
 The river's a-tremble;
 Death's coming ..
 But the Emperor's Fire burns still within!

Taj the peerless,
 Light of Love,
 With marble magic
 Soothes the heart of night;
 An immutable Beauty
 Broods upon the moving moon
 In the glistening river!

Even as he awaits
 Death's impending call,
 The Emperor's gaze—
 Bedimmed by uses of the years
 And gone too hard for tears
 But, at this last phase,
 Still a-daze
 At the impeccable marvel
 His pain in forsaken love
 Has wrought—
 Dwells on the lucent tomb
 To lay its dying kisses
 On the Redeemed Doom:
 The Jewelled Dream
 Visible from the Palace room,
 From across the stream.

The Emperor seems
 To wonder
 If he it was the doer
 Of the Fabulous Miracle
 Standing out there
 Like a lone white lotus
 Bathed in serene moonbeam;
 Or shining like an evening star
 On the rosy bosom of one beloved
 Dreamt in a dream within a dream!

V

Beside the romantic river,
 Through the incomparable Taj
 The two departed lovers—
 Soul within soul,
 Now reunited forever
 In one imperishable whole
 Poised on transient dust—
 Beckon Time
 In silent trust
 To behold
 In all weather
 The Eternal Wonder of Love,
 To be told and retold
 Through the ages
 To generation after generation!

VI

Seer artist,
 Such is your gift divine,
 With only the trifle of a colour,
 The bagatelle of a line,
 Making us oblivious
 Of our roots in the slime
 For a little time,
 You wake our souls
 To a breathless rapture of the Everlasting
 And the Sublime!

BIBHAS JYOTI MUTSUDDI

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A scholar in both Western and Oriental studies and cultural lore, Sri Aurobindo, a revolutionary, a poet, a critic, a yogi and one of the greatest thinkers of our time, makes the following observation on the exceptional merit of the artist:

So wonderfully has God made the world that a man using a simple combination of lines, an unpretentious harmony of colours, can raise this

apparently insignificant medium to suggest absolute and profound truths with a perfection which language labours with difficulty to reach.¹

The poem was inspired by Abanindranath Tagore's masterful painting of Shah Jehan, and Sri Aurobindo's memorable comment on the remarkable powers of the artist to express the inexpressible with such rare perfection as to set one dreaming. The painting, a beauty of striking simplicity, shows the powerless Emperor lying on his bed in the verandah of the Red Fort in Agra, while he was still a prisoner of his own son, Aurangzeb

The Shah's head is turned towards the distant Taj, clearly visible as a small white building on the other side of the river, Jumna, inevitably associated with Sri Krishna's symbolic play—*Rasa Lila*—with the Gopies. The Emperor is assisted by his youngest and most devoted daughter, Jahanara, sitting beside her old dying father's bed.

Maybe, it is worthwhile citing here a few more passages from Sri Aurobindo's insights on art, which illuminatingly bring out the differences in the approach, form and style prevalent in Western and Oriental cultures before the advent of what is called "Modern Art", which has undoubtedly uniformised and universalised the vision and practice of art all over the world. So it is now next to impossible to know if a painting is the product of this or that particular culture, country or continent! Sri Aurobindo sums up the Oriental way of expressing art, thus:

The life depicted is the life of the soul and not, except as a form and a helping suggestion, the life of the vital being and the body.²

In reality the shapes he paints are the forms of things as he has seen them in the psychical plane of experience: these are the soul-figures of which physical things are a gross representation and their purity and subtlety reveals at once what the physical masks by the thickness of its casings. The lines and colours sought here are the psychic lines and psychic hues proper to the vision which the artist has gone into himself to discover.³

The whole creative force comes here from a spiritual and psychic vision, the emphasis of the physical is secondary and always deliberately lightened so as to give an overwhelmingly spiritual and psychic impression and everything is suppressed which does not serve this purpose or would distract the mind from the purity of this intention.⁴

As for the Western way, Sri Aurobindo says:

The orthodox western artist works by a severely conscientious reproduction

of the forms of outward Nature; the external world is his model, and he has to keep it before his eye and repress any tendency towards a substantial departure from it or any motion to yield his first allegiance to a subtler spirit. His imagination submits itself to physical Nature even when he brings in conceptions which are more properly of another kingdom, the stress of the physical world is always with him, and the Seer of the subtle, the creator of mental forms, the inner Artist, wide-eyed voyager in the vaster psychical realms, is obliged to subdue his inspiration to the law of the Seer of the outward, the spirit that has embodied itself in the creations of the terrestrial life, the material universe.⁵

... difference between two kinds of imagination, the mental, vital and physical stress of the art of Europe and the subtle, less forcefully tangible spiritual stress of the art of India.⁶

References

- 1 *The National Value of Art*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1922, p 52
- 2 *The Significance of Indian Art*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1947, p 96
- 3 *Ibid* , p 97
- 4 *Ibid* , p 94
- 5 *Ibid* , pp 91-2
- 6 *Ibid* , pp 106-7

MUSINGS ON PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1995)

4. THE MEETING (1)

Introduction

ONLY when one reads Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Mother's experience of November 16, 1915, can one begin to realise to what high spiritual Summits the Mother's *Prayers* refer. Those who have not gone beyond the Overmind consciousness (and hardly anybody can claim this, barring some exceptional individuals like Nolini Kanta Gupta) cannot interpret or understand these *Prayers* or their high content. But even though we may not be able to dive to the core of these Divine Communion and Revelations, we can, according to the measure of our sincerity and preparation, bathe and exult in the divine purity of the ambience of these *Prayers*. Additionally, we might also get some clue to the nature of Divinity, of course in proportion to our receptivity.

The Mother poured her Infinite Love and care on her children and disciples and was always with them, even physically, yet she rarely revealed or asserted her Divinity. Only in the golden pages of *Prayers and Meditations* are opened the gates of the diamond planes of her Supreme Splendour. These prayers are like a glimpse of the Unknown and Unknowable. For the reader they can open a gate onto and grant an entry into the Infinite and Eternal Divine Consciousness.

Let us read these *Prayers* with a grateful heart kneeling at her feet. Then who knows, by her Grace, some day we might be privileged to walk into the furrows etched by her divine aeonic labour on the breast of Time, to emerge into Timelessness.

Part One

On March 4, 1914 the Mother wrote in her diary, *Prayers and Meditations*,

It is likely to be the last time for a long while that I am writing at this table, in this calm room all charged with Thy Presence. For the next three days I shall probably not be able to write.... In an indrawn state I contemplate this turning page, vanishing into the dream of the past and look at the new page all full potentially of the dream of the future ..

On 4th and 5th March, the Mother was to leave behind all her past life and set out for the accomplishment of her true role—that of Avatarhood. The *event* for which centuries await eagerly and for which all Nature yearns and aspires,

was near. In these lines the Mother's beautiful and promising past is symbolized by the *turning page* she refers to as *vanishing into the dream of the past* and the *new page all full potentially of the dream of the future* awaits her pen.

The Mother had taken leave from all the material things in her life on March 3, and from the family and friends on 5th March. Thus she closed the first chapter of her life with an overflowing sweetness and an all-encompassing love and divine detachment. And having thus done with the old life, she, like an immaculate *Deity*, boards her temple-chariot for *The Journey* which will lead to the momentous meeting with Sri Aurobindo. The *meeting* which will turn the scales of the Creation in favour of the descent of the Supramental Power with the future certainty of its reign of Light, Love, and Immortality being established here on our earth, this Power which has the potentiality of the transformation and divinization of Matter.

But the Hostiles, the Titans who rule the world were very conscious of this *Divine Event*, the impending *meeting* of the Divine and his Shakti. They became active and tried to wreck the chances of this catalytic fusion of Divine Energies which would one day bring about the end not only of their forces but of their very existence.

The Anti-Divine agents tried their best to sink the ship on which the Mother was travelling. They called the hordes of death and destruction and raised the furies of hell to help them gain their objective. A terrible tempest buffeted the ship *Kaga Maru* which was carrying the Divine Mother on her momentous *mission*. There was an imminent danger of the ship sinking with all on board. But the Divine Force was also there, battling the Titans, to protect the *Deity* of the New Creation. On an inner impulsion the Mother went out in her subtle body and calmed the agitated entities behind the storm. About this important battle she wrote on March 7, 1914 in her diary,

Thou wert with us yesterday as the most marvellous of protections;
Thou didst permit Thy law to triumph even in the most external manifestation. Violence was answered by calm, brutality by the strength of sweetness, and where an irreparable disaster would have occurred, Thy power was glorified. O Lord, with what fervent gratitude did I greet Thy Presence!

The great battle between the Forces of Light and Darkness had begun in earnest that day on the *Kaga Maru*. *Irreparable* damage was intended. The Mother had taken an attitude of total submission to the divine Will. She was fully alert but at the same time absolutely detached. She had made it clear in her prayer of February 21, 1914, even before setting out on this *voyage*,

O Lord, my heart is purified of all uneasiness and anguish; it is steady and calm and sees Thee in all things; and whatever our outer actions may

be, whatever the circumstances the future has in store for us, I know that Thou alone livest, that Thou alone art real in Thy immutable permanence and it is in Thee that we live....

Thus having already conquered all anxiety, she now gave battle to the Forces of death and disintegration, but, as we have seen above, she battled with different arms. Sri Aurobindo has written,

Some day surely
The world too shall be saved from death by Love.

(SABCL, Vol 6, p. 534)

The only Power which can set right this world, which has gone astray, is Divine Love—this Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have stipulated repeatedly. On that day the Mother went out on the deck of that ship and with utter calm and *by the strength of sweetness* overcame the violence and brutality of the elements. It was no simple battle, rather a cosmic war having the future Divinization of the universe at stake and the Mother was permitted to use only calm and sweetness as her means of defence. For the Mother it was not only a victory won in a single skirmish but a test, a sign, a seal of Divine Approval. She testifies,

It was for me the sure sign that we would have the strength to act, to think, to live in Thy name and for Thee; not only in intention and will, but effectively in an integral realisation.

That day the Mother entered into and expressed the sweetest and probably the holiest state of Universal Love. On March 7, 1914, after recording the battle and its outcome in her diary she made the following testament of Divine Love,

This morning my prayer rises to Thee, always with the same aspiration: to live Thy love, to radiate Thy love, with such potency and effectiveness that all may feel fortified, regenerated and illumined by our contact. To have power to heal life, to relieve suffering, to generate peace and calm confidence, to efface anguish and replace it by the sense of the one true happiness, the happiness that is founded in Thee and never fades.... O Lord, O marvellous Friend, O all-powerful Master, penetrate all our being, transfigure it till Thou alone livest in us and through us!

These words are a Supreme Grace. And that day, even though unconsciously, all things animate and inanimate must have felt a benediction and protection and, momentarily at least, a sudden sweetness in their lives.

A new dawn came. All was turned Godward. The chance fellow-travellers

on that boat received a divine bounty. They were after all, unknowingly, a part of the Divine Mother's entourage. She, whose nearness turns all dross into purified gold, showered the blessings of her Love on them. On March 8, 1914 she noted in her diary,

In front of this calm sunrise which turned all within me into silence and peace, at the moment when I grew conscious of Thee and Thou alone wast living in me, O Lord, it seemed to me that I adopted all the inhabitants of this ship, and enveloped them in an equal love, and that so in each one of them something of Thy consciousness would awake. Not often had I felt so strongly Thy divine power and Thy invincible light, and once again total was my confidence and unmixed my joyful surrender. O Thou who relievest all suffering and dispersest all ignorance, O Thou the supreme healer, be constantly present on this boat in the heart of those whom it shelters that once again Thy glory be manifested!

Thus she invoked the Lord's protection and benediction on all those on board. Then all these people were as if sanctified and made worthy to be in the company of the *Deity*. After having won the battle and enveloping everyone around in her golden aura, the Mother again turned inwards. She wrote on March 9, 1914,

Those who live for Thee and in Thee... for them, it is Thy Presence that is manifest in all and Thy unchangeable splendour, which never leaves them, is apparent in the least grain of sand. The whole earth chants Thy praises; in spite of the obscurity, misery, ignorance, through it all, it is still the glory of Thy love which we perceive and with which we can commune ceaselessly everywhere.

Enveloped in the glory of the Divine's Love, the Mother made an enchanting word picture of that ship,

O Lord, my sweet Master, all this I constantly experience on this boat which seems to me a marvellous abode of peace, a temple sailing in Thy honour over the waves of the subconscious passivity which we have to conquer and awaken to the consciousness of Thy divine Presence.

Seated in that Temple the *Deity* of that sailing Temple prepared the marvellous future of which she gave a hint in the same prayer,

Blessed among all days be that day when the earth at last awakened shall know Thee and shall live only for Thee.

Thus we see the divinization and transformation of earth was ever the aim of the Mother. To achieve it was her mission and the *golden journey* to India the first decisive step.

Part Two

While the *Kaga Maru* glides on its way unaware of its special Divine Passenger, the Mother is fully conscious of the great *event*, her approaching meeting with Sri Aurobindo, with its stupendous spiritual ramifications.

After the great battle when *irreparable disaster* was averted, a holy hush spreads around. Apropos of the words *irreparable damage* we must remember that *Prayers and Meditations* is a record, where the spiritual Scribe has used each word purposefully, with full awareness of its purport. If the Mother uses the words *irreparable damage* she means it fully. For the Divine Creatrix who makes and unmakes millions of universes was fully conscious of who She was and what the stakes were. In this context it will be pertinent to remember how the ship on which Sri Aurobindo was to travel to India sank mid-way. It was only a divine intervention which made Sri Aurobindo come by another ship. In a state of total, alert silence, on March 10, 1914 the Mother wrote in her diary,

In the silence of the night Thy Peace reigned over all things, in the silence of my heart Thy Peace reigns always; and when these two silences were united, Thy Peace was so powerful that no disturbance of any kind could resist it.

Thus enveloped in an immutable peace the Mother now turns her benevolent gaze on the crew and the passengers,

Then I thought of all those who were watching over the boat to safeguard and protect our course, and in gratefulness I wanted to make Thy Peace spring up and live in their hearts; then I thought of all those who, confident and free from care, slept the sleep of inconscience, and with solicitude for their miseries, pity for their latent suffering which would arise in them when they awoke, I wanted that a little of Thy Peace might live in their hearts and awaken in them the life of the spirit, the light that dispels ignorance.

Here we have to note two things. Firstly, as if these unconscious voyagers, the people travelling with the Mother, had to be raised to a certain minimum standard of divine purity so that their impurities may not give an entry to the hostiles to attack the ship again. The surroundings, the land, the chance participants in this *journey* had to be lifted into a certain divine ambience.

Secondly, the Divine Mother, on way to her *Ascension* to her sacred throne was throwing divine largesses on all around. And she was duly grateful to the crew who were responsible for the safety of the ship.

Now she spreads out her arms, full of divine compassion, to gather all the beings of the earth to her. The following part of this prayer is the most detailed and sublime benediction ever recorded. There is perhaps nothing so comprehensive even in the great benedictions of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*.

She writes,

Then I thought of all the inhabitants of this vast sea, both visible and invisible, and I willed that Thy Peace might spread over them. Then I thought of those we had left far behind and whose affection goes with us, and with a great tenderness I wanted Thy conscious and lasting Peace for them, the plenitude of Thy Peace as far as they could receive it. Then I thought of all those towards whom we are going, who are troubled by childish preoccupations and fight in ignorance and egoism for petty rivalries of interest; and ardently, in a great aspiration, I asked for them the full light of Thy Peace. Then I thought of all those we know, all those we do not know, all the life in the making, all that has changed its form, all that is not yet in form, and for all these, even as for all that I cannot think about, for all that is present to my memory and for all that I forgot, in a deep contemplation and mute adoration I implored Thy Peace.

In this all-encompassing benediction the Mother gathers together all the known and unknown, all that is conscious and unconscious, all that is in form and without form, all those she remembers or has forgotten and *implores* for the Lord's Peace to take away their futile agitations. Immersed in this holy and immaculate state, full of love for the creation and its creatures, the Mother lays down her pen and one more day of that momentous *voyage* passes.

On November 12, 1914 the ship wakes up to a new day and totally unconscious of what had been asked for and bestowed upon them, the passengers go on with their usual life of petty occupations; eating and drinking, playing cards, etc. For them time, which hangs heavy on their hands, is something to be frittered away in frivolous pursuits. But she, who has become a poised serenity, one whom nothing can disgust or discourage, takes the occasion to look for the hidden Divinity in things. She writes,

O Lord, my one aspiration is to know Thee and serve Thee better every day. What do outer circumstances matter? They seem to me each day more vain and illusory, and I take less and less interest in what is going to happen to us in the outer life; but more and more I am intensely interested in the one thing which seems important to me: To know Thee better in

order to serve Thee better All outer events must converge upon this goal and this goal alone; and for that all depends upon the attitude we have towards them.

The first goal of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo is the psychicisation of life—to deal with each and every event in the light of its hidden spiritual significance, to go behind appearances and touch the Truth of things. This the Mother began to actualise in her life long before she met Sri Aurobindo. Actually, even while outwardly leading a family life in ordinary circumstances, she had been intensely preparing herself for her *Mission*. Now the manifestation of that concentrated *Tapas* begins.

This is not a stoic attitude or a compromise or even forbearance. It *is* the sadhana and also the surest means for organizing life around the psychic being. The attitude of the devotee, who bears with dislike and barely suppressed disgust or at least with impatience all the mundane and often ugly sights which he witnesses while on way to the temple, who is annoyed if someone or something delays him and for whom the way is an ordeal to be tolerated as best he can, may be the ideal state in the *Bhakti Yoga*. But it is not so on the path of the Integral Yoga. On this path each spot of the world is the temple and each act of life should be and can be an offering. Behind each facet of the manifestation we can, if we would remove the veil, discover the presence of our Lord. The Mother makes it very clear in the same prayer,

To seek Thee constantly in all things, to want to manifest Thee ever better in every circumstance, in this attitude lies supreme Peace, perfect serenity, true contentment. In it life blossoms, widens, expands so magnificently in such majestic waves that no storm can any longer disturb it.

In her infinite wisdom, the Mother has given us the sure means, the unfailing formula for true and successful divine living. The sadhak of the *Jñāna Yoga*, the path of knowledge, eager to reach the assembly of the Wise in the shortest time, may spurn the babble of a child without realising that it is the Lord Himself teasing and testing him. Anybody who has made an inner effort for self-discipline can remain free of rancour, greed or craving, in short, of all the lower impulses, in the august premises of a temple or church. He may manage to come out of his limitations if by the grace of the Lord, he is thrown in the company of saints. But this is not the permanent, unshakable foundation, the sure Divine poise. It is a borrowed effulgence, a time-bound achievement. Once that pure environment or those propitious circumstances vanish, one lands straight in the lap of the lower universal nature, the *avidyā māyā*. The true change of nature comes from the attitude the Mother reveals, *to seek Thee constantly in all things, to want to manifest Thee ever better in every circumstance*; this, according to her,

is the shortest route to true spirituality, and the surest means to attain constant and everlasting spiritual Bliss. After stating this supreme truth the Mother lays down her pen with the words,

O Lord, Thou art our safeguard, our only happiness, Thou art our resplendent light, our pure love, our hope and our strength Thou art our life, the reality of our being!

In a reverent and joyful adoration I bow to Thee.

Part Three

A Trail of Light and Love

For the Mother, physically as well as spiritually, each day of this *voyage* was a step forward, leading to the goal. In her prayers of March 10 and March 12, she invokes the Lord's Peace and infuses as much of it as possible in those around her and in those far from her, in the animate and in the inanimate, in the known and the unknown. But in the prayer of March 13, 1914 she shifts the stress from peace to consciousness, light and love. She explains what is true consciousness,

How many different levels there are in consciousness! This word should be reserved for what is illumined in a being by Thy Presence, is identified with Thee and partakes of Thy absolute Consciousness, for that which has knowledge, that which is "perfectly awakened", as the Buddha says.

For the Mother, nothing short of that state which is illumined by the constant Presence of the Lord and in which the being in full awareness participates in His absolute Consciousness can be called consciousness. This knowledge by identity, this awakening to one's true self and its conscious identity with the Supreme Self is Consciousness. The rest is merely the process of awakening, of partial participation. She further clarifies the point,

Outside this state there are infinite grades of consciousness, going right down to complete darkness, the veritable inconscience which may be a domain yet untouched by the light of Thy Divine Love (but this seems improbable in the physical substance), or which is, for some kind of reason of ignorance, outside our individual range of perception.

The first thing that strikes one while reading this paragraph is that the words and the terms used here like *complete darkness* and *veritable inconscience* and

the ideas and the conclusions like the presence of the Divine Consciousness in Matter. are very similar to those used by Sri Aurobindo in his volumes. Except for the fact that the Mother has used a devotional and poetic mode and language for expressing the most profound philosophical-spiritual Truths, as far as their essence and substance are concerned, these writings might very well be Sri Aurobindo's. It seems as if *The Two* had already met and chartered together the whole course of the Supramental Yoga. As if though physically living far apart unknown to each other, on the inner plane the Avatars of the Supermind were consciously united and working towards the same end, the same aim—that of infusing Consciousness in the very heart of the Inconscient. The phrases and their meanings, and the philosophy behind them are strikingly identical.

To revert to the theme of consciousness the Mother writes,

This is, however, only a way of speaking, and a very incomplete one; for when the being becomes aware of Thy presence and is identified with Thy consciousness, it is conscious in all things and everywhere.

This is the self-expansion of the Supreme Consciousness. The Divine living in Her Divine Status is aware of all things simultaneously. It cannot be called even an Awareness or a Consciousness, it is simple and pure 'Existence.' For the Divine to become Self-awareness is needed the succession made possible by the divisions of Time and the expansion made by the creation of Space. The Mother says,

But the fleeting duration of this supreme consciousness can be explained only by the complexity of the elements of the being, by their unequal illumination and by the fact that they enter into activity successively. It is, moreover, because of this successive activity that they can gradually become aware of themselves as a result of their experience, both objective and subjective (which are really one and the same), that is, discover Thee in their unfathomable essence.

This objectivization of the Supreme Self, this growth through the manifest creation is for the beings the only way of attaining conscious Self-Knowledge. Through the successive becomings the elements of the different beings discover the divine in His *unfathomable essence*. But in fact there is no difference in the Being and his becomings. Closed or open, a book remains a book, its content remains the same, the relation of the words with each other remains the same.

Then what stands in the way of an integral consciousness permeating these millions of people? The Mother points out,

The subconscious is the intermediate zone between precise perception

and ignorance, total darkness; it is probable that most beings, even human beings, live constantly in their subconscious; few emerge from it. This is the conquest that is to be made; for to be conscious in the true sense of the word is to be Thyself integrally; and is not this the very definition of the work to be accomplished, the mission to be fulfilled upon earth?

Thus the Mother sets out to infuse consciousness in these myriads of creatures, humans and others, to make them divine, fully aware of their godheads, who would one day walk on the earth, like gods walk in their Empyrean. She, the Supreme Consciousness, incarnated in a human body sets out to divinise the whole Creation and its creatures. Can one imagine anything more holy and awe-inspiring? One can only kneel in adoration to this Greatness.

The Mother, ever conscious of her *mission* and the importance of the present *voyage* prays,

Sweet Master of Love, grant that all my consciousness may be concentrated in Thee so that I may live only by love and light and that love and light may radiate through me and awaken in all on our journey; may this physical journey be like a symbol of our action and may we leave everywhere a trace of Thee like a trail of light and love.

Yet again the fact strikes us how the Mother is fully conscious of the significance of this *physical journey*, and invokes the Lord that she may live in His love and light

True to her aspiration she radiates the Divine Consciousness and what she leaves behind is not only a *trace* but rather diamond-footprints on the sands of time. The work of the world's redemption had truly begun.

(To be continued)

SHYAM KUMARI

INVOCATION

MANY times you have come, O Lord,
And secretly tapped on my door.
Locked in the arms of worldly coils
I could not hear your call
Even when I was wide-awake.

Unhesitatingly I entered the thorny 'Ketaki' grove
For the lotus mistaking it
In my proud ignorance I gathered the honey
From the blooms of lust and filled my thirst.
I lighted the nights with the lamps of desire,
So missed seeing your golden eyes.

The strings of my veena played
Only the songs of my concert—
And not the melody of your love.
I saw my alluring ego in the mirror of the world
Instead of your image.
Losing the path of Immortality, I set out
On the steed of arrogance in the quest of nectar.

Reveal yourself as Nataraj, O Lord,
And destroy all my vain gyrations.
Open my all-seeing third eye;
Break the walls of my black egoism
And place your feet on the threshold of my soul.
May the Ganges of Consciousness flow
Into my desert heart
By your touch of beauty and bliss

JYOTSNA MOHANTY

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1995)

His one year's imprisonment, which he likened to an Ashram life, brought about a profound change in Sri Aurobindo's outlook. His life was so completely and so thoroughly changed that it can be said that he who went into the prison was not the same person who came out of it. In the jail he received the Supreme Grace of the Divine that showed itself as Vasudeva, Krishna of the Gita, Narayana.

Sri Aurobindo himself has recorded a number of his spiritual experiences during his solitary confinement. Truly speaking, it was an Ashram *Vas* in Alipore Jail.

Sri Aurobindo records an experience of levitation: In jail "I was having a very intense Sadhana on the vital plane and I was concentrated. And I had a questioning mind: 'Are such Siddhis as *Utthapana* (levitation) possible?' I then suddenly found myself raised up in such a way that I could not have done it myself with muscular exertion. Only one part of the body was slightly in contact with the ground but the rest was raised up against the wall. I could not have held my body like that normally even if I had wanted to and found that the body remained suspended like that without any exertion on my part...! In the jail there were many such extraordinary, and one may say, abnormal experiences. As I was doing Sadhana on the vital plane, I think these might have come from there. .. Then again I was practising to raise my hands and keep them suspended without any muscular control. Once in that raised condition of hand I fell off to sleep. The warder saw this condition and reported that I had died!"¹

Sri Aurobindo also undertook a fast which lasted eleven days when he was in Alipore jail. He lost ten pounds during that period and yet did not feel any adverse effect. He was in full yogic activity. The Superintendent of the jail did not know that Sri Aurobindo was throwing away his food into the bucket. Only the warder knew and he said to the others: "The gentleman must be ill. He won't live long."²

Also during the jail period, for a short time, Sri Aurobindo used to hear the voice of Swami Vivekananda instructing him on a particular aspect of Sadhana. Years later he said. "It was the spirit of Vivekananda who first gave me a clue in the direction of the Supermind. This clue led me to see how the Truth-Consciousness works in everything.... He didn't say 'Supermind', 'Supermind' is my own word. He just said to me, 'This is this, this is that' and so on. That was how he proceeded—by pointing and indicating. He visited me for 15 days in Alipore jail, and, until I could grasp the whole thing, he went on teaching me and impressed upon my mind the working of the Higher Consciousness—the Truth-Consciousness in general—which leads towards the Supermind. He would not leave until he had put it all into my head.

“Sri Aurobindo had another direct experience of Vivekananda’s presence when he was practising Hathayoga. He felt this presence standing behind and watching over him.”³

One of Sri Aurobindo’s occult experiences runs: “... I once saw anger coming up and possessing me. I was very much surprised as to my own nature. Anger has always been foreign to me. At another time while I was an undertrial prisoner in Alipore, my anger would have led to a terrible catastrophe which luckily was averted. Prisoners there had to wait outside for some time before entering the cells. As we were doing so the Scotch warder came and gave me a push. The young men around me became very excited and I did nothing but gave him such a look that he immediately fled and called the jailor. It was a communicative anger and all the young men rallied round to attack him. When the jailor who was rather a religious man arrived, the warder said I had given him an ‘insubordinate look’. The jailor asked me and I told him I had never been used to such treatment. The jailor pacified the whole group and said while going, ‘We have each to bear our cross.’ But by anger such as I had, I do not mean the Rudrabhava which I have experienced a few times.”⁴

“Upen Banerjee was very much struck by the brilliance of Sri Aurobindo’s hair and he thought that it was due to oil. On inquiry he found that there was no oil with Sri Aurobindo. So he asked Sri Aurobindo, who replied that it was due to sadhana.”⁵

There were experiences during this period in jail that may be called extraordinary and miraculous. About how the faculty to appreciate painting came to him Sri Aurobindo says: “I . . . knew something about sculpture, but [was] blind to painting. Suddenly one day in the Alipore jail while meditating I saw some pictures on the walls of the cell and lo and behold! the artistic eye in me opened and I knew all about painting except of course the more material side of the technique. I don’t always know how to express though, because I lack the knowledge of the proper expressions, but that does not stand in the way of a keen and understanding appreciation. So, there you are! all things are possible in Yoga.”⁶

Regarding this Alipore period Sri Aurobindo wrote: “I was carrying on my Yoga during these days, learning to do so in the midst of much noise and clamour but apart and in silence and without any participation of the others in it. My Yoga begun in 1904 had always been personal and apart; those around me knew I was a Sadhak but they knew little more as I kept all that went on in me to myself. It was only after my release that for the first time I spoke at Uttarpara publicly about my spiritual experiences.”⁷

In the jail the red ants too gave him divine rapture! Years later he wrote to a disciple: “... a knock on the head or foot or elsewhere can be received with the Physical Ananda of pain or pain and Ananda or pure physical Ananda—for I have, often, quite involuntarily, made the experiment myself and passed with

honours. It began by the way as far back as in Alipore jail when I got bitten in my cell by some very red and ferocious-looking warrior ants and found to my surprise that pain and pleasure are conventions of our senses. But I do not expect that unusual reaction from others. And I suppose there are limits.”⁸

We are quoting from the speech at Uttarpara his account of his experience of Sri Krishna in the Alipore Jail. “He made me realise the central truth of the Hindu religion. He turned the hearts of my jailors to me and they spoke to the Englishman in charge of the jail, ‘He is suffering in his confinement, let him at least walk outside his cell for half an hour in the morning and in the evening.’ So it was arranged, and it was while I was walking that His strength again entered into me. I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me, I walked under the branches of the trees in front of my cell but it was not the trees, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me his shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me. I looked at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies. Among these thieves and dacoits there were many who put me to shame by their sympathy, their kindness, the humanity triumphant over such adverse circumstances. One I saw among them especially, who seemed to me a saint, a peasant of my nation who did not know how to read and write, an alleged dacoit sentenced to ten years’ rigorous imprisonment, one of those whom we look down upon in our Pharisaical pride of class as *chhotalok*. Once more he spoke and said, ‘Behold the people among whom I have sent you to do a little of my work. This is the nature of the nation I am raising up and the reasons why I raise them.’ ”

Sri Aurobindo continues: “When the case opened in the Lower Court and we were brought before the Magistrate I was followed by the same insight. He said to me ‘When you were cast into jail, did not your heart fail and did you not cry to me, ‘Where is Thy protection?’ Look now at the Magistrate, look now at the Prosecuting Counsel.’ I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Vasudeva, it was Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. I looked at the Prosecuting Counsel and it was not the counsel for the prosecution that I saw; it was Sri Krishna who sat there; it was my Lover and Friend who sat there and smiled, ‘Now do you fear?’ he said, ‘I am in all men and I overrule their actions and their words. My protection is still with you and you shall not fear. This case which is brought against you, leave it in my hand. It is not for you. It is not for the trial that I brought you here but for something else. The case itself is

only a means for my work and nothing more. .. I am guiding, therefore fear not. Turn to your own work for which I have brought you to jail and when you come out, remember never to fear, never to hesitate. Remember that it is I who am doing this, not you nor any other. Therefore whatever clouds may come, whatever dangers and sufferings, whatever difficulties, whatever impossibilities, there is nothing impossible and nothing difficult. I am in the nation and its uprising and I am Vasudeva, I am Narayana, and what I will, shall be, not what others will. What I choose to bring about, no human power can stay.”⁹

In this mysterious way Sri Aurobindo was led by God to His Kingdom of Truth and eternal Beatitude. He had gripped his heart and soul at first at Baroda long before the Swadeshi movement began, and led him from experience to experience in order to prepare him for the great mission he had to accomplish. But it was in the Alipore Jail that He initiated him into the secret of a long-lost Yoga and lighted the virgin way for his advance towards the Supreme Realisation of the dynamic integral union with Him, which is the eventual destiny of earthly evolution, and of which he had destined Sri Aurobindo to be the Prophet and Pioneer.

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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- 4 *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, by A B Purani, p 212
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ALL ABOUT CROWS

[The crow is not unknown to anyone. It is less lovable (less welcome) than any other species of birds because of its cawing anywhere and everywhere, teasing people continually. Even when driven out from one part of the house, it appears in some other part, cawing with added vigour. It is one of the early risers among birds, disturbing the sweet slumber of people.

But if it is observed without getting tired of it, with a friendly feeling, it will reveal its peculiar characteristics and also the difference among individual members of its species.]

SOME crows used to come and sit on the wooden railing of my balcony. At odd times when I would go to the balcony door, they would be there and, if my attention was not directed to them, they would carry on quietly the activity on hand, whether it was preening their feathers or observing an object or just cawing. If I looked at them intently, they would try to scrutinise my gaze. However, at the same time, they would all be prepared to fly away any moment. But if I looked at them pretending that I was not doing so, they would feel that there was not the least danger and they would continue with their activity. I love to observe birds, and hence I watched them, feigning that my attention was elsewhere. The shining black colour of the crow, its clean, well-arranged feathers, its habit of looking at things by twisting its neck and its care to keep the feathers scrupulously clean by preening them during leisure time, have all the elements of good showmanship.

To watch the crow from close, once I placed a piece of bread on the railing with an arm extended from the door. The crow looked at it rather suspiciously, and then slowly began to move towards it in such a way that whether it got the bread or not it could fly away at the slightest indication of danger. But when it saw that I was indifferent, it snatched away the piece in one quick movement.

This was just a beginning. The crow was tempted to come regularly, and soon it became known among its friends that they could get food here. So, instead of going about in search of food elsewhere, they preferred to come in a group of four or five and sit on the electric wire near my balcony. They did not come at any fixed hour. But even if a single crow came, others would follow and all would start cawing. The moment I placed a piece of bread on the railing, all of them would scramble for it. But all would not be equal in courage, so the most fearless one would make the first bid and snatch it away. Some others would then pursue it to have their share, but more often they waited for another piece to be placed on the railing.

I was not, however, interested in opening a free feeding centre for crows. All I wanted was to watch them from close quarters. So I stopped placing bread

on the railing and began to put it on the shut lower half of the two-piece door opening onto the balcony, and stood inside, a little away from the doorway. They suspected foul play in my new strategy. They hesitated, wondering what to do. After a while, some brave ones left their perch on the wires and sat down on the railing, and yet the goal was some three feet away. Soon, however, one of the regular ones winged its way to the bread and snatched it away without landing on the edge of the door. The problem was solved. Others followed suit, but misgiving still persisted.

Out of these crows I began to know four. I could see that they feared me no more. One would sit on the railing and wait for me and pick up the bread as soon as I placed it. Another first sat on the wire, then came to the railing before making a dash to claim the bread. The third, it seemed to me, trusted me more. It waited on the railing and when I placed the bread on the door, came to it without fear and would collect it unhurriedly, look at me and then go. Each one, though, ate the bread only when it reached its retiring place—each had a place of permanent habitation during the daytime; it might be the branch of a tree, the parapet of the terrace of the house opposite or somewhere on a distant house in our locality. When I am out of the house, I keep the door closed. But the moment I opened the door, it would come to the notice of one of the crows, who would then arrive. And that would be a signal to the others. They evidently began to feel that to get bread from me was their right. Two of them would come directly and perch on the door, and if I did not pay any heed to their presence because I was busy, they would start cawing to call me. When I went to the door to place the bread, they would fly away, and then, moments later, return to pick it up.

Apart from these four, there were others who were interested only in the food without wanting any familiarity. They did not hesitate to employ their proverbial cleverness. They saw that the other crows waited on the railing till I placed the bread at the door and moved away, thus inviting them to come and collect it. It was a good chance for them to grab the bread. But if I saw them, I would stop them. So they hid themselves on the extreme ends of the railing, and the moment I placed the bread, they came with lightning speed, grabbed it in their beaks and flew away while the other crows looked on flabbergasted.

To frustrate their piracy, I fixed up a rather long piece of wood on the top edge of the door's lower section, in such a way that one end protruded into my room. I began to place the piece of bread on it. Now unless a crow came and sat on the door, it would not be able to get hold of the bread. This almost prevented anyone from snatching it away, but it also created a fresh suspicion in the minds of all the crows, even the familiar ones. For some time they sat on the railing and looked at the bread, but they did not dare to pick it up. To reassure them I would put the bread and move away, not paying any attention to the crows. After a while, I succeeded in inducing them to give up their apprehension and to make

bold to pick up the bread. Of course, as always, it started with one or two daring ones; but the pirate crows could not muster up enough courage to repeat their former feat, though when my attention was elsewhere, they tried it sometimes. But the moment I would lift up my hand to chase them away, all flew away and became frightened. And then it would take some time to restore their trust in me.

Just as there were bold ones, there were some timid ones too. They would come with the obvious intention to get the bread, but seeing me standing nearby, they would hesitate: either they would come forward a few steps and then retreat, or, shuffle on their feet without moving from the railings. One could see fear in their eyes, and they crouched their body in such a way as to make flight easy. I would call them saying “come, come, take it” so that their fear would go away, but they would not trust me.

They scrambled to get the bread, but once some courageous one made away with it, rather than trying to snatch it away from the one who possessed it, the others generally preferred to wait for another piece of bread to be placed. But sometimes, if an aggressive crow came on the scene, it would chase away those sitting on the railing.

Once a one-eyed crow came along. Perhaps he had lost his eye in an accident or a scuffle. He seemed to have no fears. He would come quite close to pick up the piece of bread in a leisurely manner. But he seemed to occupy a low position in their social hierarchy, for he had to keep away from others, and if he was sitting when the others came, they would chase him away. When he came, he would look around timidly, and if he felt a sense of insecurity, he would go away without waiting for the bread. Whether this was due to his physical defect or because of some other reason was not clear. He did not have any other physical deformity, but his head seemed a bit too small and his feathers were somewhat sparse around the neck, his good eye looked a bit larger than the other one. He continued to visit me for a long time, but he never made a cawing noise. He waited, patient and silent, and came very close to me without fear to get his food. Even when surrounded by some crows, if I called him “kania” (the one-eyed), he would understand that the food was meant for him; so even though afraid of the others, he would immediately come to me. The other crows knew my partiality to him and hence behaved themselves in my presence; but the moment he went to the opposite house, they tried to snatch away the piece of bread from him. He tried to elude their grasp by dodging from side to side, but never bolted as the others often did. The others often kept the piece of bread in the lower part of their beaks and joined the race to grab a new one.

The summer was about to end, and the crows began to come out with their fledglings. The fledglings were almost as big as the grown-ups, only their heads were smaller and they were blacker at the breast, neck and throat. We could see they were still fledglings. The most distinguishing feature was, however, their

voice, which was rather hoarse and rasping.

It appeared that they were more attached to their mothers. One or two young ones would come with their mothers to collect food from my room. The mother would sit quietly on the electric wires, waiting for me to put the bread, but the young ones not aware that the bread was not placed, grew impatient and started cawing as if saying to their mothers, "Give me food." It was quite annoying for me—and perhaps no less for the mother too. As soon as the mother picked up the bread, both the young ones almost attacked her for it. She would hold the bread in her claws to bite it into pieces. They could eat only when the bits were put into their mouths. But they were not ready to wait till this whole operation was over, and tried to snatch it from her claws while the mother kept them away with her beak. However, when there were two fledglings, the task would become particularly difficult—while the mother tried to keep away the one, the other would make a grab at the bread. This would enrage the mother, who would push them away with her beak, and her anger could be seen not merely in her eyes and face, but in her entire body. At times, in utter exasperation, she would fly away from them.

There is a special method of feeding the young. Like a human baby who cannot eat with its own hands, and begins to flail its hands and feet when milk or other food is brought close to it, the young bird half opens its wings and flaps them when it sees food. At the time of feeding, the young one lifts its neck while crouching the rest of the body and the mother pulls herself quite erect, bends down her beak towards that of the young one, and all the while the young ones caw raspingly.

Gradually the young ones grew up and came to collect food on their own. They were timid no doubt, but they could be reckless as well. They naturally lacked maturity and hence would jump at things. They would try to grab from near the mouth of even a grown-up crow. Once when a young one did it twice, the crow got furious and pursued the young crow and just opposite my balcony there began a flying race in circles till the young crow escaped. During this time, the other crows were cawing and that attracted still more crows. These 20-25 newcomers added their cawing to the cacophony. No crow came to the aid of the young one. Though he escaped, the cacophony continued. How long it would have continued! At last, I chased them away.

(To be continued)

KRISHNALAL

ESSAYS ON THE MAHĀBHĀRATA (X)

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1995)

The Role and Function of Curses

THE Mahābhārata tells us of life with a great sense of realism. It would be wrong therefore to ignore the numerous occurrences of curses and create too idealized a picture of the ancient holy men and other famous personalities. In fact, a curse is nothing but the instant return of bad *karma* which needs to be worked out. Even though the victim suffers at the moment, his evolution is hastened nonetheless. He is given a shock treatment which gives him a chance to realize his mistake on the spot and undergo an inner change. It is to be admitted, though, that not all curses are of this nature. Some are just irrational outbursts, others hardly justifiable. And yet most of them do hit at some weak or black spot in the victim. In this Chapter, I will give a summary review of certain events in the first five Minor Books of the Ādiparva and show how an intricate network of curses forms a structure that carries a major part of the action in these Books. In fact, one may say that the whole action in the epic basically hinges on incidents relating to saints, ascetics etc. who have been pleased or displeased and have released their anger in response or cut a certain path into the future through their blessings.

In the Book of Pauśya we are told of a sacrifice which was held at Kuruksetra and attended by King Janamejaya and his brothers. A dog of "Saramā's brood" went there and was heavily beaten up by the brothers. The dog ran yelping to his mother (who was the bitch of the Gods) and told her that he was mistreated even though he had done no wrong. Thereupon she went to see Janamejaya and found that indeed the brothers were guilty. Therefore she cursed Janamejaya: "As he was beaten without doing wrong, therefore, an unseen danger will befall you!" (1.3.8)

Janamejaya was much frightened on hearing her curse and sought help from the son of a seer to appease the evil. We already learn here of the great effective power of the curse once it is spoken, as well as of the possibility to counteract its realization by taking appropriate precautions. The best method is to find someone who has the necessary power to dissolve the force of the malediction. Somaśravas, who is here chosen by Janamejaya, obviously has this qualification: "He is able to appease any evil deeds you may have done excepting the evil against the Great God," says his father Śrutaśravas to the king (1.3.15).

After this short episode follows the story of Āyoda Dhaumya and his three students Upamanyu, Āruni and Veda. We are concerned here with an incident regarding Veda's disciple Uttanka. The latter was asked by his teacher to bring the earrings of King Pauśya's wife as *gurudakṣiṇā*. King Pauśya too was Veda's disciple. Thus, the meeting of Uttanka and Pauśya gives us a scene where two

disciples of the same *guru* exchange curses against each other.

The occasion was the following: after Uttanka had secured the earrings from Pauśya's wife, he was in a hurry to return to his teacher's house, since the condition was that he had to deliver them within four days. Therefore he asked Pauśya for some food. Uttanka was served cold food with a hair in it and "judged that it was impure." Therefore he said to Pauśya, "Since you have offered me unclean food, you shall go blind!" (We have here an example of the instant *karma* boomerang: the king is to be hit at the precise point where he was negligent.) Pauśya rejoined: "Since you have spoiled unspoiled food, you shall stay barren!" (1.3.126-7) Pauśya's counter-curse requires more imagination to be understood, but it follows the same logic: the food offered to Uttanka is seen as a natural product which has been presumably unduly rejected. Therefore, Uttanka will be without offspring. However, Pauśya's reaction was merely emotional. On examining the food, he found that indeed it was impure and he tried to appease Uttanka, seeking his pardon, "Let me not go blind!" Characteristically, Uttanka replies that a curse once uttered cannot be taken back, but the king would soon recover his eyesight. It is interesting to note here that even the one who spoke the curse cannot immediately cancel it—it is like an arrow shot which cannot be called back. But it can be deflected, as it were, and hit less hard. We come across a number of similar incidences in the text.

In any case, Pauśya has now been practically freed from the evil consequences of Uttanka's curse, and it is no wonder that the latter seeks a reciprocal favour from the king. But Pauśya, strangely, does not oblige Uttanka: "Mild as butter is a Brahmin's heart, in his word lies a honed blade—not so the baron [Ksatriya]: his word is buttered, but his heart is honed. This being so, I cannot change my curse, for my heart is honed. Leave." (1.3.132-3) Uttanka points out to Pauśya that he himself had his curse cancelled, therefore he should do now the same. Moreover, the king's curse was an obvious error. It was made in the assumption that the food was clean, even while it was actually impure. Therefore, the malediction cannot be valid. "There can be no curse on me. Let us be done now." (1.3.135-6) Here ends the incident and we may assume that there were no further consequences.

While returning home to his teacher's house, Uttanka was waylaid by the snake king Takṣaka who managed to steal the precious earrings from him. Uttanka later retrieves them, but he swears revenge on Takṣaka. For this purpose he approaches Janamejaya (who had also chosen Veda as his preceptor) and inspires him to hold a great sacrifice for burning all snakes. Uttanka achieves his purpose by telling the king about his (Janamejaya's) father Parīksit who himself was killed by Takṣaka due to a certain curse.

The latter story is told in the Book of Āstika (1.36-39). Once Parīksit was out hunting and shot a deer which escaped into the forest. The king followed it for a long while until he came to a hermit's place deep in the woods. This ascetic

was living on the froth spilled by sucking calves, says the text, and he observed a vow of silence. Parikṣit approached him hastily and asked him about the deer. Naturally, the hermit did not answer him. Angrily the king picked up a dead snake with the end of his bow and put it around the hermit's neck. The latter happened to have a rather rash and choleric son, named Śṛṅgin. As soon as Śṛṅgin heard about Parikṣit's frivolous deed, he cursed him and said that Takṣaka would kill the king within seven days. Śamika, the ascetic, tried to appease his son's anger, for he himself had forgiven Abhimanyu's son and did not wish that anything should happen to him. He even sent a messenger to Parikṣit to warn him of the danger. But Śṛṅgin's curse takes its inevitable course in spite of all counter-measures. The great healer Kaśyapa who has the power to heal snake bite is intercepted by Takṣaka on his way to the king. Kaśyapa demonstrates his great powers to the snake, but finally accepts some bribe from it, after he has convinced himself (in whatever occult way) that Parikṣit's life has run out anyhow and that he cannot be saved. Takṣaka enters the king's special snake-proof fortress in the form of a worm, hidden in a fruit, and makes true Śṛṅgin's curse. In this particular case the malediction is shown to be instrumental of inevitable Fate, it is not like a misfortune that happens to the victim, but just the functional execution of a pre-determined life-end.

We proceed now with the Book of Puloman in which we come across a rather strange curse of the sage Bhṛgu. The latter had a wife named Pulomā who was originally promised to the Rākṣasa Puloman. One day the Rākṣasa came to Bhṛgu's hermitage and asked the ritual fire who the woman was. If she was Pulomā, as he suspected, he would abduct her. The Fire was in trouble: "I am no less fearful of speaking untruth than of Bhṛgu's curse," it whispered. (1.5.26) Thereupon Puloman concluded that the woman was Pulomā; he assumed the form of a boar and carried away the pregnant woman. The child fell out of the mother's womb (it was therefore called Cyavana) and this sight killed the Rākṣasa.

Some time later Bhṛgu returned to the hermitage and learnt from his wife that the Fire had betrayed her to Puloman. Thereupon the sage cursed the Fire: "Thou shalt eat anything!" (1.6.13) The Fire protests pointing out that the oblations go to the Gods and ancestors through him. How then could he eat anything and become omnivorous? Therefore Fire chooses to withdraw from the *agnihotras*, which causes great distress to the seers. They approach Brahmā for help. The Great God calls the Fire and tells Him, "thou shalt not become omnivorous in thine entire body. Only those flames that are for acceptance, O flame-crested Fire, will devour everything. Even as all things that are touched by the rays of the sun are thereby made pure, thus anything that has been burned by thy flames will be rendered pure." (1.7.20-21)

This story leads us to another curse which fell on an ascetic named Ruru. Now there was another *Ruru*, the son of Pramati and Ghṛtācī (Pramati was

Cyavana's son by Sukanyā). *Ruru's* bride Pramadvarā got killed by snake bite just a few days before the wedding, but she was revived when *Ruru* offered half of his own life to the young girl. He swore, however, to kill all snakes that came into his sight. Once he was on the point of killing a lizard when the latter told him that lizards were different from snakes even though they resembled them. *Ruru* suspected that the lizard was a seer in disguise. The latter then disclosed that he had once been the seer *Ruru* who was reduced to a reptile by the curse of a Brahmin. This happened when he made a snake out of straw and frightened the Brahmin with it while he was performing an *agnihotra*. The priest fainted and burned with rage when he regained consciousness. Cursing *Ruru*, he said, "as you made a powerless snake in order to frighten me, so by my anger you shall become a powerless reptile." (1.11.4) Thereupon *Ruru* sorely repented his mischief and tried to appease the Brahmin who had been his friend. "I made a joke to make you laugh. Please forgive me, Brahmin, turn your curse away!" (1.11.6-7)

Here too we find that the curse once uttered cannot be taken back, but it can be modified. The Brahmin assures *Ruru* that he will be freed from the curse when he meets *Ruru*, the son of Pramati. As for the nature of the malediction, we may note again its precise *karmic* formulation: the person who made a *powerless* snake, now himself becomes a *powerless* reptile, as if to impress on his mind forever the remembrance of his disrespectful action towards the Brahmin.

The next Minor Book, the Book of Āstika, is replete with various curses that carry the action forward. However, it all began with a boon which Kaśyapa gave to his two wives, Kadrū and Vinatā. Vinatā chose two sons of superior strength, while Kadrū opted for a thousand sons of less strength. These numerous sons were hatched after five hundred years, but Vinatā's eggs showed no development. Thereupon she broke open one egg and found her son with a half-developed body coming out of it. He cursed her that for five hundred years she would have to be Kadrū's slave until her second son released her, and then he flew into the sky to become Aruna, the red dawn at daybreak.

The text relates then the story of the churning of the ocean by Gods and Asuras in the process of which the horse Uchchaiśravas came forth from the ocean which had become butter. Vinatā and Kadrū made a wager as to the colour of the horse's tail; the loser would be the other person's slave. Kadrū said the tail was black and asked all her snake sons to insert themselves on it to make sure it would have the desired colour. When they did not obey her, she cursed them and said they would be burned in the fire when Janamejaya held his great Snake Sacrifice.

We have here an instance of an 'unjust' curse—in fact Kadrū asked nothing but treacherous action of her sons who should therefore be spared any evil consequences. However, the malediction is shown to be constructive in its nature: the text tells us that Brahmā and the Gods heard Kadrū's all too cruel

curse, but they did not intervene because the snakes had become too many in number. The snakes finally obey and crowd the horse's tail so that Vinatā loses the wager and becomes Kadrū's slave. Meanwhile Garuḍa is born as Vinatā's second son. The mighty bird who was greeted by Gods and seers at his birth, soon realizes that his unfortunate mother is Kadrū's slave and asks the Snakes what he could do to secure freedom for himself and his mother. He is asked to bring the Elixir (*amṛtam*) and departs with his mother's blessings.

Before setting out on the long journey, he tries to find suitable food to give him adequate strength. He swallows some Nisādas but his hunger is still far from being satisfied. He then meets his father Kaśyapa and asks him for advice. Kaśyapa tells him the story of the seer Vibhāvasu and his younger brother, Supratīka, who was also an ascetic. The latter kept insisting on dividing their property so that everyone would have his own share. One day Vibhāvasu could not stand his brother's demands any more and cursed his brother to become an elephant. Supratīka in turn cursed Vibhāvasu to become a big tortoise in the sea. Ever since, the two giant creatures had been quarreling and fighting with each other, disturbing the peace. Therefore Garuda is advised to kill and eat both of them.

We have here a story in which the curse is shown to be entirely negative in its effect. It cannot be worked out, because the two ascetics both descend to the animal level to continue their quarrel, and both are equally powerful, since they are seers who have accumulated *tapas*. As a result, some higher Force has to intervene and virtually swallow up the two: they cannot be changed, they are like fire burning against fire.

Garuḍa catches the two seers who have turned into *asuras* and alights on the branch of a big tree. The branch breaks and Garuda notices the Vālakhilyas, a group of diminutive ascetics, hanging on the branch. We learn that it was actually through their *blessings* that the Great Bird was born. It happened as follows: once Kaśyapa held a great sacrifice and asked help from Gods and ascetics. While Indra fetched a lot of firewood, the dwarfish Vālakhilyas were just able to carry a single leaf. Then they got into trouble passing a cow hoofprint filled with water. Indra arrogantly stepped over them with contempt. In revenge, the ascetics held a sacrifice for the creation of another Indra. However, Kaśyapa intervened on behalf of the existing Indra and modified the outcome of the sacrifice—with the consent of the ascetics—in such a way that an Indra of birds would be born. This was to be Garuda.

The bird allows the Vālakhilyas to leave the branch, after having sought his father's advice, and then he proceeds to conquer the Elixir. On his return he meets Viṣṇu who grants him the boon that he will always perch above him. Later Garuda reconciled with Indra and promises not to drink or give away the Soma. Indra grants him a boon that he shall feed on snakes.

Meanwhile the snakes try to find a means of counteracting the curse of their

mother Kadrū. A snake named Elāpatra reports that Brahmā allowed Kadrū's curse, but said that Āstika, son of Jaratkāru, would stop the sacrifice. Jaratkāru would marry his namesake, another Jaratkāru who is identified as Vāsuki's (the Snake King's) sister. Jaratkāru's biography has some interesting points and will be given in the following chapter on "Saints, Sages and Ascetics".

The bard then speaks about Parikṣit and the curse that had fallen on him when he had hung a dead snake over the shoulder of Śamika. This again takes us back to Janamejaya, Parikṣit's son who pledged to take revenge on the snake king Taksaka that had caused his father's death and tried to steal Uttanka's *gurudakṣinā*. Janamejaya undertook a great Snake Sacrifice in which thousands of snakes were burnt to death, attracted by powerful *mantras* chanted by expert priests. Finally Taksaka and the remaining snakes were saved by Āstika who sneaked into the place of the sacrifice and praised it so eloquently that Janamejaya offered him a boon. Āstika chose safety for all snakes that were not yet devoured by the flames. Thus ends the Book of Āstika.

(To be continued)

WILFRIED HUCHZERMAYER

AN EVENING AT KONARAK

CARRYING the saga of human strides through centuries
 There stood that evening the temple of Konarak
 Like a giant mystic door opening to mysteries.
 Suddenly it came to life. Numberless eyes shone
 Heard were the footsteps of the war-horses
 And the drumbeats of a victory procession,
 The jingling dance of the Devadasis
 Tuned with the chorus sung by a crowd
 Of men and gods, birds and animals, trees and creepers.
 Time was seen hiding behind the stone,
 Human love seemed the labour of the gods
 Searching out eternity in a moment's splendour.
 Lotus of the earth, its flaming beauty conversed with the Sun,
 The grand chariot carried the world's aspiration to fulfilment.
 The dark embrace of the night
 Did not appease its passion for the heights.
 As I strolled around, bewitched,
 I felt the quiver of a sun-flame in my depths.

SEIKH ABDUL KASAM

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

*Each thing is of like form from everlasting
and comes round again in its cycle.*

—Marcus Aurelius, second century A.D.

IN 1729 the French astronomer Jean Jacques de Mairan tested a phenomenon that had intrigued observers since ancient times: the leaves of certain plants regularly open in the daytime and then close at night. It had long been assumed that such activity was cued by the alternating sunlight and darkness. But de Mairan, using *Kalanchoe blossfeldiana*, a plant with small red flowers, made a startling discovery: the leaves and petals adhered faithfully to their routine even when kept in the dark. The implication was clear: something other than the fluctuations of light was causing *Kalanchoe* to open and close on a daily basis.

De Mairan's experiment was the earliest recorded exercise in what is now known as chronobiology (from the Greek *chronos*, meaning time), the study of rhythmic temporal patterns in biological phenomena. Like the movements of *Kalanchoe*, many such patterns follow roughly a twenty-four-hour schedule; hence they are referred to as circadian (Latin for about a day) rhythms. As de Mairan's work was the first to suggest, circadian rhythms are widely held to be endogenous, or innate, to living systems, governed by shadowy physiological mechanisms known as biological clocks. Indeed, in the past two and a half centuries endogenous timekeeping rhythms have been demonstrated in years and nucleated unicells and at all levels of biological organization—cell, tissue and organ—as well as in the human body as a whole.

Ponder for a moment a few of the ways the time of day has been observed to govern people's lives: In the morning, on awakening, one's pulse rate and blood pressure rise sharply, a trend that may be linked to the high frequency of heart attack and stroke at that time of day. Body temperatures also rise during the day and, with the pulse and blood pressure, fall off sharply at night. One's tolerance for alcohol peaks at around five o'clock in the afternoon. The secretion of countless hormones, essential for the control of life's processes, ebbs and flows with faithful circadian regularity. The number of white blood cells in the immune system also fluctuates widely and regularly, with a normal variation of as much as 50 per cent in a day. The daily pattern of sleep and activity is so much a part of what it means to be human that it is scarcely noticed, except perhaps by insomniacs and narcoleptics. The time the Swedish film-maker Ingmar Bergman called the *Hour of the Wolf*—the gloomy hour "between night and dawn"—is the most likely time to be born or to die.

Why do all living organisms do virtually everything cyclically? Daily cycles of life, as well as seasonal and monthly ones, arose, quite simply, because life evolved on this planet. The waxing and waning of light, heat and electromagnetic

and gravitational forces caused rhythmic changes both in the availability of energy and in the physical medium in which evolution was unfolding. But even more basic to evolution than the happenstance of geophysical location, the rhythmic organization of temporal processes maximizes the stability of living things and ensures that they do not waste precious energy.

Life's absolute need for stability requires continuous readjustment to external and internal dynamic requirements. The adjustment can be pictured as cyclical: a phase of activation or production; then an assessment of stability, a "midcourse correction", based on feedback from the outcome of the activity in the first phase of the cycle; and a return to the beginning of the cycle. A second cycle of activity then begins at the optimum time if it would promote stability. If stability is already optimum, the first phase of the new cycle begins with minimal or nonexistent productive activity. The breakdown of such cyclical temporal ordering has lethal consequences for the organism.

One of the most important and practical applications of the emerging understanding of the role of cycles in biology is the treatment of disease. The abnormalities associated with virtually every disease—from allergy, arthritis and asthma to cardiovascular disease and cancer—are themselves organized cyclically and, in particular, along circadian lines. The treatment of such illnesses according to daily rhythms is commonly referred to as chronotherapy. Only recently has the medical community integrated chronotherapy into the development and delivery of pharmaceuticals. Circadian variations in symptoms and in the ability of certain tissues to absorb certain drugs help determine whether a given treatment will be successful or dangerously toxic. A growing body of evidence suggests that therapy could be improved and toxicity reduced by administering drugs at carefully selected times of day. A brief survey of the cases in which chronotherapy is most effective will suggest how much has been learned, and how much remains to be done.

The drugs used to control allergy symptoms—among them, antihistamines and decongestants—represent one of the largest and most profitable pharmaceutical markets in the world. A great deal of effort, time and money has been spent developing such drugs, with an eye toward diminishing their sedative or stimulatory side effects. It does not take a genius, however, to realize that antihistamines, which generally act as sedatives, are better taken in the evening, and that decongestants, which exert a stimulatory effect, should be used during the day and be avoided at night. Aside from that kind of logical treatment, other, less obvious and even surprising circadian differences in drug absorption, excretion, metabolism and effectiveness have recently become clear.

Allergic reactions are cued by the overzealous response of the body's primordial defense against invasion, the inflammatory reaction. When a person is exposed to an allergen, be it dust, pollen or a particular food, the bloodstream sends a crowd of circulating white blood cells to the site of contact. There they

proceed to react with and engulf the foreign agent. Some of those white cells, the basophils, release histamines, chemicals that increase local blood flow, cause leaks in small blood vessels, and spark a flood of more white cells. The result is swelling, pain and itchiness, burning and redness. That response can serve as the takeoff point for either allergy or exaggerated inflammation. Inflammation can also trigger an aberrant immune response against normal tissues.

Both the immune system and the inflammatory response are orchestrated primarily by circadian rhythms in the release and action of glucocorticoids, steroid hormones made in the adrenal gland. Glucocorticoids, cortisol above all, promote the manufacture of glucose out of protein and fat stored in the body. Their intense release, along with the release of adrenaline, is part of the flight-or-fight response to times of heightened, short-term stress (a mugging, say, or a job interview). Glucocorticoids also regulate and, if present in excess, depress the immune system, which may explain why people are more susceptible to illness when they are under stress—and why the hormones, cortisol especially, turn out to be valuable in reducing the redness, pain and burning of inflammation.

Cortisol concentration in the blood is highest in the morning, around five or six o'clock; as expected, the inflammatory reaction is weakest at that time. But in the evening, when the blood concentration of cortisol is lowest, inflammatory activity is at its strongest. The daily waxing and waning of cortisol concentration has broad implications for the timing of virtually any anti-inflammatory agent. That profoundly stable rhythm may also be responsible, at least in part, for the circadian coordination of all the body's defense networks and even the daily pattern of cell division—in other words, for the renewal of almost all bodily tissues.

Arthritis, an all too common inflammatory disease of the joints, also runs on a biological clock. The condition comes in two major varieties. In rheumatoid arthritis a disordered immune system attacks components of the joint. Non-rheumatic arthritis includes a wide range of degenerative diseases. Some of them are associated with the formation of crystal deposits in the joints; others are set off by wear and tear, trauma or infection. Various forms of rheumatoid arthritis affect millions of people, whereas nonrheumatic arthritis to some extent affects most people who live past the age of forty.

For generations physicians have differentiated between the two kinds of arthritis according to the circadian patterns of their symptoms. In rheumatoid arthritis the joints are most stiff, swollen, hot and painful when one arises, they "work themselves out" as the day progresses. In contrast, in nonrheumatic arthritis, such as osteoarthritis, the redness, pain and swelling build throughout the day and get relieved only by a good night's rest. By timing the medication and optimizing the relation between dose and time of day, one can better control the symptoms and reduce the side effects of drugs.

Arthritis is often treated with NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory

drugs), among which are aspirin and ibuprofen. Depending on the release characteristics of the specific preparation, NSAIDs can best be taken at one time of day or another. An NSAID taken in the evening that hits its peak of release within four to ten hours after ingestion would best treat rheumatic diseases. A once-a-day preparation taken at bedtime for osteoarthritis, however, should peak the following afternoon, between fourteen and twenty hours later.

In addition to symptom patterns, many other considerations relate to the construction of an optimized pill—one that, taken at a certain time of day, provides the highest levels of its active ingredient when it is needed and the lowest levels when it is least needed and most damaging. The absorption of a standard drug preparation in the gut also depends on when the drug is taken. Sodium salicylate, for instance, which is prescribed for osteoarthritis, is absorbed relatively slowly in the morning; ketoprofen, prescribed for the same condition, is absorbed quickly in the morning.

Sometimes NSAIDs are not enough. For the most severe cases of rheumatoid arthritis, physicians typically prescribe steroids. Because steroids are hormones that occur naturally in the body, their side effects—including weight gain, thinning bones, diabetes, mania, high blood pressure, suppression of the adrenal gland and increased risk of infection—can be diminished if the hormones' usual circadian rhythms are mimicked, taking advantage of the body's capacity to neutralize their toxic effects. The patient takes most of each day's dose on arising or takes a larger morning dose every other day.

Perhaps the most prominently circadian of all diseases is asthma, which affects one of every twenty people worldwide. Asthma is a contraction of the smooth muscle surrounding the airways that makes it excruciatingly difficult to breathe. The great majority of asthma attacks take place between two and six o'clock in the morning. That circadian pattern is caused by the co-occurrence of many normal physiological processes.

Airway size and breathing patterns change rhythmically throughout the day in healthy people as well as in asthmatics. Generally the airways are open widest during the day. There is a rhythmic reduction in the airflow after midnight, and particularly between the critical hours of two and six in the morning. Those normal fluctuations can become extreme in response to both internal and external stimuli: allergens in the sleeping room, the supine posture and mucus retention during sleep, the cooling of the airway caused by breathing through the mouth, and circadian patterns in muscle and sympathetic nervous tone and in the circulation of cortisol, histamine and the hormone epinephrine.

The so-called chronopathology of asthma suggests that drug treatments should be designed to anticipate the temporal onset of an attack. One of the most successful kinds of chronotherapy yet developed is the bronchodilator preparation for nocturnal asthma. Many such drugs are on the market, each one absorbed, metabolized and excreted differently, depending on when it is

ingested The optimal once-a-day bronchodilator must make its active ingredient most available between the critical hours of two and six in the morning. Thus an evening dose should delay delivery for between four and six hours, and a morning dose should do so for between sixteen and eighteen hours.

Only recently has it come to be understood that cardiovascular disease, the number-one killer of adults, is heavily influenced by circadian rhythms in pulse rate, blood pressure, the tendency of blood to clot, the interactions between blood cells and the walls of the blood vessels, and important interactions in the part of the nervous system that controls involuntary functions.

Consider angina pectoris, a chest pain caused when the heart muscle does not get enough oxygen. Oxygen is carried to the heart by the blood through the coronary arteries. A partial blockage of those arteries may prevent some area of the heart muscle from getting enough blood, an ongoing condition known as myocardial ischemia; ischemia can be silent or it can manifest itself as angina. The timing of ischemia during the day makes it clear that getting oxygen to the heart muscle is quite sensitive to circadian rhythms, and so those rhythms are potentially highly relevant to coronary artery disease. Several large studies have shown that ischemia is much more frequent and severe in the four to six hours after people arise in the morning than it is at other times of day. Whatever its precise cause, that finding has obvious implications for the development of anti-anginal-drug delivery systems.

Several large studies have demonstrated that myocardial infarctions—heart attacks—strike twice as often in the morning as they do during the rest of the day. Like angina, heart attacks result from a lack of blood, and hence of oxygen, in the heart muscle. The condition can arise from a variety of problems inside the blood vessels, and one of the most significant of those problems is high blood pressure or hypertension.

Blood pressure, as I noted earlier, is strongly circadian; thus transient hypertension in response to daily stresses may not be as ominous as blood pressure that is abnormally elevated at a time of day when it is usually much lower. The main problem with hypertension is that it gives an unhealthy battering to the walls of the blood vessels. That raises the odds that the vessels will be damaged, giving rise to a blood clot and causing a heart attack or a stroke.

Another threat to the blood vessels is intensified shear stress—the pulling or tearing force exerted on the vessel wall by the flow of blood cells. Shear stress relates in complicated ways to blood pressure, to the rate of blood flow and to the diameter of the blood vessel. The most prominent increase in shear stress takes place, again, when one gets up in the morning: when one stands upright after lying down for a long while, the nervous system cues an increase in blood pressure and a change in blood flow, as well as a constriction of the blood vessels. The shear stress and change in blood pressure ultimately damage the vessel walls.

A third important factor in the evolution of heart disease is an unfortunate side effect of the body's mechanisms for controlling bleeding. When a small wound opens in the skin, the blood cells known as platelets clump together at the site of the injury. But blood vessels damaged by hypertension or shear stress also appear wounded to the platelets, and so large numbers of platelets can aggregate inside the blood vessels and eventually set off a chain reaction that can block the passage of the blood. Platelets tend to be stickier in the morning than they are at other times of day, hence it is safer to shave in the morning than it is at night. The tendency is associated with increased levels of catecholamines, stress hormones released when a person assumes an upright posture. Any drug that might suppress the morning surge in stress hormones should reduce the tendency of arterial platelets to clump together. Also, drugs that directly interfere with platelet function should be given in such a way that most of their activity takes place in the morning.

Another important factor in the control of bleeding is fibrinogen, the main clotting protein in the blood. The concentrations of fibrinogen in blood plasma peak in the morning and then plunge into an evening trough. In normal circumstances blood clots are constantly dissolved by fibrinolysis, a process whereby the crucial clotting proteins are absorbed by the body. Fibrinolytic activity has a prominent circadian rhythm, with a morning trough and a nocturnal peak—which helps account for the inverse pattern of fibrinogen concentration.

Any strategy for interrupting the cascade of events leading to a heart attack would do well to account for all the foregoing circadian dynamics. In the morning the heart's need for oxygen should be decreased; small doses of anticoagulants should be prescribed; blockers of the effects of stress hormones must be administered to counteract the tendency of damaged blood vessels feeding the heart muscle to contract and thereby decrease the flow of oxygen; and blood pressure, which tends to leap after one awakens, must be modulated.

Cancer, in its various forms, will be responsible for 600,000 deaths this year in the United States alone, making it second only to heart disease in frequency and lethality. A number of natural cycles govern the delicate balance between a person and an incipient or established cancer—seasonal cycles, fertility cycles and circadian cycles. Breast cancer tumors grow more rapidly, and are most likely to be discovered, in spring; the opposite is true in fall, and growth in winter and summer lies somewhere in between. In men the discovery of two main kinds of testicular cancer peaks at different times, one in early winter and the other in late summer. As for fertility cycles, recent studies have confirmed that the cure of a breast tumor by surgery is dramatically more likely between two and three weeks from the first day of the patient's menstrual period than it is at other times in the menstrual cycle.

The effects of circadian rhythms in cancer are somewhat less obvious than

they are for arthritis or asthma. But they bear enormously on treatment, especially because the stakes are so high: cancer is life-threatening, and the cure often involves chemotherapy, the use of drugs with frequently serious side effects.

Chemotherapeutic drugs generally kill human cells by exploiting their relative vulnerability during cell division: they damage actively reproducing cells far more severely than they damage cells that are not dividing. Thus the drugs kill cancer cells preferentially, because such cells, by definition, grow and proliferate at an abnormally high rate. The catch is that anticancer drugs also sometimes damage and destroy noncancerous cells, usually including the white blood cells of the immune system, the precursor immune cells in the bone marrow and the cells that line the gut.

Most oncologists give little thought to the time of day when a drug is given: generally the deciding factor is convenience for the medical staff. But a growing body of data suggests that the patient can gain an optimal therapeutic effect with minimal toxicity if the drugs are dispensed at carefully selected times. Regular circadian rhythms in the division of cells in the bone marrow and in the gut may partly explain why chemotherapy is more toxic to those normal cells at certain times of day. There is also evidence that suggests the division of human tumor cells follows a synchronized circadian pattern. An understanding of that pattern could reap extraordinary benefits. For example, if the daily periods of cell division in healthy and cancerous cells are not identical, chemotherapy could be tailored to work when only the cancerous cells are dividing.

Although much work remains to be done, the benefits of timing have so far been demonstrated for a diverse class of anticancer drugs. Consider doxorubicin, a complex fungal derivative that attacks the DNA of all kinds of cells, cancerous as well as benign. Often taken in conjunction with a platinum-based drug called cisplatin, doxorubicin significantly depresses the body's concentration of white blood cells. Although the effect is not understood, when doxorubicin is given in the morning, the dip in white blood cells is much less profound, and recovery to normal levels is complete within twenty-one days. In contrast, when doxorubicin is administered in the late afternoon or early evening, full recovery does not take place even after twenty-eight days. Women with ovarian cancer who receive optimally timed doses of doxorubicin and cisplatin are four times more likely to survive for five years than are women who receive the same drugs in ill-timed doses.

Recent multicenter studies by workers in Canada, France and the U.S. suggest that for certain cancers drugs in the fluoropyrimidine family—widely used in chemotherapy—are safest when most of the daily dose is given at night. Moreover, the French trial found that nighttime doses of fluoropyrimidines given with daytime platinum-based drugs are safer and dramatically more effective against colon cancer than the same drugs given at a constant rate in

daytime hours. Other data suggest that circadian timing is even more crucial for certain cancer therapies involving growth factors and peptides that stimulate infection-fighting white cells

Anticancer drug development is a complex, protracted and expensive high-risk venture. The few agents that graduate from in vitro screening to trials in whole animals or in humans have high rates of failure. And so it is ironic that the results of such trials may themselves depend on time of day.

Consider the development of a new, so-called S-phase (for synthesis phase) active agent: a drug that damages only cells engaged in making DNA for self-replication. Suppose the S-phase agent targets an enzyme in the cell required for the synthesis of a nucleic acid necessary to replicate DNA. If the agent is evaluated for toxicity at the time of day when little DNA tends to be synthesized in the gut or bone marrow, the agent will be classed as highly therapeutic and scarcely toxic.

As it turns out, drug trials are usually run in the first half of the working day. That happens to coincide with the first half of the daily sleep cycle of the laboratory mouse, when relatively low levels of DNA are synthesized in the gut and bone marrow. When the drug passes the mouse test, it generally goes on to a clinical trial with real cancer patients. Those initial trials are also carried out in the first half of the working day—and therein lies a rub. At that time of day the level of DNA synthesis in people is at its highest—the reverse of its level in mice. Thus a potentially useful drug that works well in mice may well be prematurely discarded as too toxic.

The outcome could be quite different if laboratory studies were focused on finding the optimum circadian time for therapy and then, as a result, setting up the clinical trials at the appropriate time of day. Here, as in much else in life, timing is everything. In some instances, proper circadian timing may enable effective drugs to be distinguished from the ones that have no effect. That knowledge, in turn, can make the difference between tumor control and tumor enhancement growth: between life and death.

WILLIAM J. M. HRUSHKESKY

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A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1995)

53. VIRTUE REWARDED

KAVIRIPOOMPATTINAM, a port city, once boasted of many a moneyed man, who were invariably traders. They were of two kinds—the brainy and the lecherous. The brainy saved their profit and invested in the business of their choice and became richer. The lecherous spent their profit in wine and women, and thereby lost their fame and wealth day after day.

Sadhuvan belonged to the second category of traders. In spite of the fact that he had a beautiful woman named Ādhirai for his wife, he spent all his wealth on women of easy virtue. As his coffers became empty he realized his fault. But it was too late a realization. The women who once pampered him for his money, now showed him the door

An atmosphere of shame drove Sadhuvan away from his hometown. He rushed to the port and embarked on a merchant ship bound for the West.

As the ship began to sail forward, Sadhuvan's mind sailed backward. He harped on his beautiful and chaste wife Ādhirai, whom he had deserted. The wealth he had lost made him hurl a series of expletives at himself. Tears, penitent tears, were streaming down his face. Sorrow gnawing his heart, he forgot all about food and sleep. He was not sure of the number of days he had spent in that state of mind

Sadhuvan came back to his senses when a hurricane blasted the ship and shook the people on board. They became panicky. The mast cracked with a thunderous noise and fell on the deck with a resounding thud.

“Pray to God! Pray to God to save our souls!” Sadhuvan heard someone shouting the hullabaloo inside the ship.

Before anyone could chant the name of God, a ferocious wave that rose to an unimaginable height dashed against a side of the ship. The poor ship disappeared in a trice. In its place there were only planks and planks floating all around.

Several heads were seen swimming towards the shore. Some people cried for help. Some sank to meet their watery grave.

People at Kaviripoompattinam were surprised to see many merchants reach the shore swimming the waves and fall down on the sand gasping for breath. A little later they told of their harrowing experience at sea to the anxious people

“Many were drowned,” one continued, “I heard Sadhuvan, Ādhirai's husband, shouting for help. But before I could swim to him he was drowned ”

News reached Ādhirai of the death of her husband. She wailed, mourned and finally said: “I will join my husband in the other world through a fire-bath.”

Ādhirai's parents and well-wishers objected to her decision. But she was adamant "This is my last wish," she insisted.

Beautifully dressed and garlanded, Ādhirai moved towards the burning ghat. She was escorted by a sorrow-stricken crowd.

Huge logs were crackling and smouldering in the fire. The many tongues of fire leapt out as if they were eager to wolf her down.

Ādhirai stood before the fire-pit and prayed to God, "Guide me, O Fire God, to reach my husband" She then leapt into the fire-pit, leaving everyone in tears.

But the unexpected happened. The eyes of the onlookers went wide. Their mouths stood agape, for a miracle was taking place before their very eyes.

Ādhirai was in the fire-pit, of course. But not a hungry tongue of fire touched her. Her silken sari remained unscorched and her body unscathed.

When everyone in the crowd stood dumbstruck, a thunder rolled in the sky and attracted their attention.

"Hear O Ādhirai, hear!" came a voice from the heavens. "You are a chaste woman. It's the inimitable power of this virtue that had saved your husband from the jaws of death. Sadhuvan is not dead. Sympathetic waves have drifted him and left him on the shores of the Naga island. He will come back to you soon. Wait till the arrival of Chandra Dattan's ship."

Ādhirai beamed with joy. The people were quite happy to take her back home. Ādhirai became a revered woman.

Sadhuvan opened his eyes and looked around. He was lying on the shores of an island. There was no sign of the ship on the sea. He pulled himself up and went into the interior to know if anyone of his merchant friends was around.

"Aha! Our dinner has come.. We will have a real feast today."

Stunned stood Sadhuvan. His eyes searched for the speaker of those words. But no one was seen. When he was about to give up the attempt, two men jumped in front of him from a tree-branch above.

They were tall and well-built. But for a headgear and a garland made of human bones, they were naked. Each had a gruesome weapon which resembled an executioner's axe.

Sadhuvan recognised them as Nagas, who eat human flesh. And when they raised their lethal weapons above their heads to club him to death, Sadhuvan asked: "O, why do you want to kill me? I am only a human being like you."

The cannibals dropped down their weapons and hugged Sadhuvan. They did so not because Sadhuvan called them human beings but because he spoke in their mother-tongue. Such was the love even the cannibals had for their mother-tongue.

They escorted him to their chieftain.

A huge mound of human bones served as the throne for Gurumagan, the chieftain. Beside him sat his wife. With a luxuriant growth of hair all over their

bodies, they very much resembled a couple of bears with human heads. The edges of the throne were decorated with human skulls, both big and small. On either side of the throne were lined pots and pots of toddy. The stench of grilled flesh was very much in the air.

Sadhuvan bowed before the throne and related to the chieftain the circumstances that drove him to their island.

Quite surprised at the alien's fluency in the Naga language the chieftain welcomed him and ordered his guards to feed him with mugs of toddy and grilled human flesh. He advised them to arrange for his marriage with one of the young Naga girls so that Sadhuvan could settle down and become one among them

Sadhuvan who had his realization only a few days ago said in all humility: "I had my lessons .. I have decided to abstain from all such vices. These vices will push us into hell It's only our good deeds that take us to heaven "

Words such as Heaven and Hell were new to Gurumagan. He wanted Sadhuvan to throw more light on them Sadhuvan happily lectured on birth and rebirth, sleep and death, joy and pain, heaven and hell, and God and devil. He then briefed him on the importance of shunning vices.

His inner eyes opening slowly, Gurumagan treated Sadhuvan as Heavensent, and treated him as a guest of honour.

A few years later Chandra Dattan, who happened to stop with his crew at the Naga island, was surprised to see the transformation that Sadhuvan had brought on the Nagas. Having learnt about him, Chandra Dattan took him to Kaviripoompattinam on his ship.

Sadhuvan joined his wife Ādhirai and together they lived happily for a very long time

54. THE VIRGIN

Dharuma Dattan was orphaned while yet a child. His maternal uncle was kind enough to bring him up

Dharuma grew up. So did Visakai, the only daughter of his maternal uncle. They were intimate playmates from their infancy The intimacy continued and flowered into a love affair.

Dharuma spent many days in a week away from his hometown—Kaviripoompattinam—on business errands. And when he was back home he loved to spend his hours with Visakai.

A neighbour who was jealous of the charms of Visakai whispered to her friend: "Dharuma and Visakai lead a life of conjugal bliss even before they are married to each other."

The friend in turn repeated to her friends the whispered words with a pinch of her imagination at the public water tank.

As every woman is highly imaginative with rumours about others, they contributed their share in blowing a whisper into an erotic story.

Rumour travels faster than sound. When Visakai overheard the erotic story about her, she felt a pain as if an awl was penetrating deep into her heart.

Tears cascading her cheeks, Visakai rushed to a nearby temple, fell at the feet of the deity and complained. "You know, Mother, that my lover and I are not bodily attracted to each other. Ours is a divine love. We have made a vow not to touch each other even once before our marriage is sanctified. But didn't you listen to the people who have spread rumours, erotic to the core, about me and my lover? You know very well that I am a virgin, with not an iota of immorality on my mind. Will you do something to wash off the mud they have slung at me?"

The sky rumbled. Seconds later a voice from the heavens said: "Senseless are those who speak ill of this virtuous girl. She is not immoral. She is destined to be an immortal for if she commands the clouds to rain they will obey her, such is the power of her virtue."

The rumour died a timely death. The rumourmongers were ashamed of themselves for they were not blessed to command the clouds.

Visakai reached home. But her parents were surprised when she said: "I have decided not to marry in this life. I'll spend my life as a spinster and will marry Dharuma in my next birth only, just to teach these rumourmongers that our love is divine."

Women, unlike men, are not fickle-minded. They stick to their stand.

Dejected Dharuma, vowing not to marry anyone but Visakai, set sail to different port cities on business and finally settled down at Madurai. Money flowed into his coffers.

Years passed. His youth was gone.

Visakai continued to be a virgin. One day when she was passing by the palace to reach a temple, the prince leaning from the ledge of his balcony saw her. To him it was love at first sight. He raised his hand to remove his necklace of pearls and throw it at her in order to attract her attention.

Alas! The joints of his hand got stuck and refused to move.

The king of that land punished the prince with death for his lewd thought about a divine and virtuous woman.

An aged brahmin who received help from Dharuma advised him: "Marry someone of your choice. Life without a wife is a hell on earth. True love knows no age."

Dharuma journeyed to Kaviripoompattinam and approached Visakai for her hand to walk through the rest of their life. But she replied:

"You have turned sixty now. My hair too has started graying. We have lived all these years thinking of each other. We'll be husband and wife in our next birth. Nothing is real in this world. Before your body perishes, help everyone

including your enemy in need of help in all possible ways ”

Dharuma left Visakai once and for all in this birth. He turned a philanthropist.

55. CANINE APPETITE

Kayasandikai and her husband, Kanjanan—a Vidhyadharar¹ couple—were once journeying in the air. Their eyes were downcast and they were enjoying the beauty of the world that God had created for the mortals.

A particular spot on the earth attracted their attention and they stopped for a while. The lush growth of greenery, the very tall hills, the serpentine river that flowed amidst the hills, and above all the fragrance of flowers pulled their minds down and the Vidhyadharar couple began to descend.

It was Podhiyal Hills

The couple reached the bank of the serpentine river. While Kanjanan took rest under a greenwood tree, Kayasandikai like a calf untethered gambolled on the banks. As the chill-cool breeze inspired her, she began to sing and dance.

Her eyes noticed a jambolna fruit, as big as a giant beetle, sitting snugly on a teak leaf resting on the earth. She was not aware of the inimitable medicinal value of the fruit; nor did she care to know about it.

In an ecstatic moment she stepped on that fleshy fruit and crushed it.

As she continued to dance, Sage Viruchigan emerged out of the flowing waters of the river after a bath and reached the bank. He looked for the jambolna fruit he had kept on the teak leaf.

He found it, but in its crushed state. Fretting and fuming he looked around. To his great horror and shock he saw a celestial being dancing in ecstasy and caring a damn for the sage.

“Why did you crush this fruit?” yelled the sage.

Kayasandikai’s dance came to a dead halt. She shivered at the sight of the angry sage. Words got stuck up in her throat.

“This fruit you have crushed is a rare one,” cried out the sage and continued: “A jambolna tree on this hill blooms only once in twelve years. The tree sheds off all its flowers allowing only one to grow on its top-most branch.

¹ Ancient Tamils have classified the dependent supernals under 18 categories: 1 *Amarar* (immortals, the inhabitants of Heaven), 2 *Siddhar* (Supermen well-versed in ashtama siddhis), 3 *Asurar* (demons), 4 *Daiyar* (another kind of demon), 5 *Garudar* (a class of gods), 6 *Kinnarar* (celestial musicians), 7 *Nirudar* (another kind of demon), 8 *Kimburudar* (a kind of celestial musician who possess a human face and the body of a bird), 9 *Gandharvar* or *Vidhyadharar* (heavenly choristers), 10 *Eyakkar* (demigods who attend on God), 11 *Vinjayar* (heavenly musicians), 12 *Boodhar* (ghosts, familiar spirits), 13 *Pisasar* (devils), 14 *Andharar* (wanderer), 15 *Munivar* (sages, hermits), 16 *Uragar* (serpents), 17 *Agavasiyar* (those who dwell in the air) and *Bhoga-boomiar* (those who by the practice of virtue in this world have attained a residence in that of the particular principal deity whom they worshipped. They are ever blooming and young, however, their time of residence in this abode of happiness depends upon the merit they had acquired previous to their admission).

That flower develops into a fruit. . just one fruit in twelve years ”

Kayasandikai listened to the sage in rapt attention

“Now what have you done to that rare fruit? Crushed it, eh!” said the sage and gritted his teeth

Kayasandikai’s eyes began to glisten with tears.

“Whoever eats this fruit will not feel the pinch of hunger for twelve years,” continued the sage “This fruit you have crushed is my only food. I fast for twelve years, eat only this fruit and fast for another twelve years.. Now that the fruit is defiled by your dancing feet, it has lost all its power.”

Kanjanan who was also listening to the sage said in all humility, “Forgive her, O sage, for her carelessness It was not a wanton mischief ”

Hunger began to pinch the sage’s stomach. Unable to bear the pangs of hunger, he bawled “I know no means of quenching the raging fire in my stomach. As I am destined to go hungry for twelve years, I curse you with a long disease of excessive morbid hunger.² Let your hunger subside when mine subsides; that is when I eat the rare fruit after twelve years. And as you didn’t care for the divine fruit, you will forget the divine mantra that takes you in the air Let it come back to your memory when your hunger subsides ”

The sage disappeared into the forest, leaving the Vidhyadharar couple in tears.

Kayasandikai felt her bowels melting with fear As hunger began to gnaw at her, she held her stomach in her hands and began to wail tumultuously as a woman in labour.

Kanjanan procured for her all the fruits and roots he could lay his hands on. But the curse was very powerful. As her chances of going to their celestial abode was very remote, he lost all hope

“Now all that you can do is to go on foot to the city of Kaviripoompattinam. Its citizens are very generous hearted They will give you food The curse may find its cure.”

As Kanjanan ascended the sky, his wife moved towards Kaviripoompattinam, to make a living by begging

Once in a year, during the celebration of Indran festival, Kanjanan visited Kayasandikai and soothed her in all possible ways.

Though no one in Kaviripoompattinam turned Kayasandikai away, none was able to satiate her canine appetite

As everything has to wait for its time, Kayasandikai had to wait for the arrival of Manimekalai on the scene.

(More legends on the way)

P. RAJA

² ‘Bulimia’ in medical parlance, it is also called canine appetite

CHRISTALIS

by

GEORGETTE COTY

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1995)

A Visitor

DID I fall asleep sitting here? It seems like it. I'd better go to bed and get some rest. It was a hard day.

"What"—I turned round, "What's that?" Now I must be hearing things, where would music be coming from, if not from my own tired head? I folded my papers and placed them carefully in the bag that I was to take with me in the morning

"There! .. There it is again, that sound, or music " Funny, it reminds me of little bells I used to have when I was a little girl. They hung on coloured ribbons. What colours were they? Can't remember now, but they were very pretty and the bells were made of some kind of fine glass and you had to be very careful when you touched them

I put out the oil lamp and lay down on my bed across the room from Christopher's bed. I am almost sure that my eyes were shut when I saw a light flicker and heard the sound again... the sound that reminded me of bells.

"Woman?" I sat up startled. "Woman," the voice said again... "Night Hair, I can see the stars in them."

"Have I got a fever?" was my thought. I put my hand to my forehead to see if it was hot. "There, those bells again, or something like them. I can hear them again, I swear "

"You should not do that under any circumstances," said the voice, "surely you know better than to do such foolishness, nor have you any fever, Night Hair; I protect you from that."

"You do?" I said sheepishly, "How?"

"That is not difficult"—said the voice laughing and at that moment I realised that whomever this strange voice belonged to must be reading my thoughts, unless I was speaking aloud without noticing it. Very slowly I pushed myself up from bed—"I must have some light."

"There is no need," the musical voice came promptly—my heart was beating so hard that I could hear it drumming against my chest—"and please do not act so alarmed, I am very fond of you already and I do hope you will like me also."

Now I could see every object in the room clearly as though it was daylight. Christopher slept peacefully as when I had put out the lamp The lamp! That's it.

But I did not light it again, how then is there light?

Light? But we have no electricity at all! I heard it said the other day at the Hall that it may take at least six more months before they could hope to repair the generator. I trembled like a leaf, for the room was glowing in a rose-yellow colour.

“Ha!” I raised my hand to my mouth, “I mustn’t wake the child,” and sat up transfixed

A boy, a most beautiful boy stood in the middle of the room smiling at me with rose colour coming out of him. The light shone out of him, there was no question about it. After all, I had not put on the lamp again, had I?... and yet the room was flooded with radiance.

“Good meeting, Night Hair,” he said, “I do hope that I am not too discoloured You do look startled! The atmosphere here is not easy on me, no reflection on you, Night Hair!” he added.

“No, oh no, you look more beautiful than anyone I have ever seen. Are you a God? I haven’t died Have I? The children need me, I cannot leave them now, and Christopher has only me in this whole wide world ”

“What foolishness you talk! Most assuredly you are alive and as for Christopher, your child, having only you to love him, that is not the truth at all and I expect that you know it ”

“Yes,” I said and I couldn’t tell why I felt suddenly ashamed Casting my head down, I added, “I know that God loves him too.”

“We will talk more about that Now tell me how do people call you?”

“Lillian. That is my name, but Julian who was my husband before, before” . . . I stopped, “he never came back, he died on some battlefield I better not speak of that. He used to call me Lilly for short.”

“Lilly? Has this a meaning, this sound? For I don’t know it. Why yes, it is also the name of a flower isn’t it? Very sweet-smelling at night and it is pure white.

“Well then, I had better call you Flower Woman Halion It is a truly fine sound I am pleased with what you are called, and I shall call you Halio for short, as Julian did.”

“No, no it’s not like that, it is Lillian,” I corrected. Had I known better it would have been silent, but how was I to know anything about this strange boy?

“Let it be,” was all he said then.

All at once I remembered that this was no ordinary occurrence; he standing there in the light and I asking and saying ordinary things Yet I heard myself say—“How did you get in here, into this room? Was the door open?”

“You called Halion, and the door was open.”

“Yes,” I thought, “the door,” and felt as if I was standing in front of some secret chamber and advanced cautiously, lest it should open too suddenly for my beating heart

“But what about this light, this colour? It is glorious, I never saw anything as radiant as this.”

“You can see it when you leave your door open,” was his reply.

How does he know my thoughts when I have not put them into words yet? Does he understand them as they come into my head?

Now the glow of his light began to fade away and darkness obscured him from my sight.

“Wait, beautiful boy, wait! Don’t go away! Dear boy, please remain! I need help so much, so very much. Who will help me, who will help us? We are left alone, there was a great destruction, you know, the dead were uncountable and our eyes were dry of tears. There is a great hunger in the lands—the world almost disappeared a while ago.”

I called after him. “Boy of light, do come back, how will we live?... There is nothing to eat for us, or hardly anything... there is no fish in the waters, some of the rivers went away and died and the birds fell out of the sky!”

Silence. Long desolate silence filled everything. The pink-gold light was gone now, only the remembrance remained of where he stood. In the darkness I was left alone.

A desperate cry rose from my very soul—“Please don’t leave me, I am so lonely and in such need!”

The glorious colour began to glow once more and his bell-like voice rose as if coming from afar, yet clearly. I could see his eyes looking at me lovingly. His voice was gentle now, no more chiding but filled with incredible love.

“In need? What of, Flower Halio?”

“I mustn’t let him go yet, he wants to know something, of this I am certain, and he doesn’t understand my mumblings.” With effort I said—“Of light!”

The words gushed out of me like water that was waiting behind the rocks too long—“I am in need of light!”—then, so as not to appear foolish I added, “See for yourself, we have no electricity yet.”

“The light is coming down, it is good that you ask for that I will come to help you when my parents will call for me.”

“Wait, beloved child, where are your parents? When will they call you? How will I know it is you they will call, I don’t even know your name.”

“My name is a secret,” he said solemnly—“until I am called.”

“But that is what I mean, what do your parents call you?” I probed.

“It is for your need that I will be born, the children will be saved and you will know my name. Have you no patience, Halion? It is essential to possess it.”

He was not smiling now—“I am not born yet.”

“Ha!” A cry escaped me—“you are not?”

Lotus Lake

I awoke as usual, before dawn. One gets used to an early rise, after a while it becomes an effortless habit, no trouble at all. It is a very private time, everything seems asleep all round. Only you are awake, alone with your fresh morning thoughts. No noises to disturb them, no chatter, no distraction. It starts the day off with a joyful calm. I often wondered why most people never much cared for the magic of dawn. They preferred late nights, late shows and, when I think of such foolish habits, it was little wonder we drove ourselves off the cliff.

But today was different, something woke me very suddenly. What was it? That's right, I remember now; I had fallen down off something with a thud. I could feel the mattress shaking as I hit it in the fall. It was not a bad fall, still there was something special about it. What was it then? I did not want to get up yet, I had to find it out. It was important for some reason. With effort I was trying to recover my consciousness.

"What is this? You have work to do, get up!.. Not yet, I am looking for something: something I must find, it is very important... something to go back for. Yes, go back and find it—go back—go back."

How curious, I am feeling so light as though I had no weight at all. and so happy—utterly blissful—but what about? My body feels light, weightless, no fibre to pull it down, but then how did I fall?

All at once it reached me; a flash of remembrance. A door flung open into a scene almost shut out forever by the awakening all-erasing mind. Cancelling a precious experience lived, branding it in broad red ink-prints; unreality, dream stuff—wiping out all that was subtle and beautiful.

It was a dream, was it? Yes, I had a marvellous dream. I must remember it! I must go back for it.. back. Sink back, go into that border time which separates our dreams on awakening. Find it.. go back.. sink.. sink.. deeper, more! Let go of everything. Yes, like this.. there!

Was it not a beautiful place? What kind of a town could it have been? Those houses, those buildings! Never, never have I seen anything like them before... And the streets, they were alive, it's true, I felt it. I entered a house and its occupants, a man and a woman, greeted me as if they were expecting me to come. How did I come here and how did they know me, but it seemed natural.

They were very tall and beautiful. Their body had a light that shone through their garments with a glow. I could see its colour through it distinctly. Through what? The colour of their skin or their garments? Remember it! It's important! Yes, I think that the glow had come from inside them. Very lovely it was and their garments fell from their shoulders in full-length folds and moved about them as if it were part of all their movements.

I marvelled at this beauty, whilst they looked at me penetratingly, then smiling, the tall man spoke for the first time.

“You had come to visit us, be welcomed. We were going to the Lake and now that you are here, you may accompany us. We shall go together to Lotus Lake. We wish for a child, you see, and our hearts are filled with love for it. We had heard it call.. it wanted to do some urgent work and we would be happy to be its parents. Do you wish to come?”

“Oh yes, I would love to, thank you for your kind invitation. I too am a mother and I love my boy very much, and all children too.”

Still smiling “Yes, we know,” was all they said and we were on our way.

We went toward a special part of the town where the houses looked as living, breathing forms of differently cut coloured crystals, all symmetrical and not fixed. Somehow they appeared to move lightly, to the direction from where the sun was shining, or the breeze was coming from. I am quite sure that this is how it was. They, my friends, knew that I had not been here before and explained that this was a crystalline town, very pleasant to live in.

We came to where the last houses showed in a play of colours in the bright rays of the sun, making everything look like a shimmering fairyland. We passed through a sprawling meadow of flowers, and there was a forest in front of us.

What colours were here! Those trees and everything else in this forest.. The fruits which hung off some of them, were more like jewels and yet they were fruit. The leaves made a beautiful, magical sound, and they glistened—I could not take my eyes off them.

The flowers too were enchanting to look at, and they all seemed to be dancing in rhythmical waves toward the sun. I think that they were worshipping it and made musical tones all the time. That’s what it was, musical notes—clear and lovely notes. There were different notes coming from different flowers and leaves, yet together they made a harmony that I shall remember, if I may live to a hundred or more.

“I am not going to wake up from this. I am going back there, to those wondrous things, to that world, the world I want.”

We walked a little way into the forest and although we had come quite a long way since we left their house, I was not tired at all. But then, one does not get tired in dreams, does one? Oh yes, one does, sometimes you feel so tired that you cannot move a limb. But this was not that kind of feeling at all. Not at all. And the limbs,. what about them? That’s right, I was almost as tall as they were, which was very extraordinary as they were very tall indeed, yet so graceful.

A light glittered in the distance. “Maybe this is an enchanted forest, will I find my way back from it?”—I thought. The light coming towards us shining through the trees was getting brighter now, or was it that we had moved closer to its source? I couldn’t tell; but what glittered so strongly, now came into view.

A lake sparkling with light was in front of us. Perfectly round it seemed, I could even see from a distance that a peculiar kind of brilliance hung above it, like a fine, coloured mist. The colour, wait. what colour was it? No, it was not

just one definable colour, but several, all blended together most harmoniously. Rather like all the colours there are, shimmering in one perfect hue. The tremulous hue was quite high. It surrounded the lake like some magical curtain hung down from the sky to hold it in its circumference. I knew that this was a very special place and one could only come here on some special mission.

The breeze brought toward us a fragrance of incredible sweetness. This too, not unlike the colours, was like so many perfumes of flowers and honey blended into one intoxicating fragrance coming from the direction of the lake. We stopped in our stride—I understood that we had arrived at our destination. An azure expanse of water, a lake full of lotuses .. Lotus Lake was in front of us.

My friends said that they had to see the Lake-keeper and sign their names, so I sat down on the grass and waited. I saw, what I had not noticed before, that none of the flowers were open. They were all in bud, yet all in different colours, as if cloaked in delicate shades, ready for a gala opening.

The strangest kind of hum surrounded the place. A haunting sort of tune was coming from the buds. So soothing was it that it made me drowsy. I wanted to lie down and sleep. This humming must have affected me because I felt that I was like an infant, resting safe and secure in my mother's arms. The drowsy, floating feeling overtook me, I gave myself over to it and sank down onto the grass. My lids were heavy, I could no longer keep them open.

I felt myself sinking back into eternity, which is a very strange thing to feel in a dream. A light flashed over me and with effort I opened my eyes. My friends were standing in front of me smiling radiantly and it seemed to me that the glow they had about them was brighter than before. Maybe because I was sleeping, I said to myself, but it was very bright, all the same. They said that they had received permission to receive the child and that the call they had heard was right and true. The man motioned me to go with them, I rose wordlessly and followed.

The curious thing was that everything seemed very natural to me, as though I was part of it all. I never asked any questions because somehow I understood things as they were, without any need for an explanation.

We reached the edge of the lake now and stopped. A vibrating kind of force encircled and engulfed me in its magical spell... a flow of love emanated out of my own being, as well as from my friends. Engrossed by it, we stood there for some time. There was nothing else perceivable now, but this tangible, solid force of love. We were in a love capsule, floating somewhere in the universe.

I could not move, nor shift my glance from the faces of my friends,—trans-fixed, motionless, I watched them. I saw in wonderment that their eyes had become so large, so bright and mirror-like that rays of light shone out of them periodically, or was it the rays of the sun reflected in them? I wondered if there was a difference, since everything seemed to be part of all other things here.

He spoke now, without taking his eyes off the lake and said, "The colour is rose and gold," and the woman replied, "Yes, dear, it is that."

Slowly, ever so slowly, as when the sun rises, they raised their arms toward the lake in a gesture of expectation. Their voices, like music, rose from their depths and broke upon their lips, a glorious crescendo rising heavenward. "Beloved child, come " Up and up rose the call, it filled the place until it was heard everywhere, reverberating its beautiful invocation.

The glow in their eyes now settled and gradually it became like the smooth surface of the lake and everything they looked upon was now mirrored there. I could clearly see every detail reflected in them.. the gently swaying leaves and stems, and the many lotus-buds.

One lotus-bud amidst the many began to move. Just a flash of a movement, yet it was unmistakable. Soon it was followed by another. The stem below it began to move slightly upward until it was visible among all the others.

Holding my breath I looked on. Presently it came to a halt. Its movement of upward pushing and sideways swaying stopped entirely. It sat above the others majestically and rested there a while, then its petals began to spread outward and unfold themselves one by one, in spectacular ceremony. My heart beat in delight; "a good thing I am here" I said to myself, "I have never seen a flower open up before "

It was entirely open now, I could see the fully spread petals of a lovely rose-and-gold colour or was it gold? But there are no rosy-gold coloured lotuses, are there? Apparently there are and this one shone with light as well.

The stem began to move once more, this time pushing itself quite rapidly toward the shore with the lotus bloom still growing upon it A flash of intense light appeared in its centre. I could not any longer keep my eyes on it and for the first time since this wonder began, I was obliged to shut them. When I opened them again, the brightness had subsided, then slowly faded out.

It was then that I saw it. There, in the centre of the lotus, where the light had glowed an instant before, now stood a boy. . A boy child, looking like heaven fallen on to a lotus bloom. He stood there smiling and radiant, and it seemed that his smile entered me through the brilliant eyes of those two waiting for him in intense ecstasy.

The bloom lowered its charge onto the shore and the boy touched down on the ground With a rhythmical stride, more like a graceful dance, he came to where we stood

For some timeless moment I looked upon the scene and onto the three standing there smiling. The multicoloured hue from the lake played an enchanting show upon them and mingled with the splendour of the love which bound them together The flowing current generated by it went outward in all directions. I could feel it expanding in growing circles until—I was sure—it must have covered the whole universe.

The boy made the first move He raised his arms and looked toward the sun and made a gesture of salutation toward it, then toward my friends. He spoke

for the first time with a voice which reminded me of bells made from fine glass. Something stirred inside me, a memory of a sound trying to come to the surface, but I could not identify it, yet I was sure that I had heard it before.

He bowed down deep to them in salutation—"For Love," he said. And they, my friends, replied with solemnity, "For Joy "

Long silence followed, then the boy, bowing again, raised one hand: "Mother, I shall serve," and turning to him, "My father, I shall do and obey". And they with one voice—"Beloved child, you have come, and we too love and serve "

What followed was an embrace of the tenderest kind and all the rest was waves of currents of their love reaching me, coursing through me, filling my entire being from the top of my head down to my very toes

With great tenderness spoke my friend, his mother, to the boy—"Child, what are you named?"

His lovely eyes seemed to go into the depths of himself. When he opened them again, they shone. A brilliant light of gold flashed up again at the centre of his chest, then went out again.

Softly came his reply: "I am named Christalis, and I too love and serve."

Time no longer existed, no more movement of any kind. The marvel of the moment engulfed everything. It had its own life. This here was the reality of bliss and I was part of it.

Enfolded in an embrace stood the three, resembling the lotus bud from which the boy rose, forging their togetherness within its fold. Slowly, majestically they emerged from it: a flower-dance in slow motion. They turned toward me with enhanced delight.

The boy, this beautiful child, smiled his heavenly smile, looked at me penetratingly and said: "Greetings, Halo!"

Something like the force of a strong blow hit my mind, I fell to the ground.

(To be continued)

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Seventy-seventh Seminar

17 April 1994

WHY, IN SRI AUROBINDO'S INTEGRAL YOGA, IS THE BRINGING TO THE FRONT OF THE PSYCHIC BEING AN INDISPENSABLE NECESSITY?

Speech by Anirban Deb

BEFORE entering into a detailed discussion on the subject of this Seminar, let me first clearly define what is meant by the psychic being in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. The word 'psychic', as Sri Aurobindo uses it, has not the same meaning as is given to it by other psychological and spiritual systems, as he himself points out.

".. people do not understand what I mean by the psychic being, because the word psychic has been used in English to mean anything of the inner mental, inner vital or inner physical or anything abnormal or occult or even the more subtle movements of the outer being, all in a jumble; also occult phenomena are often called psychic. The distinction between these different parts of the being is unknown."¹

To clear this confusion, Sri Aurobindo gives his own precise meaning:

"The psychic part of us is something that comes direct from the Divine and is in touch with the Divine. In its origin it is the nucleus pregnant with divine possibilities that supports this lower triple manifestation of mind, life and body. There is this divine element in all living beings, but it stands hidden behind the ordinary consciousness, is not at first developed and, even when developed, is not always or often in the front, it expresses itself, so far as the imperfection of the instruments allows, by their means and under their limitations. It grows in the consciousness by Godward experience, gaining strength every time there is a higher movement in us, and, finally, by the accumulation of these deeper and higher movements, there is developed a psychic individuality,—that which we call usually the psychic being"²

The part of our nature of which we are normally conscious is our surface or outer being, consisting of the body, the surface vital related to the life-energy and emotions, desires, passions etc. and the surface mind having to do with

cognition, intelligence, ideas, thought-perceptions etc. Behind this superficial consciousness there exists a far greater, deeper and more powerful consciousness in touch with the universal planes of mind, life and matter. This hidden subliminal consciousness, referred to as our inner or true being, consists of the true or inner mental, the true or inner vital and the true or inner physical with the psychic as the innermost being which, as an aspect of the central being or the Jivatman, supports all the different parts in our outer nature and which develops in the course of evolution an individuality which is called the psychic being.

Among the different parts of man's nature, it is the psychic being in him that gives the readiest response to the supramental truth when it manifests upon earth. I read here a few lines from a letter of Sri Aurobindo in which he states very clearly:

"...it is the psychic being that gives *the readiest response* [to the supramental influence]—more ready than the mind, the vital or the physical. It may be added that it is also a purer response, the mind, vital and physical can allow other things to mix with their reception of the supramental influence and spoil its truth. The psychic is pure in its response and allows no such mixture.

"The supramental change can take place only if the psychic is awake and is made the chief support of the descending supramental power."³

Once the Mother was asked what exactly is the soul or psychic being and what is meant by the evolution of the psychic being? What is its relation to the Supreme?

The Mother gave the following answer:

"The soul and the psychic being are not exactly the same thing, although their essence is the same.

"The soul is the divine spark that dwells at the centre of each being; it is identical with its Divine Origin; it is the divine in man.

"The psychic being is formed progressively around this divine centre, the soul, in the course of its innumerable lives in the terrestrial evolution, until the time comes when the psychic being, fully formed and wholly awakened, becomes the conscious sheath of the soul around which it is formed.

"And thus identified with the Divine, it becomes His perfect instrument in the world."⁴

For becoming conscious of the psychic being, which is essential in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, the Mother gives the following directions:

"In the ordinary life there's not one person in a million who has conscious contact with his psychic being, even momentarily. The psychic being may work

from within, but so invisibly and unconsciously for the outer being that it is as though it did not exist. And in most cases, the immense majority, almost the totality of cases, it's as though it were asleep, not at all active, in a kind of torpor

“It is only with the sadhana and a very persistent effort that one succeeds in having a conscious contact with his psychic being. Naturally, it is possible that there are exceptional cases—but this is truly exceptional, and they are so few that they could be counted—where the psychic being is an entirely formed, liberated being, master of itself, which has chosen to return to earth in a human body in order to do its work. And in this case, even if the person doesn't do the sadhana consciously, it is possible that the psychic being is powerful enough to establish a more or less conscious relation. But these cases are, so to say, unique and are exceptions which confirm the rule

“In almost, almost all cases, a very very sustained effort is needed to become aware of one's psychic being. Usually it is considered that if one can do it in thirty years one is very lucky—thirty years of sustained effort, I say. It may happen that it's quicker. But this is so rare that immediately one says, ‘This is not an ordinary human being.’ That's the case of people who have been considered more or less divine beings and who were great yogis, great initiates.”⁵

The Mother further explains:

“It is through all the experiences of life that the psychic personality forms, grows, develops and finally becomes a complete, conscious and free being.

“This process of development goes on tirelessly through innumerable lives, and if one is not conscious of it, it is because one is not conscious of one's psychic being—for that is the indispensable starting-point. Through interiorisation and concentration one has to enter into conscious contact with one's psychic being. This psychic being always has an influence on the outer being, but that influence is almost always occult, neither seen nor perceived nor felt, save on truly exceptional occasions

“In order to strengthen the contact and aid, if possible, the development of the conscious psychic personality, one should, while concentrating, turn towards it, aspire to know it and feel it, open oneself to receive its influence, and take great care, each time that one receives an indication from it, to follow it very scrupulously and sincerely. To live in a great aspiration, to take care to become inwardly calm and remain so always as far as possible, to cultivate a perfect sincerity in all the activities of one's being—these are the essential conditions for the growth of the psychic being.”⁶

I have spoken at some length about the psychic being, and cited the words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, explaining its meaning and its evolutionary development. The awakening of the psychic being and its coming to the front to

transform the nature is of crucial importance at the present hour when the descending Supermind is urgently calling for our response in order that it may securely establish itself in our life and fulfil the human aspiration for the divine life upon earth I conclude with a few lines from Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri* which reveal in exquisite terms the supreme necessity of bringing the psychic being forward for the supramental transformation which is the aim of the Integral Yoga:

“Earth must transform herself and equal Heaven
Or Heaven descend into Earth's mortal state.
But for such vast spiritual change to be,
Out of the mystic cavern in man's heart
The heavenly Psyche must put off her veil
And step into common nature's crowded rooms
And stand uncovered in that nature's front
And rule its thoughts and fill the body and life.”⁷

References

- 1 *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 22), p 290
- 2 *Ibid* , p 288
- 3 *Ibid* , p 288 fn
- 4 *Collected Works of the Mother* (Cent Ed , Vol 16), p 247
- 5 *Ibid* , (Cent Ed Vol 7), p 273
- 6 *Ibid* , (Cent Ed , Vol 16), pp 223-24
- 7 *Savitri* (Cent Ed , Vol 29), pp 486-87