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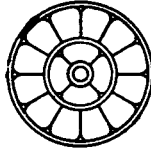
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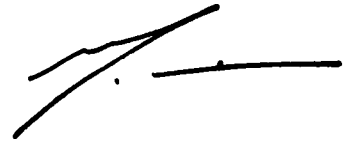
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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No. 4

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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WORDS OF THE MOTHER

2 April 1972

FOR centuries and centuries humanity has waited for this time. It is come. But it is difficult.

I don't simply tell you we are here upon earth to rest and enjoy ourselves, now is not the time for that. We are here... to prepare the way for the new creation.

The body has some difficulty, so I can't be active, alas. It is not because I am old, I am not old. I am not old, I am younger than most of you. If I am here inactive, it is because the body has given itself definitively to prepare the transformation. But the consciousness is clear and we are here to work—rest and enjoyment will come afterwards. Let us do our work here.

So I have called you to tell you that. Take what you can, do what you can, my help will be with you. All sincere effort will be helped to the maximum.

It is the hour to be heroic.

Heroism is not what it is said to be: it is to become wholly unified—and the Divine help will always be with those who have resolved to be heroic in full sincerity. There!

You are here at this moment, that is to say upon earth, because you chose it at one time—you do not remember it any more, but I know it—that is why you are here. Well, you must rise to the height of the task. You must strive, you must conquer all weaknesses and limitations; above all you must tell your ego: "Your hour is gone." We want a race that has no ego, that has in place of the ego the Divine Consciousness. It is that which we want: the Divine Consciousness which will allow the race to develop itself and the supramental being to take birth.

If you believe that I am here because I am bound—it is not true. I am not bound, I am here because my body has been given for the first attempt at transformation. Sri Aurobindo told me so. Well, I am doing it. I do not wish anyone to do it for me because... because it is not very pleasant, but I do it willingly because of the results; everybody will be able to benefit from it. I ask only one thing: do not listen to the ego.

If there is in your hearts a sincere Yes, you will satisfy me completely. I do not need words, I need the sincere adhesion of your hearts. That's all.

(Collected Works of the Mother, Cent. Ed., Vol. 11, pp. 307-08.)

LIGHTS FROM SRI AUROBINDO

THE MEANING OF SPIRITUALITY

THE meaning of spirituality is a new and greater inner life of man founded in the consciousness of his true, his inmost, highest and largest self and spirit by which he receives the whole of existence as a progressive manifestation of the self in the universe and his own life as a field of a possible transformation in which its divine sense will be found, its potentialities highly evolved, the now imperfect forms changed into an image of the divine perfection, and an effort not only to see but to live out those greater possibilities of his being. And this consciousness of his true self and spirit must bring with it a consciousness too of the oneness of the individual and the race and a harmonious unity of the life of man with the spirit in Nature and the spirit of the universe.

(Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 9, p. 251)

FUNCTION OF ART AND POETRY

To embellish life with beauty is only the most outward function of art and poetry, to make life more intimately beautiful and noble and great and full of meaning is its higher office, but its highest comes when the poet becomes the seer and reveals to man his eternal self and the godheads of its manifestation.

(Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 9, p. 255)

THE INNER STRENGTH

Try to realise the strength within you, try to bring it forward, so that everything you do may be not your own doing, but the doing of that Truth within you. Try so that every hour that you live shall be enlightened by that presence, that every thought of yours shall be inspired from that one fountain of inspiration, that every faculty and quality in you may be placed at the service of that immortal Power within you.... You will have no complaints to make against others, because then you will not need any leader. The leader is within yourselves.... That voice and that strength is within you. If you feel it within yourselves, if you live in its presence, if it has become yourselves, then you will find that one word from you will awake an answering voice in others...

(Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 1, p. 664)

INDIA AND SRI AUROBINDO'S CONTRIBUTION

ANCIENT India was a leader not only in the cultural field but in several others also. It was like a number of suns radiating at the same time from this great nation, in the fields of literature, mathematics, astronomy, botany—a number of things. It is India that gave to the world the concept of 'zero'. And most important of all was India's contribution to the organisation of a collective life. We have seen the Ramarajya, we have seen the great kings who were also yogis, who ruled as guided by the Divine. The great Rishis created the Vedas and the Upanishads, again guided by the Divine Consciousness. People were happy then.

But a time came when the synthesis of spiritual and material life became imperfect. The spiritual meaning was lost and people clung to outward forms. That is how the country degenerated because most of these outward forms, rituals, rules and conventions were misunderstood, misinterpreted and wrongly practised. The ancient glory was possible because our forefathers could take a total view of life, in unity with the Divine Consciousness. The Rishis could synthesise everything—politics, law, the economic aspect of life, labour and management relations, family relations, ethics, religion, the entire spectrum of life, in line with the basic law of evolution, in the fundamental knowledge that the Divine is in everyone and everywhere and the aim of life is to manifest Him.

All the writings of the ancient seers have two aspects; one permanent, the other, temporal. As I said, the permanent aspect which should have changed humanity was unfortunately lost sight of and people continued to cling to the temporal and followed it blindly.

The time came to restate the ancient Truths as suited to the present times and the need of the future. In an evolving world where society and men are both evolving, there has to be an evolution of thought, too. A new synthesis was needed which could harmonise all the divergent aspects of life. This great work was done by Sri Aurobindo. He wrote His experiences and His vision of the future in English, the language spoken in the largest number of countries in the world.

When Sri Aurobindo was fighting for India's independence, he felt the limitations of human capacity. He felt He could not fight the British because the Indians were not well organised nor did they have the proper means

Sri Aurobindo thought: if our forefathers could work so many changes by their spiritual powers, why could He not also develop these powers through yoga and fight for India's independence by spiritual means? That is why He started practising yoga. But as He grew in consciousness, as He went to higher and higher planes, His vision became global and he could foresee India's independence as a certainty. To Him, the crucial question was, what would India do after gaining independence; what path would she show to mankind? He believed

India had a leading role to play in the history of humanity.

When Sri Aurobindo was in the Alipore Jail, Swami Vivekananda appeared to Him and revealed to Him the necessity of an individual and a social change through the descent of a higher consciousness. Sri Aurobindo perceived that it was not a small improvement which was required but a transcendence, a further accelerated evolution from man to the Supramental Being, so that life on earth could really be transformed and men would develop such powers that all the scientific inventions, all that the future had in store, could be utilised for the benefit of mankind. Out of jail and acquitted of all charges, Sri Aurobindo dedicated His life to the evolution of the supramental consciousness in man and to the establishment of a divine life on earth.... He placed before us a fourfold, interconnected and interdependent vision of a very great future for mankind, a future not yet realised, a future really worth striving for, a future that is inevitable.

NAVAJATA

(From *Awakening*, August 1992)

A REVELATION ABOUT FOOD

ONE day I was reflecting on food. As one grows in years, one becomes more concerned about the body's health. One tries to eat what goes well with the body and avoids what may cause disturbance, indigestion, illness, etc. even though the temptation of the palate may sometimes try to influence one's choice. Added to it is the genuine difficulty of obtaining the correct knowledge as regards the effect of certain types of food. Some doctors recommend an item while others prohibit it.

One day as we were having food in the Ashram Dining Room, someone said that a doctor had advised him to drink a big tumbler full of water along with food as that would lessen his acidity. He was finding it helpful. Somebody remarked that the usual medical advice is not to have water while or immediately after taking food as it dilutes the juices of the digestive system, produced by food-intake, with the result that the food gives less energy. Another person expressed the view that one should take water half an hour either before or after the meals. Yet another person recalled having read that water should not be taken even one hour after food. As I silently listened to all this, it occurred to me that all were correct in their own ways. The best thing would be to understand one's own body and take water according to its need.

With this background, I was reflecting, trying to know the requirement of my body. It was difficult to separate my mental notions about certain foods, as they were deep-rooted. Suddenly a beautiful revelation dawned on me. It was a strong subtle vibration with clear voiceless words:

What do you eat for? If it is to satisfy your palate or your desires, their very nature being transitory and fickle, the effect will also be so. Besides, you will be supporting and strengthening the desires in you which will multiply and keep you dissatisfied. If food is taken for nourishing the body, it will no doubt energise it and make it a strong and healthy instrument for His existence and expression in you and your life. So, the choice is given to you. It goes without saying that if the Lord is invoked, He takes charge of your body and vital being and mind. Every thought of yours then emanates from Him, reflects and reveals His knowledge and light, every feeling of yours vibrates His love, purity, force and rhythm. Every cell of your body radiates His peace, harmony and beauty. So food can become a great medium for self-awakening and self-transformation.

SUSHILA MELVANI

(From *Awakening*, August 1992)

A MESSAGE OF THE MOTHER'S

A MEDITATION

WE read the Messages of the Mother's in the Birthday Cards and elsewhere as we read a number of other things. We forget that to understand their full significance and drive and to benefit from them we have to brood over them, meditate on them. Here is a message, for example:

Be simple,
Be happy,
Remain quiet,
Do your work as well as you can,
Keep yourself always open to me.
This is all that is asked from you.

The "luminous simplicity of the Divine's Grace" that characterises the message dazzles us and deceives us to believe we have understood its import on the first reading. That it bears a number of readings comes home to us only on meditating on it for quite some time.

She asks us to *be simple*. It is not really simple to be simple! The Mother, in another message, speaks of the "complications of the so-called human wisdom" above which stands the luminous simplicity of the Divine's Grace ready to act if we allow it to do so. At every level of life, in our so-called human wisdom, we complicate matters. There is no spontaneity in our responses and behaviour-patterns, nor in our attitudes to ourselves or to others. Even our appearance or dress is governed by our "wisdom" that cares for what others would think of us: we are influenced by either social convention or "fashion" both of which lead us away from what best expresses our inner personality (granting that we are aware of it!). Some persons in being keen on being simple become a nuisance to others: it is said of a well-known Gandhian that it needed a number of people and a lot of money to keep him simple!

She wants us to *be happy*. We cannot believe that we love to be unhappy! We make ourselves miserable on no account, on any account. That is why Sri Aurobindo speaks in *Savitri* of recovering the lost habit of happiness. Happiness is not happiness if it depends on any external circumstance. In fact the Mother, in one of her *Prayers and Meditations*, speaks of "the sense of the one true happiness, the happiness that is founded in Thee and never fades".

She then wants us to *remain quiet*. We cannot remain quiet simply because there is no quiet within us. We want to be busy doing something or nothing because we are "bored" otherwise. We also cannot remain quiet in the face of any happening: we cannot face life with "an equal soul" unless we aspire and endeavour to do so.

She also wants us to do our work as well as we can. But to do our work thus, we must not do it for a gain of any kind. We must do it with a spirit of dedication. The ideal is: we must do it as the "Mother's business" if one could adapt the words of Jesus. Only then we can do our work as well as we can.

The next prescription is the most difficult of all! She desires us to keep ourselves always open to her. How is it possible when we are really open to so many forces in life? We can keep ourselves open to her only when She alone matters to us,—when nothing or nobody else does.

She tells us,

This is all that is asked from you.

What else is necessary? If we fulfil the requirements we have become true Yogis.

K. B. SITARAMAYYA

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

You have quoted from *Savitri* (Centenary Ed., p. 61) the lines—

The universe is an endless masquerade:
For nothing here is utterly what it seems,
It is a dream-fact vision of a truth
Which but for the dream would not be wholly true,

You have asked:

“Do lines 3 and 4 mean:

‘It is a vision of a veridical fact seen as in a dream, which but for the dream would not be quite true’

or:

‘it is a vision of a veridical fact such as happens in a dream’

or:

‘it is a vision of a dream-happening that appears as a true fact?’”

Here is my answer:

The meaning seems to me rather complex, and all the interpretations you have suggested have their own shades to contribute to it. I should attempt something like the following as a total explanation.

The appearance of everything in our world is at the same time a covering up of the truth and a disclosure of it and also an ultimate enrichment of its substance. The disclosure intended is through the very terms of the covering up. It is as a phenomenon that the world is to be understood and completed. There is an eternal reality behind it, which is to be expressed here. But this reality is figured forth under conditions of space-time. These conditions make the figuring forth such as to be different from the original but this difference is exactly what should be there. The expression would not be authentic, would not conform to the divine purpose without that difference. Nor even would the original be totally fulfilled unless this phenomenon came out from it as its self-expression.

It is all as though a veridical fact would appear in a dream with a certain change in its reality, so that it became a dream-happening looking like a true fact while it is not so, and yet what appears is no mere phantom, no sheer falsehood, but on the contrary the veridical fact itself getting realised in the form meant for

it if the medium of its realisation is to be the dream-state, the form which alone answers to the Divine's plan for His own truth and which is in addition a necessary mode for that truth's fullest and richest sense of its own non-phenomenal being. (14.1.1975)

*

Yesterday I received six letters from you in 24 hours and each envelope contained more than two communications. For quite a long time you have been indulging in this occupation and much of it strikes me as unhealthy.

You seem to be dredging treacherous depths by harping upon your deficiencies and your doubts about your own aspiration to become the child of the Divine. I advise you to check this flood of letters that appear to take pleasure in making concrete to yourself the anxieties and uncertainties that flit across your heart now and then. Keep as quiet as you can your monkeying mind and write only when the soul in you commands.

There is danger here of slithering into a depression that will lead to a darkness through these endless uncontrollable self-scourings.

Some questions like "Who is Sri Aurobindo? Who is the Mother?" are puerile at the stage where you are; they are just due to the itch to scribble.

Letting your pen run loose is dangerously akin to automatic writing, giving charge of yourself to some imp within you or haunting you. This indulgence is likely to cover up your awareness of the Divine Presence in you. Attend to your studies and your medical work and to the calm sadhana to which I have always called you. The Hostiles are digging for you a path to their obscurities through these bouts of what I have termed "logorrhoea" in my last note to you.

Aren't you becoming too introvert? Introversion is quite different from inwardness. Inwardness is a going towards one's depths—a movement away from one's ego in the direction of one's soul. Introversion preoccupies itself with the concerns of the ego—its various moods, its complexities, its predominant interests, its differences from other egos. It can also turn into a pseudo-inwardness. (17.8.1993)

*

You have mentioned two things bothering you. But one of them is due to an over-conscientious heart. Very few people can keep up a steady remembrance of Sri Aurobindo. Such remembrance calls for a condition of being in which one does not need to conjure up his presence by a conscious act. A constant flow from some deep inexhaustible source of devotion has to be found. When the Mother once put the question "What is Yoga?" to the small group which used to be with her before the Soup-distribution would take place, various interesting

answers were given. Some replies were intellectual though life-experience lay behind them. For example, Nolini's definition: "To divinise life." Lalita's was an ideal deeply desired and pursued: "To live as if nobody and nothing existed except the Mother." Mine was based on a feeling which used to recur often: "A warmth and a glow in the heart when seeing or even remembering Sri Aurobindo and the Mother." As a result of long practice this warmth and glow becomes constant or else one experiences a spontaneous flow from the middle of one's chest when one turns one's consciousness towards our Gurus. This flow can grow a permanent sensation and even when one is busy with or attentive to any activity it goes on and one feels it like a soft but concentrated background music. Whenever I am asked how to cultivate and preserve this movement of the being I suggest two lines of sadhana. A wide equanimity facing all situations. Along with it a seizing of every event and offering it to the Mother.

These two lines of sadhana have to be followed in the instance of the financial loss you have suffered because of the irresponsible action of the share subbroker. It is unlikely that she will return the money she has lost. I can well sympathise with your violent reaction. But this reaction can do nothing except sour your days. Here is a fine chance to develop and deepen your relationship with the Divine.

After writing all this I have concentrated on you and inwardly tried to lift you high up towards the Mother and to set you within her light and love. I feel as if something opened up on the height and made room for you. (10.12.1994)

*

I liked your talk very well. The idea of accompanying it with slides is rather original. Your audience must have greatly appreciated it. I look forward to seeing the script of your next lecture—the one on the life of Zarathustra. By the way, mention of Zarathustra sets me asking what Mary Boyce really thinks is the true significance of the name. The one connected with Old Camels is the present favourite with scholars, but the one bringing in a Golden Star appeals to me more. It has a poetic justice about it when one hears of the three Magi—Persian priests—guided by a star to the cradle of the infant Jesus—Jesus who was to start a religion so very much in tune with the doctrines of Zarathustrianism.

The only fault I can find in your paper is the practice of writing the Avestan for "Lie" as "Drug". One's mind at once goes to "pot" and "acid". I remember a similar side-tracking when Egyptian archaeologists spoke of having discovered a temple to Sin. "Sin" happens to be the Egyptian Moon-Goddess; but in English the name suggests all kinds of lascivious ritualism. My preference is for "Druj". I noticed also a slightly irregular construction on p. 13 when you present the slide "Priest offering wood to fire". I see the phrase: "...the fact that *Aša*—'Truth' and 'Righteousness' are the highest ideals of the Zoroastrian."

What is the subject of the verb “are”? It can only be *Aša* as the sentence stands. I would suggest a slight modification: “...the fact that ‘Truth’ and ‘Righteousness’, which are what *Aša* means, are the highest ideals of the Zoroastrian.”

Your exposition of the Parsi religion is both simple and systematic. But I wish you would in the future pierce to the esoteric sense, the mystic kernel, which has been overlaid, though finely, by the ethical aspect accompanied by the formal or ritualistic procedures. Sri Aurobindo’s seizing of “the Secret of the Veda” should be a guide to a similar grasping of the inner significance of what is plainly a similar religion, both the Vedic cult and Zoroastrianism being based on the symbolism of Fire and Sun, the sacred drink Soma or Haoma, the importance of the Cow as a sign of *Rita* or *Arta* (*Aša*), the fight between Truth and Falsehood, the Gods and the Demons. Even the shift of sense in the Vedic word *Asura* came, as you know, in the later hymns. In the earlier ones, the word is not the privative of “sura”: it comes from the root *as* implying “force”. The Gods in their aspect of power rather than of light or knowledge were *Asuras* rather than *Devas*. The supreme divinity, the One who manifests as the Many, is both *Asura* and *Deva*. There is an interesting mixture of senses in that phrase about the *Angirasas*, bringing them before us not merely as deified human fathers but also as heavenly seers, sons of the Gods, sons of heaven and heroes or powers of the *Asura*, the mighty Lord, *devas putrāso asurasva vīrāh* (III.53.7). Zoroastrianism has throughout a demonic meaning for *Deva* and a deific significance for *Ahura* (= *Asura*). But all the rest of the Vedic cult continues in it and should be susceptible of elucidation if one applies to it the clues laid bare by Sri Aurobindo for reinterpreting the *Rigveda*.

Sri Aurobindo himself seems to suggest the possibility of such an application. He writes in his *Essays on the Gita*: “The fundamental idea of the *Rig-veda* is a struggle between the gods and their dark opponents, between masters of Light, sons of Infinity, and the children of Division and Night, a battle in which man takes part and which is reflected in all his inner life and action. This was also a fundamental principle of the religion of Zoroaster.”

Again, in *The Secret of the Veda*, while referring to the contending powers on both sides, the gods and their enemies the demons, he says: “They represent the struggle between the powers of the higher Good and the lower desire, and this conception of the *Rig-veda* and the same opposition of good and evil otherwise expressed, with less psychological subtlety, with more ethical directness in the scriptures of the Zoroastrians, our ancient neighbours and kindred, proceeded probably from a common original discipline of the Aryan culture.”

I may mention, in passing, that a certain quotation you have made from the *Gathas* reminds me directly of the *Rigvedic* vision. *Yasna* 43.16 reads: “Mazda inhabits in Paradise the Sun-beholding dominion *Khšathra*.” The *Rishis* speak of the ideal end of their spiritual aspiration as the heavenly dominion *Swar* which lives forever under the light of the supreme *Gnosis*, *Surya*, the field or *Kshetra* of

divinity. Of course, Swar in the outward or non-mystical connotation is only the highest part of the physical sky. (1.10.1977)

AMAL KIRAN
(K.D. SETHNA)

THE STAGE

ONE day our searching hearts will quiver
And the huge tawny curtain rise
From its ancient floor of ambiguous clay,
Revealing the players behind the disguise.

Masks that peer within the night,
Their fiery eyes deceive God's ray,
As if to shatter our sheltered hearts,
Our candle of hope to steal away.

Storms assail with throats of thunder,
Lightnings fell our clay-bound home,
Too frail to stand the winds of time,
With a glowing lantern we are left to roam.

Let them mock, little gnomes of night,
Who dance upon our human sorrow,
Their feet cannot climb the rainbow bridge,
In their bosom dwells not the golden morrow.

One day the crimson lights will burst,
And the glass lose its dubious gleam,
Which cannot hold long the sun behind;
The wizards of maya will forget their dream.

Then the grand stage will crumble,
The cosmic artist his plan unseal,
Who sculptured our lives in glory and pain,
His golden chisel its purpose reveal.

HERTHA

K. AMRITA—A VISITOR'S VIEWPOINT

SHRI K. AMRITA, lovingly referred to as Amritada, was a man to whom visitors came for help to be put into contact with the Mother, and they were never disappointed. He never viewed visitors in the light of their capacity of making offerings. The only thing that mattered to him was the visitor's devotion for the Mother—no matter how poor or powerless was the supplicant. He loved all who loved the Mother; he would take the visitor's troubles to his heart and allow nothing to stand between the Mother and the devotee. He would faithfully present the case or the communication to the Mother and receive the responses from her for the devotees. This communication was sacred to him and he held it in trust for the Mother and the devotee. He was indeed the true trustee of the Mother.

When a devotee asked for permission to go to her he never decided beforehand, on the excuse of Mother being busy, whether the devotee should go or not. If refusal had to be there, it had to be only from the Mother. Because of this simplicity of his he received every visitor—rich and poor, powerful and weak—with equal feelings of love. He slighted no one. That was his character. His speciality was that he knew how to say “No” to a visitor with all affection and love. If he was approached by visitors when he was busy or at an odd time, he was never impolite; he was aware how difficult life was in the outside world. He would call them at another time, hear their story of plight with love and kindness, and present the facts to the Mother in the proper perspective. That was the mark of Amritada's humility and compassion, which were unique. He was a rarity.

JAGAT KAPADIA

FLOOD OF GRACE AND GOLDEN LIGHT

VISIONS AND EXPERIENCES

We are republishing from the *Mother India* of March 1977 this article for its remarkable matter. In December 1994 we reproduced from an old issue T. R. Thulasiram's article on its author.

It is by Grace that I came into contact with the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in my youth when she visited my village Veerampattinam, four miles off Pondicherry, in 1928. She poured Her looks of Grace into my heart. I was soon attracted to join the Ashram in my twentieth year which fell in 1933. I come from a poor and uneducated family. I had only completed the lower standards of school education. All the sadhana or spiritual discipline that I did and am still doing is wholly centred upon the work which She gave to me. I work in the sanitary service of the Ashram.

By doing the work with sincerity and devotion as the Mother's own work, I began to get experiences. By Her Grace my soul or psychic being opened after five years of Ashram-life. Since then, the psychic has been my guide and I feel always the Mother's Presence in my heart. From time to time various kinds of spiritual experiences have come, one after another. In my 63rd year, I had a flood of spiritual experiences and visions soon after I had sat in meditation in Sri Aurobindo's room on my birthday, along with fellow disciples and devotees whose birthdays coincided with mine. Then in the next year, when I meditated in my own room on my sixty-fourth birthday (24-7-76) at 12 noon, the Grace of our Divine Mother descended and entered into the depth of my mid-forehead. She came in the form of a Luminous Young Child—Bala, in the same form as when She had been about seven years old—and opened the "chakra" on the top of the head, the Sahasrara, giving rise to wonderful visions and experiences.

I feel that these are purely a gift of the Grace of our Divine Mother, and not at all due to my merits or qualifications or Sadhana. The experiences have continued and developed since then and especially in my night meditation between 2 and 3 a.m. Soon after the experiences, the Grace comes in the form of Tamil poetry in which they get expressed. Below I am giving in English some recent experiences in the order in which they came.

The Divine Mother lit the Light of a Lamp burning in the middle of my forehead. It is a Light that extended, with its flaming heat, in all directions.

In the depth of a silence beyond mind and heart, I found the pure flame of Truth blazing in its intensity. As the bud blossoms unfolding its petals all around, so the inner consciousness blossomed and expanded in that profound silence.

In lonely silence again, I realised the Divine Mother, the Consciousness of all consciousnesses, manifesting Herself as a luminous young child—Bala. I

became one with Her in consciousness.

My uvula curved upwards and tasted the oozing Amrita (Nectar) of Grace. The thousand-petalled lotus opened itself. I sensed its subtle fragrance full of Grace.

The lid of Brahmarandhra (Aperture of Brahman) opened itself. The last vestige of the ego was dissolved. A flood of Light entered in from above. I became absorbed in Bliss, the most precious gift of the Mother. The infinite pure Consciousness and the Self were realised.

The bond of birth and death has been broken and with that the dualities of pleasure and pain, sorrow and happiness were cancelled. The being has become free by realising the Light of Consciousness which is the source of the Vedas.

Mother Bala gave by Her Grace the Eye of Knowledge to see and realise the Truth. By surrendering to Her Lotus-Feet one can receive the supreme fulfilment of life as Her gift.

After the rending of the lid on the top of the head, and being surrounded by Light, I quickly rushed through wide spaces of heavens. Heavens within heavens were entered. The consciousness moved both upwards and inwards. It crossed six overhead planes which had been screening the Truth. Then I entered into the experience of the Void, the Sunya of Nothingness. But this was not the end. I felt I was near the vast Realm of Light which is the Home of Mother Bala who has manifested to me in Her splendour of Light. The ascending path to the home of Grace and Peace was seen. The Golden Door opened. I trod the interior path to the Heaven of Mother Bala and quickly entered into the vast Realm of Truth-Knowledge. I saw Mother Bala seated in Her Form of dynamic and vibrating golden Light in Her own supreme and universal Heaven of Light. I had wonderful visions of Truth; and Bliss coursed through and overflowed my whole being.

Cascades of intensities of the pure golden light spread in all directions, and all the spaces were flooded with the golden Light. The Light within the inner Light was realised and I became one with the consciousness of Light and partook of the Amrita of Bliss.

I entered into the vast Golden Truth-world and realised its vast Golden Light of Truth-knowledge. There was an enjoyment of the dynamic play of the Lord, His play of the beginningless and endless Bliss. I realised the supreme Lord with His Shakti Uma as the Two-in-One in the vast Golden Realm of Truth, which even the great gods fail to see. I realised Him as the Lord of my soul and self, present everywhere and bestowing His Grace on the devoted faithful in the depth of their hearts.

I saw the supreme Lord, realised union with Him, and became verily Himself. The birth, maintenance and destruction of the universe taking place in the Heart of the supreme Lord was seen. My being got fused and absorbed in the eternal Ananda which is beginningless and endless, and verily became that.

There, all the crores of heavens and worlds and the physical bodies, namely, the sun, planets, earth, moon and stars, were seen whirling like atoms. I saw them with the eye of Grace.

I realised the vast and supreme golden Light of Grace in its own Home of Truth which is without beginning and end. I became the pure Consciousness of the dynamic golden Light of Truth. The source of the secret Truth of the Vedas was found, and that without one's learning to know of it. I realised the supreme Light (*suddha param Jyoti*) spreading, from far beyond above, in all directions.

In the supreme and pure infinity of existence which is without day and night the unity of the all-containing supreme Existence (*eka poorana*) was realised. It was realised also as the one infinite and eternal Bliss of the supreme Consciousness.

The world of play of Truth-knowledge is found in the depth of silence. The whole universal movement is the play of the Lord of the Truth-world, the play of Knowledge-Will, the play of the beginningless and endless Ananda. The earthly life shall get changed into a play of Bliss when one annihilates the ego and realises the supreme Lord who has extended Himself as the universe.

The Golden Sun of Truth-knowledge rose up in that supreme world of Peace and Silence, and in the midst of the vibrating ocean of Ananda, spreading the flood of golden Light everywhere and illuminating, sustaining and nourishing the earthly world of ours. With the rising of the Sun of Truth-knowledge, the darkness disappeared everywhere and the Golden Light pervaded the whole universe and the earth too became golden.

The pure Golden Light descended from the vast Heaven of Truth-knowledge like the raining of waters. The earth, being flooded with the descending golden Truth-Light of Grace, changed into a golden earth, shining in its golden luminosity. A golden world was seen born, and men too became golden in the mental, vital and physical levels of existence. With the descending force of the golden Light of Truth on the earth, a new era has begun and the earth has woken up with a new consciousness which is seen vibrating with a new awakening of life at all levels of human existence. The human race is awakening everywhere with a new life.

Carried by force of the flood of the descending golden Light, I came down to the earthly consciousness when I entered into my body through the Brahma-randhra.

I hear the Omkara-nada vibrating in me and, along with it, the Golden Truth-Light infiltrates into my adhara. The heart is filled with the consciousness of Grace which is indeed the Golden Light of Grace. The ego has been completely effaced. The golden Light of Truth also descended into me, into my mind, life and body and made them golden. The golden Light entered into all the cells of the body, into the bones, muscles, tissues, brain and nerves, blood and its cells, skin and even the hairs, from the root to the end, and made them appear

golden with a tinge of red. The whole body appeared a beautiful golden red body.

I saw even the Sun of golden red Light rising up over the earthly sky, spreading its golden red Light of Truth into the whole material earth. The golden red Light of Truth is verily the concrete physical form of the highest supreme consciousness. The descending Golden Light becomes the golden red Light when reaching into matter and the material world and the material body.

The phenomenal universe which is derived and born from the supreme eternal Truth of Bliss, Light and Peace, moves to reach and become the Truth of Bliss, Light and Peace again, by enjoying the endless Bliss.

Man shall realise the eternal Truth and become That and he shall live the immortal life here on the earth by attaining a deathless body

The Golden Light of Truth is awaiting above the head to descend and enter in man through the opening of the Sahasrara when one, being awakened to the psychic being, remains in undisturbed silence and peace. The Golden Light is seen to rush into the whole adhara and into the body and shall transform man.

GANGADHARAN

THE REGAINED

I HAVE no home,	I firmly build
Nor anyone	A castle of Love
As my own:	To abide by
I am all alone.	Rules of freedom
My lonely heart	And laws of wisdom.
Sighs or smiles.	
Who cares,	
Who hears?	

My White House,
 All cool and clean,
 Showers eternal bliss....
 Then I am not alone
 I regain
 All as my own:
 Not leaving
 Even the vilest one.

ASHALATA DASH

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of March 1995)

IN our previous articles we have mentioned the death of Gossain. But there can be no doubt that Gossain's death had a decisive effect on the entire trial. He had made several damaging statements which might have seriously jeopardised Sri Aurobindo's defence and created other grave complications. Gossain would have been certainly a key witness but with his death the prosecution was debarred from producing his statements as evidence since the defence had no chance to cross-examine him on the witness stand. So, legally, the statements stood invalidated

The case commenced in the Alipore Session Court on 19 October 1908. Mr. C. P. Beachcroft, the District and Session Judge, tried the case. It was an irony of fate that both the judge and the principal accused had been at Cambridge together. Beachcroft was at Clare College and Sri Aurobindo at the neighbouring King's College. Both of them had passed into the Indian Civil Service in 1892. Sri Aurobindo stood eleventh and Beachcroft thirty-sixth. They might have known each other and met many times as both were scholars at Cambridge. In 1892, the year Sri Aurobindo was rejected from the Civil Service, Beachcroft began his career in the Bengal cadre of the I.C.S. He must have been surprised when he heard that his old classmate had been charged with a capital offence. Sri Aurobindo was fully familiar with his background. This must have led Beachcroft to follow the case with more than usual attention and care.

For the first few days a leading Calcutta barrister appeared for Sri Aurobindo and Barindra but as they could not afford the fees he demanded, he soon gave up the case. It was then that Chittaranjan Das, the "Deshbandhu" of a later day, agreed to appear for Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo's sister Sarojini Ghose and his friends had thus succeeded in finding Chittaranjan a true defender of a great prophet of the future. At that time he was a rising criminal lawyer, a sensitive poet, a dedicated patriot, a flaming idealist and an adoring son and servant of Mother India. He came upon the court scene at Alipore and the prospect brightened up at once for the defence

Leaving aside all other work, he devoted himself wholly to the defence of Sri Aurobindo. The forensic skill of Eardley Norton met its equal in him.

Retorting in the Judge's presence to the Prosecuting Counsel's case that Sri Aurobindo was the head of a conspiracy, Chittaranjan Das argued: "...the conspiracy is of such a nature that it is impossible to believe that Aurobindo could ever have thought in his mind that it could succeed. My learned friend has referred to the thousand and one ramifications of the conspiracy and he has argued that in order to substantiate this vast conspiracy, as it were, he has not hesitated to bring a charge of conspiracy against persons of whom there is not the

slightest evidence on record to show that they were in any way connected with it. I ask you to disregard all that; the conspiracy is in my learned friend's imagination. I wholly concede that he fully believes in the conspiracy which he has put forward before the Court and the only way I can explain that and the only suggestion that I can make is that he has been under the tutelage of the police for a long time and the police have poisoned his mind during the last ten months and no doubt he sincerely believed in it and put it forward before the Court."¹

"My appeal to you therefore is that a man like this who is being charged with the offence imputed to him stands not only before the bar in this Court but stands before the bar of the High Court of History and my appeal to you is this: That long after the controversy is hushed to silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. Therefore I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this Court but before the bar of the High Court of History."²

Chittaranjan Das gave his whole heart and soul to the organisation of the defence and during the next six months devoted himself day and night to it and took practically no fees. It was the discipline of a Titan's labour, it was the ministry of a noble mission. We learn that in this case 200 witnesses were examined and over 4000 documents were filed and exhibits consisting of bombs, revolvers, ammunition, detonators, fuses, poisonous acids and other explosive materials, numbering about 300 to 400, were examined. Poet, visionary, patriot, Chittaranjan had come to a brother poet's defence. Sri Aurobindo describes him as one "who put away from him all other thoughts and abandoned all his practice, who sat up half the night day after day for months and broke his health to save me."³

Nirodbaran records: "... in the famous speech Sri Aurobindo delivered at Uttarpara, after his acquittal, he says: 'when the trial opened in the Session Court, I began to write many instructions for my counsel as to what was false in the evidence against me and on what points the witnesses might be cross-examined. Then something happened which I had not expected. The arrangements which had been made for my defence were suddenly changed and another counsel stood there to defend me... when I saw him I was satisfied, but I still thought it necessary to write instructions. Then all that was put away from me and I had the message from within: "This is the man who will save you from the snares put around your feet. Put aside those papers. It is not you who will instruct him, I will instruct him."⁴

"On 4 March Norton closed his evidence and began his concluding statement. It took him more than two weeks to present the government's case. Most

of his oration was given over to an elaborate attempt to prove Aurobindo's complicity. This man, Norton asserted, though 'possessed of qualities far above the ordinary run', had been driven by religio-political fanaticism to launch a conspiracy against the King-Emperor. He could not be shown to have taken part in any illegal act, but he was unquestionably 'the guiding spirit of the whole gang' and must be convicted. If it had not been for the murder of Narendra Nath Goswami, Aurobindo's complicity would not be in question. But even without the testimony there was a convincing mass of circumstantial evidence against him. The 'school' at the Garden of which he was part owner, was structured on lines laid down in his *Bhawani Mandir*. It was impossible to believe that Aurobindo did not know what was going on there. The initials 'A.G.' appeared in an incriminating context in a notebook found at the Garden. Aurobindo's brother was the group's acknowledged leader. Another conspirator, Abinash Bhattacharya, looked after Aurobindo's household. Documents like the 'sweets letter' and the 'scribblings' provided incontrovertible proof that Aurobindo was involved in the plot. Norton spent whole days trying to prove Aurobindo's connection with known conspirators. He gave less time to the cases of Barin and the rest. The confessions, the arms and explosives found at the Garden, and the testimony of numerous witnesses showed conclusively that Barin had led the others in an abortive insurrection against the legally constituted rulers of India."⁵

"Norton finished his address on 21 March. Immediately afterwards the first defence lawyer, R. C. Bonnerjea, began his statement. Speaking for Barin and eight others, Bonnerjea could do little more than raise a series of technical objections. The confessions were induced, the charges misjoined, the evidence inadmissible. As for the arms found at the Garden, 'eleven revolvers, four rifles and one gun' could hardly be said to constitute a 'preparation for waging war.' Bonnerjea spoke for two days, after which Das began his address on behalf of Aurobindo. This 'masterly specimen of forensic eloquence' lasted for more than a week. It was, in the words of a contemporary, 'nervous, compact, closely argued and with that touch of genuine passion which is the essential characteristic of great oratory'. Courtroom eloquence tends to become overwrought. Das's oration suffers from this defect. It is also filled with statements that he knew to be untrue. But for all that it was both impassioned and well-argued. The case of the Crown, Das said, 'is that Aurobindo was the head of the conspiracy'. Norton 'has credited Arabinda with vast intellectual attainments and with vast powers of organization and his case was that he was directing this conspiracy and was working from behind.' But even if the evidence established the existence of a conspiracy, it was at best a 'childish conspiracy—a toy revolution'. It was altogether 'impossible that Arabinda could ever have believed in his heart of hearts that by bombing one or two Englishmen, or some Englishmen in different places, they would ever have been able to subvert the British Government. If you credit him with intellectual powers and say that he has a brilliant mind, it is

not open to you at the same time to say that he was the leader 'of such a bungling effort'. In his conclusions Das adopted the first person to present his client's 'whole case'.⁶

"If it is an offence to plead the ideal of freedom, I admit having done it—I have never disputed it. It is for that I have given up all the prospects of my life.... If that is my offence let it be so stated and I am cheerful enough to bear any punishment. It pains me to think that crimes I could never have thought of or deeds repellent to me, and against which my whole nature revolts, should be attributed to me and that on the strength, not only of evidence on which the slightest reliance cannot be placed, but on my writings which breathe and breathe only of that high ideal which I felt I was called upon to preach to my countrymen, to make them realise that India had a mission to perform in the comity of nations. If that is my fault you can chain me, imprison me, but you will never get out of me a denial of that charge."⁷

"The addresses of the other defence counsels occupied the court until 13 April—the hundred and twenty-fifth day of the proceedings. When the last vakil had had his say, Norton rose and asked the judge, 'Will your honour hear me further on law points?' 'No. I don't wish to hear you any further.' Beachcroft answered. The two assessors were then asked for their opinions. Unlike jurymen they were not on oath: their duty, as another judge told other assessors, was 'merely to offer advice which need not bind me as Judge'. On the 14th the two Bengalis who had been selected to discharge this decorative function gave their verdicts. Neither believed that there had been a conspiracy to wage war; the only section that had been violated was 122: collecting arms and men. Eight of the thirty-six accused were guilty of offences under this section: Barin, Upen, Ullaskar, Hem Das, Indu Bhusan, Bibhuti Bhusan, and two others. The other twenty-eight were not guilty. The judge 'congratulated the assessors at having arrived at the end of their labours' and informed the court 'that he would take a month to write his judgement'.⁸

"Das's strategy was to minimize the importance of the overt acts and challenge the legitimacy of the testimonial and documentary evidence. In regard to the charge that the prisoners had waged war, he insisted that the various attempts at assassination were isolated acts done 'for the purpose of redressing private wrongs'. Despite Beachcroft's decision with regard to the confessions, he insisted that they ought not to be used. He and other defence lawyers raised innumerable objections on points of law, subjected the prosecution's witnesses to very lengthy and minute cross-examination, and objected to 'practically every document' that could not be shown 'to be in the writing of some one or other of the accused'. This last tactic was used often in the case of Aurobindo, particularly in regard to the 'sweets letters'.⁹

An extract from Mr. C. R. Das's arguments runs:

"The time has come for you, sir, to consider your judgment and for you,

gentlemen, to consider your verdict. I appeal to you, sir, in the name of all the traditions of the English Bench that forms the most glorious chapter of English history. I appeal to you in the name of all that is noble, of all the thousand principles of law which have emanated from the English Bench, and I appeal to you in the name of the distinguished Judges who have administered the law in such a manner as to compel not only obedience, but the respect of all those in whose cases they had administered the law. I appeal to you in the name of the glorious chapter of English history and let it not be said that an English Judge forgets to vindicate justice. To you gentlemen I appeal in the name of the very ideal that Aurobindo preached and in the name of all the traditions of our country; and let it not be said that two of his own countrymen were overcome by passions and prejudices and yielded to the clamour of the moment.”¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo describes his spiritual experience of Sri Krishna’s presence when the prosecution was going on and the arguments between Mr. Norton and C. R. Das were being tossed to and fro:

“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 out 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, I have 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.’ ”

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

References

- 1 *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Century*, by Manoj Das, p 63
- 2 *Ibid* , p 64
- 3 *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Vol 2, p 5
- 4 *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, by Nirodbaran, p 96
- 5 *The Bomb in Bengal*, by Peter Heehs, pp 205-06
- 6 *Ibid* , p 206
- 7 *Ibid* , pp 206-07
- 8 *Ibid* , p 207
- 9 *Ibid* , pp 203-04
- 10 *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Century*, by Manoj Das, p 64.
- 11 *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, by Nirodbaran, p 101

NIGHT-WOMB

IN utter blackness
 Shrill-voiced bats
 Flap leathern wings;
 A sharp-toothed wind
 Tortures rickety trees.

Scree clatters down to where
 The river grinds the boulders of its bed
 Like angry teeth.

This tyrant dark
 Grants us no star to see by;
 Not one bright pebble gleams.

Blinded we hear
 Bat-flap and squeak,
 Boughs' groan and creak;
 Unvisioned suffer
 The rush and moan of wind and water,
 Their icy clasp.

What resplendent delicacy of dawn
 Is this night-womb nurturing?

MUSINGS ON PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

(Continued from the issue of March 1995)

4. THE MEETING (2)

Part Four

SOME golden sandy stretch of desert, a cave, in the snowy slopes of a high mountain, the hermitage in some dense forest, the hut on the shores of a limpid river—these have been the favourable and therefore favourite surroundings, which the seekers of the Eternal have preferred throughout the ages. They felt that in such majestic solitude they could concentrate better on their aim, the union with the Lord.

On March 14, 1914 while passing the deserts of Egypt the Mother wrote in her diary,

In the immutable solitude of the desert there is something of Thy majestic presence, and I understand why one of the best means of finding Thee has always been to withdraw into these immense stretches of sand.

This preference for an exclusive favourable surrounding might be good for the old 'other-worldly' yogas, aiming at Nirvana or Moksha, a dissolution of the soul in the Supersoul, of the Atman into the Paramatman. But to the traveller on the path of Integral Yoga, any such preference is not allowed, because he has to be tested at each step in the multifarious arena of life, with its wounding criticisms, unjust punishments, vitiating flatteries and false compliments: in brief, all the degrading gradations of living with one's own shortcomings and those of others. The intellectual, emotional and physical combinations and permutations of human life-situations are so numerous and of such a bewildering variety that the sadhak is dazzled and puzzled and easily loses his way in this jungle of Karma where luminous-looking paths, soft looks and enticing hearts land him straight in the net of *Avidya Maya*. Is then the old way preferable, where some sort of exclusive success in yoga is possible, compared to the constant slippery slopes of life which in one moment may land the sadhak again at the taking-off stage, after each summit-aimed endeavour in this fissure-ridden, crevice-infested path of Integral Yoga, where mistakes committed in the name of goodwill, altruism, fellow-feeling and idealism constantly annul our progress and the sadhak is left bewildered wondering as to where he went wrong and what made it possible for him to be trapped in another snare of his own ego masquerading as altruism.

P, an old sadhak, once narrated an incident. In his early life he had been

somewhat self-centred. Being a very conscientious sadhak, he tried to atone for this fault in his Ashram life. Once a fellow-sadhak, living in the same house, fell ill. P nursed him at night. In those early years, before taking up any new activity, sadhaks had to inform the Mother and take her permission. P had thought that in this case of helping a fellow-sadhak, certainly there could be nothing wrong. Therefore he neither informed the Mother nor asked for her permission. After a few days he felt some uneasiness and wrote to the Mother all about his nursing. She told him that it had been a wrong movement on his part, a continuation of the old sanskaras of service and asked him to discontinue the nursing. She revealed that illnesses in sadhaks are due to wrong movements and that he should fully concentrate on his own sadhana, and leave the care of the sick sadhak to her after informing her of his condition. If one can be wrong in such a right-seeming case, then how on this path of Integral Yoga can one be sure of being correct in other actions with complicated options open? Then renunciation seems a safer way.

But this is not the only way and the only issue. There is another way shown by the Mother. She writes,

But for one who knows Thee, Thou art everywhere, in all things, and none of them seems more suitable than another for manifesting Thee; for all things that exist—and many others that yet do not—are necessary to express Thee. Each thing, by virtue of Thy divine intervention of love, is an effort of life towards Thee; and as soon as our eyes are unsealed, we perceive this effort constantly.

Here one is wonder-struck by the similarity of the Mother's approach to yoga to that of Sri Aurobindo. This paragraph seems like an elucidation of Sri Aurobindo's dictum,—“All life is yoga.” The Mother reveals here that the Divine Love has manifested in the creation and all its objects. All of them are striving to express the Lord. Therefore no location, no occupation is less favourable or more favourable for the Divine Realisation. Since all life is a continuous yoga, an all-inclusive, comprehensive and catholic outlook is needed. All the existing and many non-existent things will be needed to manifest the full glory of the Lord. Then in each place and each thing one has to seek and see the Lord. But this experience is possible only for those who know the Lord. To know him is the first step, to live him and realise him universally the next requisite.

It is clear that the Mother independently, on her own, trod the same path, and came to the same conclusions as Sri Aurobindo. This was a totally new Path, whose aim is completely different from all the preceding yogas, which lead to the cloister, the monastery and the hermitage—all those houses of God where human beings separate the Lord from his Creation and fence themselves in against all temptations.

Yet the Divine Twain have not yet met. The *meeting* is as yet 15 days away. But we perceive while reading these prayers that the Mother is already doing 'Yoga In Matter', she is continuously infusing consciousness into Matter. In the above passage the Mother talks of *the divine intervention of love*. On March 15, 1914 she continues the same refrain,

Oh, these silent and pure nights when my heart overflows and unites with Thy divine Love to penetrate all thought, embrace all life, purity all feelings, awaken in every being the consciousness of Thy marvellous Presence and of the ineffable peace that flows from it.

The vastness, the all-inclusiveness, the wonder of the thought—*awakening in every being the consciousness of Thy marvellous Presence and of the ineffable peace that flows from it*—is beyond those of any sage, or any scripture of any religion, that has been ever inspired by any Avatar or any Messiah before. There is a hitherto unknown Divine Benediction in the air. A new Era begins, the most marvellous future which only the Divine having descended on earth could dream of, is already being actualized by the Mother through the potent formations expressed in these *prayers*.

And the pregnant interval of those few days before the *meeting* is passed by the Mother in a holy preparation. She becomes a burning flame rising towards the Lord. Nothing but the Divine matters to her. She concludes the prayer of March 14 with the words,

O Lord, my heart is athirst for Thee and my thought seeks Thee constantly. In a mute adoration I bow to Thee.

And then writes in the prayer of March 15,

My thought is filled with Thee, my heart is full, all my being is filled with Thy Presence, and peace grows ever deeper, giving rise to that happiness, so special, so unmingled, of a calm serenity, which seems vast as the universe, deep as the unfathomable depths which lead to Thee.

...Grant, O Lord, that this consciousness and peace may constantly grow within us, so that we may be more and more faithful intermediaries of Thy divine and absolute law.

Thus is laid down the foundation of the coming New Creation.

Part Five

On March 17, only 12 days are left before the *meeting*. Maybe the Mother was somewhat indisposed that day, or maybe she was gazing into the future and considering the ways of removing the limitations of the body.

The body is supposed to be the most obdurate and recalcitrant part of our personality, with a fixed character and obstinate limitations. We can and do change, sometimes even radically, our mental constructions and emotional preferences. The dogma or the creed which was unacceptable to us may suddenly become our own, the idea we once espoused vehemently and actively may one day seem puerile or immature to us. The person whom we loved passionately and even violently may one day leave us unmoved and cold, or may even inspire aversion. But the one stumbling block, with its unchanging hereditary or acquired characteristics, seems to be our body. We get a simple headache and a brake is put to our activity and creativity. A fever makes us rush to a doctor, as if it is some other force which is in control of our body, as if it does not belong to us. A little physical disharmony can play havoc with our inner and outer poise. It seems to make us a slave to get its demands fulfilled—hunger, thirst, sex-desire, and above all illnesses tie us to our bodies, in a none-too-happy partnership. That is why the ancient aspirants tried to ignore the body, or tried to conquer its supposed demands and hungers by all sorts of austerities—fasting, burying half of the body in the sand, lying on a bed of nails, standing in the middle of four fires lit around, with the sun burning above, pulling of all the hair of one's head one by one—in short there is no end to the indignities and tortures to which men have subjected their bodies so that they may not stand in the way of spiritual progress. Even today there are sects in which the aspirants wear minimum clothes, a thin loin-cloth, made from the bark of a tree.

Rarely did these people succeed in their aim. The only thing they succeeded in was to make themselves thoroughly miserable. In the *Gita* the Lord has clearly stated his displeasure with those who mistreat their bodies. Actually throughout the ages this poor body has been punished for the faults of the mind and the life-force. It is true that the body needs a moderate amount of food, a little hygiene and some rest. All the other things which are supposed to be needed by the body to remain healthy and alive are the uninformed opinions and misguided suppositions of the mind. People in different countries and climates lead long and healthy lives while eating diametrically opposite foods. The nomads have healthy and strong bodies without even much hygiene or comfort. People live on diets of snakes and rats, roots and herbs, without any other health-giving foods. They survive in sub-freezing temperatures and in burning deserts.

The Mother says that contrary to the general notion our bodies are wonderful and docile instruments which are spoiled by the mind with its theories and the vital being with its cravings. Freed from these two tyrants the body can

have a marvellous endurance and adaptability. On March 17, 1914 she wrote in her diary,

When physical conditions are a little difficult and some discomfort follows, if one knows how to surrender completely to Thy will, caring little for life or death, health or illness, the entire being enters immediately into harmony with Thy law of love and life, and all physical indisposition ceases, giving place to a calm well-being, deep and peaceful.

This then is the first step we have to take. We have to surrender completely before the Divine Will and remain detached from our own well-being, our life or death. This supreme surrender to the Supreme Will makes supreme sense. Instead of rushing to the doctor, who is as imperfect a being as oneself, in place of stuffing our body with the current and often useless remedy, which might do more harm than good, if we would just relax and seek refuge in the Lord, the illness and its effects might be minimized. The Mother wrote about somebody who had a heart-attack while travelling in a train and yet remained totally calm. The result was that the attack passed and the person, though a little weak, got down at her destination and went home.

It is our anticipation of difficulties which precipitates them. The Mother writes,

I have noticed that when one enters into an activity that necessitates great physical endurance, what tires one most is anticipating beforehand all the difficulties to which one will be exposed. It is much wiser to see at every moment only the difficulty of the present instant; in this way the effort becomes much easier for it is always proportionate to the amount of strength, the resistance at one's disposal. The body is a marvellous tool, it is our mind that does not know how to use it and, instead of fostering its suppleness, its plasticity, it brings a certain fixity into it which comes from preconceived ideas and unfavourable suggestions.

It is the mind which circumscribes our capacities and fixes bars on our potential. Once these mental bars are removed the floodgates are opened. Once the notion that Everest is unconquerable was belied, dozens climbed the peak, singly and in groups, male and female, with oxygen and without oxygen, from the North face and from the South face. For years the mile could not be run under 4 minutes, but once Roger Bannister broke the barrier, hundreds followed him. If the mind would not shackle our body, it could have immense possibilities.

This is what we can attain by silencing our clamouring mental and vital beings. Yet there is another way and another science of the body, as the Mother pointed out in the first paragraph of this prayer. She writes,

But the supreme science, O Lord, is to unite with Thee, to trust in Thee, to live in Thee, to be Thyself; and then nothing is any longer impossible to a man who manifests Thy omnipotence.

This then is the ultimate goal. But till this ultimate Grace of Divine Union is granted us, we can lead more healthy and fruitful lives by unfettering the body from the shackles of the mind's tyranny and the vital nature's excesses.

Part Six

We human beings have a veritable *kurukshetra* going on within ourselves. Different parts of us want different things. Our mental being, vital being and physical being have their own pet assumptions and demands. All of them project their desires or preferences as things of supreme importance and each posits that its own idea, desire or ideal must be given top priority. Each part strives hard to fulfil its aspirations and needs even at the cost of another part. All of us have the experience of forcing a tired body to continue reading an engrossing book or to watch a film even when the eyes find it difficult to remain open and the fatigued brain would rather not concentrate any more or, when due to desire and greed, we overeat. In a hundred ways these recalcitrant parts of our being annul the progress of one another and sometimes harm even themselves. The greatest loser in this tug-of-war is our psychic being which, life after life, is pushed behind. Its gentle suggestions are lost in the din of our insistent and belligerent outer parts. Lives pass and the soul sleeps or remains drowsy. Still, sometimes in our lucid inner moments we identify ourselves with the higher part of our being and the being cries out to the Lord, "Make me thine."

And when this happens, all gets changed. The Divine accepts our self-giving and takes us at our word. Then things start happening in a different way. Our Supreme Lover in his Wisdom charts the route and course of our life. The oars pass into the hands of the Super Boatman of life. Not for him the sun-splashed pleasant beaches of the Mediterranean. He delights to test and re-test our mental, vital and physical beings in treacherous shoals and reefs of mental failure, emotional heartbreak and physical stupidity. The placid tenor of life is darkened by thick storms. We fail in every endeavour which is not in tune with our soul's cry—"Make me Thine." Once the offering has been made, the indefatigable Divine Warrior would not let us be hoodwinked by the platitudes of the vital self, would not tolerate our *gracious imperfections* nor would he grant his *heavenly leniency* to our lowly pleadings. A supreme Task-Master would henceforth watch intently how we behave. He will break all our preconceptions, and our superficial and romantic outlook on things will be forced to change. At each step we will have to face the ugly and to brave the hellish. This arduous

state of things will continue until the glamour of the world is proved false and till all our worldly joys become insipid. The Lord does not mind if we have to face calamity at every turn of life because of *misadventure* he has *made a friend*. With cruel kindness he will bake us in the *Agni* of Tapasya till we become unalloyed gold, hero-warriors worthy to lead a Divine Life. On March 18, 1914 the Mother wrote in her diary,

Thou art perfect knowledge, absolute consciousness. He who unites with Thee is omniscient—while the union lasts. But even before attaining this stage, he who has given himself to Thee in all the sincerity of his being, with all his conscious will, he who has resolved to make every effort to help in the manifestation and triumph of Thy divine law of Love in himself and the whole field of his influence, sees all things in his life change, and all circumstances begin to express Thy law and assist his consecration; for him it is the best, the very best that always happens; and if in his intelligence there is still some obscurity, some ignorant desire which at times prevents him from becoming aware of it immediately, he recognizes sooner or later that a beneficent power seemed to protect him from himself and secure for him conditions most favourable to his blossoming and transfiguration, his integral conversion and utilisation.

Thus the key to achieving fulfilment in life and *siddhi* in sadhana lies in a total trust in the Divine Wisdom and Grace and in a sincere surrender of oneself to the Divine. The Divine takes our resolutions seriously and makes us adhere to them in spite of the revolt of those parts of us which are not in tune with the ideal of our psychic being. He saves us from ourselves and what seems to us misfortune or cruel destiny, is his Grace which makes our efforts for temporal success unfruitful. Over and over again our hearts are broken and life seems to drag on and on without any respite. It is only after being knocked about and even brutalised quite a bit that we revert to our soul's aspiration and try to realise our Central Aim. And then we discover that our ordeal was the best thing that could have happened to us and that the Lord is truly compassionate to have bestowed upon us our ordeals and then we thank him for eliminating and cutting out all that stood in the way of our progress. At last we comprehend clearly that all that has happened to us was the best thing for our high ideal's *blossoming and transfiguration*. The Mother further says,

As soon as one becomes conscious and convinced of this, one can no longer worry about future circumstances or the turn events take; it is with perfect serenity that one does at every moment what one thinks best, convinced that the best too is sure to come from it, even if it is not the result which we, with our limited reasoning, expected from it.

That is why, Lord, our heart is light, our thought in repose. That is why we turn to Thee in all confidence and say peacefully:

May Thy will be done, in it true harmony is realised.

In spite of the contrary appearances and painful experiences, it is true that for a sincere aspirant it is always the best that happens and if we walk with trust in the Lord the thorns will hurt less.

In this poise of supreme faith in the Lord's Grace the Mother neared the shores of Pondicherry. Only a few more days were left before the *meeting*.

Part Seven

Man is the most dissatisfied of all creatures on the earth. The more evolved a being, the greater one's dissatisfaction with oneself and with others. One feels a bewilderment at the impasse one is in. An unquenchable thirst leads the evolving being from one ideal to another till it discovers that, after all, these so-called ideals did not amount to much, they did not accomplish anything immortal. Surely a little more order in our world and a lot more of cleanliness, the upliftment of the masses by the removal of poverty and eradication of illiteracy, the fight for equal opportunity for all, the establishment of a clean government, of a just legal system—all these are worthy aims and fulfil some purpose of creation. But, ultimately, for the evolved soul all these temporal ideals lose their glamour and utility. Always something remains unexplained, some goal unattained. The far-off echo of some flute, heard in some lost dream, enamours the soul. One tries to discover this cadence in human love, in self-sacrifice for friends, family. One lays down one's life for neighbours, country or humanity. Its most delicate flowering is seen in cases where a highly educated and valuable citizen, on the spur of the moment, flings away his or her life to save a person of no consequence. But altruism does not give us the ultimate satisfaction for which we have been athirst. The search begins again in another life and another epoch. For what or whom is this quenchless thirst which torments us life after life?

While her ship was nearing the Indian shores, on March 19, 1914, the Mother wrote in her diary,

O Lord, eternal Teacher, Thou whom we can neither name nor understand, but whom we want to realise more and more at every moment, enlighten our intelligence, illumine our hearts, transfigure our consciousness; may everyone awaken to the true life, flee from egoism and its train of sorrow and anguish, and take refuge in Thy divine and pure Love, source of all peace and all happiness.

This then is the secret attraction which takes the *rasa* out of all our mundane activities and due to which all our glittering achievements suddenly lose their light and we throw them away like gaudy glass beads bought at a village fair when one was a child. This is the secret call that whispers around our soul and makes a mockery of all our achievements. And this call, this quest for the Immortal and the Eternal is the saviour which unties the knots of our ego and thus puts an end to our overwhelming sorrows. The only remedy to our unending travail is, as the Mother has pointed out in this prayer, in taking refuge in divine Love. Once we let go of our human props of intellectual attainments, worldly riches, family's protection and the lure of our pet projects that keep us busy for a life-time—then bereft of all hope, when we turn towards the Lord, only then real fulfilment comes to us, only then our temporal limits are broken and our personalities get suffused by divine hues. The Mother further writes,

My heart so full of Thee seems to expand into infinity and my intelligence, all illumined with Thy Presence, shines like the purest diamond. Thou art the wonderful magician, he who transfigures all things, from ugliness brings forth beauty, from darkness light, from the mud clear water, from ignorance knowledge and from egoism goodness.

The Secret Key of transfiguration of all our dross into pure gold is hidden in the cave of our heart and this key is—true love for our Lord. The Mother describes the beatific fullness of this love in the following words of the same prayer,

In Thee, by Thee, for Thee we live and Thy law is the supreme master of our life.

In this state of total surrender the Mother blesses the whole of the earth, as she nears the holy shores of India,

May Thy will be done in every place, may Thy peace reign all over the earth.

(To be continued)

SHYAM KUMARI

HYMN TO BEAUTY*

TODAY I saw Beauty walking sprightly on her way
Through the sordid streets
Carrying an aura of light
As she was all a-dazzle and quite
An enthralling sight;
Yesterday I saw her, a radiant face,
Eyes bright
Constellations of delight;
Tomorrow again I shall see her as she nimbly passes by
A bewitching form
Turning her votaries to a sudden spell
Of heaven-haunted world-oblivion.

The magic of a Ray of her momentary smile
Transports us
To other worlds—other states of reality,
A beatific Beyond.

There names and forms are no entities
Of transience
But unbodied raptures of deathless
Spirit-ditties

In the Over-Soul's teeming abyss of Silence
Whence the Poet snatches only meagre melodies
To lend his verse a breath of immortality.

It's a happy thing to see her thus on every waking;
It's a sad thing to muse upon heavenly beings
Born of dusty substance
Under the grip of pain or ire—
A lily and a lotus sublime
Sprung from the mire
Only to dissolve

After a moment's pleading with Time!
Is it because the transmuted sod too fair
Must forever change and remake itself
As ceaselessly as a blown flame
To feed the revenge of the lowly birth-giver?

* Recast version of a poem published in *Mother India*, March 1965

Or is it because
A rich and inexhaustible Beauty
Hid deep beneath the heated earth
 Must
 From its nescient Dream
 Burst
 Forever forth on to the surface
 Into forms more real,
 Miracles of joy more palpable;
And then with a supreme carelessness and a calm face
 Wipe off all her past wonders
 To begin anew
The extravagance of her irrepressible Laughter?...

Let all questions be!
Enough that SHE IS;
 Though never halting ever escaping,
 Teasing us with a touch of madness on our soul
 She eludes,
Vexing the poor exalted heart:
 “If here, not yet is my Appointed Hour!”

BIBHAS JYOTI MUTSUDDI

A PLUNGE INTO THE UNKNOWN

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE UNEXPECTED

(3)

IN spite of all the sufferings that I have undergone throughout my life—sufferings both psychological and physical, mostly physical—it brings tears to my eyes, sweet tears of profound gratitude, when I think—who am I, what am I, what have I done to deserve the Presence of the Supreme Lord and the Divine Mother in my very very ordinary life?

When I was a student at Santiniketan, I had the ambition to become an artist and disciple of Nandalal Bose after I had graduated. But that was not to be. Fate intervened and brought me to the feet of the Supreme Lord Himself to be His disciple! Indeed, God's dispensation is inscrutable!

Outwardly, I was one of those crores of people who are satisfied with living a vital-mental life, sometimes flying towards some heaven of ideals and sometimes wallowing in the mud. When I first came here, being forced by circumstances, I wanted only to know what was God's Will in my life. I did not want to become a superman or an immortal or even to be a sadhak of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. I heard from many that Sri Aurobindo's Yoga was the most difficult of all yogas. So many big people failed—some revolted and left, some became mad. But then I was desperate and even death seemed the easiest route for me to escape.

When I took the final plunge I thought that the worst thing that could happen to me was death, for which I was prepared. At that time I did not know that there could be worse sufferings than death itself. Perhaps God does not give us foreknowledge because of this. Otherwise, instead of taking the plunge headlong I would have preferred to travel on foot throughout India as a pilgrim till the fall of my body. I did not want to return to my native place and lead a family life.

Interestingly, I have always noticed that my psychic being—my soul—has other ideas than my mental-vital being. It intervened, called for the Divine's help and grace and saved me from my own follies, many a pitfall and even disaster. Otherwise I would not have lived so long belying the predictions of the best astrologers of Calcutta. And it was my psychic being which had decided to take the final plunge and gone ahead on the path of Yoga dragging me along with it.

In fact, it was my psychic being which had taken the plunge into the material world the moment my body was born—perhaps even before. I had a feeling within that I was sleeping when I felt a call, as if the Divine Mother was calling me to plunge down.

Before I came away to Pondicherry for the last time, my mother, who gave

me birth, divulged a secret to me which I did not know before. She said that when I was in her womb, she strongly willed that I should be born a girl child and not a male child. This was because the first born had been a male child—my elder brother, Rathindra. My mother was married at the age of twelve only. Her girlhood fancies still surrounded her. My parents were married in 1914 (the year when the Divine Mother first met Sri Aurobindo). My elder brother was born in June 1917 and myself in September 1918.

On seeing me born a male child my mother was so disappointed that she wept bitterly. But I presume that my psychic being was unwilling to be born a girl child, for the task it was entrusted with would be more difficult to be performed in that case because in our society a man has much more freedom to choose his path than a woman.

My mother was very affectionate by nature and loved children. Nursing and rearing children was a passion for her. We are four brothers and four sisters, altogether eight in number. I have reasons to believe that had my father agreed she would have been glad to have eight more! Be that as it may, unknowingly she had created great problems for me. For in my vital being a strong vital personality from my mother existed—the personality of a girl which my mother had created with her dynamic vital will. This personality wanted to use my male body for her satisfaction. The male personality had its own problems too which created a chaotic condition in my physical being for which I had to suffer throughout my life. Only now it has somewhat calmed down.

I never told the Divine Mother about this problem. But she must have felt something. In her classes, many a time she dealt with this subject.

Recently in newspapers I read some news-items where, in some Western countries, some men got operated on to become women! But in my case, I constantly pray to both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to fuse these two personalities in a sexless supramental personality, if not in this life, in some other life.

I started with the problem which should have come at the end. But then if I have to tell my whole life-story, it would be so long that I doubt whether I would have the opportunity to live so long as to touch upon that subject. But once I have started, let me go the whole hog about it. For these have been the main problems of my life—love and sex.

Even as a young man I made a distinction between the two, unlike most other young men. I still remember, when I was a college student at Santiniketan, that Bernard Shaw's play *Arms and the Man* was one of our text books. Somewhere in the text the author ridiculed the phrase 'higher love'. I spoke to one of my friends, "Whatever G.B.S. may say, there exists a higher love which has nothing to do with sex." He protested, "Sexless love is not love at all." I disagreed with him and held on to my point of view. For I myself loved most two male personalities—my father and poet Tagore. At that time I did not know Sri

Aurobindo and the Mother. I loved and was loved by all my family members and friends too.

I don't say that I had no attraction towards girls and had no sex-impulse in me. But I did not call them love. For I knew within my heart what love truly was. True love between a man and a woman is quite possible. But that is not because of sex.

I did not know till my thirteenth or fourteenth year how people were born. When I first heard about it from a school-friend of mine at Santiniketan, a strong nauseating repulsion seized my heart and I decided not to marry. And this decision I held on to in spite of the normal sex-impulses of men and many a temptation and enticement from the other sex throughout my life.

The real answer to this problem I got from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—a sexless supramental body. In the process of supramentalisation many other human organs will be reformed or totally eliminated. Sri Aurobindo has spoken about it in his book, *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*. The Mother too has spoken about it in her talks. But this is a long process. It will take at least a few hundred years. Very few are prepared for it. At least I am not prepared to live so long and aspire and pray to the Mother for a better birth and a better body next time.

I derived my physical features, family characteristics and psychic qualities more from my mother than from my father—unlike my other brothers. My father was tall, fair-complexioned—a very respectable figure among men. He was mentally very developed, of very refined habits and tastes and an idealist. He was an intellectual disciple of Sri Aurobindo. While he was here he developed a good friendship with Amrita-da, Kameshwar-ji and a few other people. Kameshwar-ji often teased me saying, “You have not got the figure of your father.” That is quite true. My father's weak point was that he was extremely nervous by nature and too preoccupied with his physical needs and comforts and demands and a bit selfish too. He always blamed others for the ills for which he himself was responsible. This I gradually understood after I started doing Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, which was integral, not merely intellectual. He trusted none except myself because I was very obliging by nature and loved him most in the whole family, from my childhood.

I am the shortest and physically the weakest among all his sons. I inherited my heart-trouble from my mother. But my mother was most unselfish. She gave her all for the good of the whole family. I was financially supported for my stay here, in the Ashram, only by her and by my maternal grandfather—not by my father. I received a few tea-garden shares from my maternal grandfather, from the dividend of which I maintained myself in the Ashram as a visitor from August 1953 to July 1957 when the Mother made me a permanent member of the Ashram.

All the money that I had collected, I deposited in the Cashier's office in the

Ashram. I was allotted the same room at Golconde, 3E8, where I had stayed before. I still cherish the happiest memories of my stay there for four years at a stretch under the supervision of Mona, that sweet and noble Englishwoman and other sadhikas who served with simplicity and dignity. That the Mother did not make me a permanent member of the Ashram, keeping me in the waiting list for four years, was indeed a blessing in disguise. And it was during that period that I made the fastest progress in sadhana.

As I wanted to do Sri Aurobindo's Yoga of transformation, and as both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother took my resolution seriously, I was being given experience after experience to understand, first of all, what Yoga was and I was put to severe tests. But in spite of the severity of tests and ordeals, most unimaginably beautiful experiences also came to me. Those who had been chosen for doing Sri Aurobindo's Yoga of transformation came at a very young age with their whole families and were brought up here in the Ashram and also educated here under the Mother's direct care and guidance. But I came at the age of thirty-five. I had to unlearn what I had learnt before in life and start anew.

Fortunately for me, a visitors' class was started at Trésor House (at present a Nursing Home) where the elder sadhaks were taking classes for one hour in the morning on various subjects pertaining to Sri Aurobindo's Yoga and literature. Purani was taking a *Savitri* class once a week. Similarly, Anilbaran taught *Essays on the Gita*; Narendra Nath Dasgupta Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy; Siddheswar Banerji *The Life Divine*; K.D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) Sri Aurobindo's Poetry; Jay Smith Human Unity; etc. etc. I was much benefited from those classes. Apart from visitors some Ashramites too joined the classes from time to time.

(4)

I started writing poem after poem on my experiences of sadhana—of course in Bengali, not in English.

Let me state here how I started writing poetry for the first time at Santiniketan. The Goddess Muse really gave me a surprise visit! I never wrote a poem when I was a student although I loved reading poetry—particularly Tagore's poetry. When I was still a school student, one day I went to take his autograph. It was his birthday, the 25th of the Bengali month 'Baishakh'. In the morning, as usual, there were celebrations at the 'Mandir' and at 'Amrakunja'.

In the afternoon I went to 'Uttarayan'. Students had wide freedom to see him at any time. I entered his room. He was then talking to a visitor whom I did not know—perhaps an outsider.

As I gave him my autograph book he put it on his table and was about to sign his name when I suddenly blurted out. "Please write a poem in it." What was my stupid audacity! First of all, I disturbed him in the midst of his talk with

another person, and then an instant poem!

He turned his beautiful face towards me and said in an admonishing but soft affectionate tone:

“O, you have become a great poet, I see!”

Then he wrote on the open page (It was the first page of my autograph book), first, the word ‘Āshīrvād’ (in Bengali) then signed his full name and put the date below it and returned me the book.

During the last ten years of his life when I was a student of Santiniketan, I saw and heard him so many times, in classes, in the literary meetings with himself as chairman, at other meetings concerning the administration of the Ashram, during dramatic performances and various festivals, as the Āchārya at the Mandir, welcoming renowned personalities from throughout the world, heard him singing songs and reciting poems. I saw and heard him for the last time in 1941 when we as outgoing students of B.A. class invited him to give us some advice in a farewell meeting. He invited the students to see him personally whenever they liked. He said that perhaps those who were in charge of looking after him would prevent them saying, “Gurudev is ill, don’t disturb him”, and with some emphasis added: “Never believe them!” He was speaking in English as there were many non-Bengali students in our class. He requested them to learn Bengali, “So that I may speak to you in my mother-tongue.” He loved his mother-tongue so much!

But, during all those ten years of my association with him and his Ashram, the sweetest thoughts that I cherish in my memory are those two personal sentences:

“Please write a poem in it.”

“O, you have become a great poet, I see!”

I never aspired to become a poet. I aspired to become an artist. This was my natural inclination. But perhaps the Divine’s Will was otherwise.

After having the good news of my passing the B.A. examination I returned to Santiniketan in July 1941 and heard the extremely bad news of Gurudev going to Calcutta for a surgical operation. No sooner did I hear the news than a stabbing premonition rent my heart. I saw Gurudev for the last time in Bolpur railway station in his special coach, provided by the E.I. Railway authorities. He sat on a window-side seat and could be seen from outside. He was looking very sad and sullen.

Within a few days my premonition came to be true. On 7th August, in the evening, I sat alone on the terrace of our house at Santiniketan thinking of him. That was the moment when his mortal coil was to be reduced to ashes at the Nimtolla burning ghat by the side of river Ganga. During the day the August clouds had shed some tears, but at that time nature was calm and quiet. On the western horizon the clouds gave way for the evening setting sun to send his glowing crimson parting message of an Endlessness in the midst of an end, of

merging of the finite into the Infinity. As I brooded on it, my soul seemed to pursue his disembodied soul and meet it. And with this meeting there was as if a flash of lightning-delight in the midst of the grief-laden black cloud of separation. Such experiences occurred from time to time in my consciousness even before I took to Sri Aurobindo's Yoga consciously. That was the first time that I was inspired to write a poem on this incident, which I wrote not instantly but a few days later. I am giving below a free prose-rendering in English of the last portion of my first Bengali poem:

“In this August evening when the clouds have stopped shedding tears, my grief-laden mind pursues thee where the finite merges itself in Infinity. I find thee. Thou turnest thy face to me, thy love and blessings wash out the grief from my heart.

“When a newly married bride leaves her parental home with sobs and tears, as the bridal music of the ‘Sānāi’ plays a tune of union, does it not carry a message of a new union in the midst of the pang of separation in the heart of the bride? Similarly, when the whole world grieves over thy passing, a sudden flash of the delight of reunion seizes upon my heart.”

The door of poetry was a little opened for me to give me an entrance into that magic world. From 1941 to 1945 I wrote a few more poems on Tagore, on the then situation in India and the world, and on my own path-finding effort and mission.

In 1946, so far as I can remember, I chanced upon a novel spiritual experience. There is a Vedic hymn in which the last line of each stanza repeats itself in a constant refrain:

“Kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema.”

I heard the hymn being chanted at Santiniketan on different occasions. The meaning of the line is: “To which God shall we offer the oblation?” The words and tune sank within my heart.

One day, at early dawn, much before sunrise, when the other members of our family were still asleep, I was taking a stroll in the garden in front of our house, with the constant refrain of the line, mentioned above, ringing in my internal ears. I felt as if something deep within me had lifted its arms towards the heaven asking the question:

“To which God shall we offer the oblation?”

And as if in answer to the question, something wonderful and unexpected happened. It seemed that the whole sky with its dawn-delight broke upon my head and coursed through each vein and artery of my body. Much later, after coming to the Ashram here and reading Sri Aurobindo's books I understood that this experience was what Sri Aurobindo calls ‘descent’.

At last, in August 1949, during Sri Aurobindo's darshan, I found my God to whom I had to offer the oblation of not only my life but all I have and am. Or,

was it He who found me? I don't know.

I wrote a Bengali poem on Sri Aurobindo's first darshan at a later stage in Pondicherry. I am giving below a free English rendering of the same:

Never did I imagine, O Lord! that I would see
 Thy form with these earthly eyes of mine.
 When the light from my eyes is blotted out,
 When my lamp of life is about to be extinguished,
 Suddenly with the Light of Thy eyes what do I see?
 Thy penetrating X-Ray eyes touch the core of my being,
 Thy compassionate smile removes all my worries,
 O, the Lord of my heart! with all Thy splendour
 Thou appearest before me!
 When I thought that all was lost, all was in vain;
 Why to live in this world where dark forces reign?
 In the twinkling of an eye I found at last
 My Eternal Lord, my Eternal Friend!

In Bengali rabi means sun. Rabindranath's demise was a sunset in my life. From 7 August 1941 I began my journey as a pilgrim of night, through a deep forest on a path-finding expedition... and on 15 August, 1949, after a journey for eight years, there was a new sunrise in my life. Yet, this was not a culmination of all my efforts, all my labour, but only a new commencement of a much more difficult and dangerous journey towards the summit of a pathless mountain with only an inner light and a psychic faith to guide me through. Of course there were intermittent sunshine and moonshine and starshine, and sometimes even in the heart of darkest depression and despondency there were flashes of a lightning delight to give me courage and succour.

Sri Aurobindo pointed to the Mother as my future Guide. But unlike most of the sadhaks and sadhikas, for four years—1953 to 1957—I had no direct communication with the Mother either through interviews or through letters. My direct physical contact with the Mother was only through darshans and blessings.

But all this was compensated by an unexpected gift from the Mother. Within a very short time I could feel the vibration of the Mother's Presence even from a distance. Whenever my psychic being called, the Mother answered unfailingly.

When my physical mind grew suspicious and wanted to leave the Ashram, when my vital being revolted, my physical became worried and exhausted, my heart became somnolent, I could hear in the depth of my being something calling—Mā! Mā! Mā! Even in the midst of a crowd, even from a distance—be it in the Ashram or Playground or somewhere else, the Mother would cast a reassuring glance at me as if to say silently—"Here I am, don't worry."

In fact, during the twenty years—from 1953 to 1973, when the Mother left

her body—we did not exchange even twenty words between us. Her answers to my letters were not much more than that. And yet, I could feel the vibration of her Presence, even physically, whenever the inner call was there.

It was my psychic being which was the best gift to me by the Divine. Otherwise, I would not have lived so long as to start telling the story of my life. That is why, in the midst of terrible sufferings of my body, I can offer sweet tears of gratitude at the holy feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

ABANI SINHA

CHRISTALIS

by

GEORGETTE COTY

(Continued from the issue of March 1995)

Dream or Reality?

TIME had rushed by me since my extraordinary encounter with what may have well been my own dreams. The winter was mercifully short this year, nevertheless the evenings were long and, with little fuel to waste on heating or light, we went early to bed. What else could be done for the time being?

I spent hours with my thoughts with no one to disturb them. I lay there wondering about our future, trying hard not to think of the past. That was altogether too painful. But the future lay ahead and I was bursting with ideas and even managed to work up an enthusiasm about my plans, as well as those of the others. In fact, in spite of our difficulties, we all had positive plans and vigorous attitudes about them.

At other times, I would bring forth my precious memories of those other kinds of people with glowing bodies and sweet voices—and relived my experience with them in every little detail I had carefully stored away in my memory.

It is good to have a storing place like this, one can open it at will, being the sole possessor of its key. It is most important to have a key to one's own thoughts and dreams; this way no one can interact with them.

I wonder if one's dreams during sleep are not really an awakened state in other realities, which are too fantastic to be approached with the everyday mind. Maybe there is another form of living than what we comprehend, one that we have never ventured to find a way to.

When is dream-stuff a reality—and when is the fact, so-called, a dream? Can one dream or imagine anything at all that is not?—What does not exist here may be real in some other dimension... in another consciousness than what we understand to be the only one relating to life. Aha, but which side of life? I must find out!

Sure it was real. It is real!... and I am going to find them again—I must be able to somehow.. Haven't we managed to meet before? If it could happen once, then why not another time?... This makes sense, doesn't it? Yes, it does—oh, much more sense than what we did before to our world, with all of our smug surety. Bah!

Slowly the debate with my own logical thoughts subsided and gave way to something else... to an intense yearning to find my way into that other reality I had a glimpse of.

The battle in my mind was over.

For a long time I sat up and listened to the beating of my heart. A joy swelled in me, such as I had not known before, and it grew into a new kind of certainty, which no amount of disturbance could shake.

Inside myself a new person, a new reality was born. I knew that nothing would be again as it had been before. Calmly, I observed the sensation establish itself within me. Nothing was there to oppose it.

Softly I called into the night—certain of my action and in no need of a lamp, a telephone or any such contrivance... I listened to my own voice rise out of this new sensation of unshakable joy.

“Christalis, boy of light... child born of love and from the heart of the lotus... Christalis, my friend. come soon to me... To us! Please come!” and after some pause I added—“For I too love... all of us do now.”

It was later in the night that I saw his light again and heard his sweet ringing voice... “I will come, Halio, it will not be long.”

*

Ardent Call

Days permeated by the memories of an experience that goes beyond any other experience known before... Night upon night I stare into the void, remembering Christalis, calling his name over and over again. I have looked at heaven through his luminous eyes, I hear his voice ringing in many delicate bells beating against my heart.

Who was it that lifted me to such heights to which I cannot travel on my own? How did I meet those heavenly greats, who called me to them to witness his lotus birth? What magical power transported me to their world? I entered a world of another reality, more real than our shifting, changing lives are. How can I remain content till I can find it again? Can I go there by myself unaided, with no guide to lead me?

“Christalis, help me! I cannot rest, my longing is towering over my senses... where is the way? True, I have nothing, no wisdom or beauty to show you, only the longing of my soul bears witness to my cries. Is this enough? And is our pitiful ignorance, our poverty of knowledge, heaven-shaking enough to make sounds upon your gates?

“There is great need for help in our lands, our wounds have hardly had time to heal, only the urgency of our tasks for starting from the pit upward is potion to our pains. Do you know this, boy of heaven, do you know it?”

It should not have happened, but there are times when the river of tears inside one rushes to the banks and spills over—and this was such a time... I cried and cried to ease my burden.

All of a sudden the outburst came to a halt, something out of the ordinary arrested my attention. A flow of love enveloped me in strong waves... it alerted me to my very soul. I lifted my head probing the air for its source. Almost motionless, slowly I looked round the room, when—‘there!... Yes, there is a light over there! Don’t stir,’ I cautioned myself, ‘remain motionless!’

A faint glow, turning brighter, centred at one place, was discernible now.

That light—oh God, I know this—it is his! “Christalis!” I cried—“Christalis, boy of light, you heard me call you and you have come!”

He stood before me looking glorious. Ashamed of my eyes heavy with tears, I tried to wipe them away, but when I looked into his I found them moist too. His eyes of light glistened as when the dew catches the glow of the sun.

“Flower Halio,” came his voice, “of course I have heard your call, without it I couldn’t have come at all. You must know that the caller and the called are equally in need of one another. And please do not think of yourself as insignificant or not beautiful, for you are very precious to me and exceedingly lovely to my eyes. And as to your difficulties, I do know them all. If I didn’t why would I have come to you before? Remember? What need would there be for us to come here, if not to set things into goodness and harmony, which you cannot do for yourself as yet.

“Have faith, Halio,—and patience. Life on earth will be so different, so wonderful, such as you cannot even imagine now. How could you imagine it? But one day I shall take you to the Hall of Learning and you can look at the pictures there. That much I will do, when the time arrives.”

I remained still in every part of me. Alert, bathed in his radiant light, I had not even the wish to ask him—‘what Hall of Learning—what pictures are you speaking of, where will you take me?’ Why would I stir,... how would I disturb this marvellous moment? I was watching the slightly alternating lights passing through him, which I understood to be the colours of the meaning of his thoughts and speech.

He stood there resplendent, and was it due to my own wonderment, or was it really so? But he seemed to have grown in size, as the rays of love emanated from him. He turned now, his beautiful eyes travelled past me and bathed the earth with his golden rays.

“I will go now, but will come again,” was all he said and he was gone.

*

The evenings were still cool, but I loved to sit out in the back veranda as long as the weather held out and watch the lights changing on the horizon. The sky wore its splendid ceremonial robe tonight, waiting for the stars to come and stud it with glittering jewels.

This was the hour of tranquillity, the time for reflection. There was so much

to dream of... Nothing would induce me to sacrifice this precious little time, to exchange it for any of the other chores that could wait. Sitting back, I would invite the magic of the sunset to enchant me, to court me as it willed. This was my own romance with the evening sky.

“Ha, ha, ha”—a sweet laughter; the sound of a singing brook came from the direction of the garden. Taut with attention and expectation, I listened, ‘Have I heard it right?’ It came again, sweeter still and now a circumflex of light caught my eyes. It was there for a second, gone the next.

‘He is here,’ I said to myself, ‘he is playing with me. I will pretend not to notice anything; besides, it may well be my own imagination anyway.’

The light flashed up again, and forgetting my smart resolution I turned so swiftly, as if my head had been pulled by a string. Now the light grew more pronounced, brighter still; I beheld his countenance standing a little afar.

“Why up on the tree, sitting so far?” I teased. “Are you determined to stay up there, then disappear in a flash, leaving me wondering?”

“That is not my intention at all,” came his reply, “but your trees are in need of help. They are very weak still, I am giving them some life-force, it will make them recover quicker. You will soon see it and be able to rejoice in their joy in life. They are wonderful things, these trees, always ready to forgive and forget what was done to them. They only wish to give more of themselves all of the time.

“And what are they asking for? A little moisture and sun and rain, that is all. They are not greedy. In truth, they do not know greed at all—they only know self-giving and love and if you give them that, there is no end to their gratitude. It is in giving that they fulfil themselves, that is their essential nature. I love trees very much.” He paused for a while, then continued—“You know, I met some songbirds not all that far from this region. They told me that they had heard that the songs and laughter had gone from the lands. They were ready to make the journey and come here as soon as I told them when to come, because they want to have the children laugh and play joyfully again.”

He came down from the tree now, or rather he had touched down onto the ground weightlessly, looking about him, observing all with his far-seeing eyes.

... And suddenly I remembered how beautiful were our wooded lands and the wheat fields... the flowers in the meadows swaying in the breeze... Our long walks and the picnics we used to have. The singing folks at harvest time and in the orchards picking the grapes... Oh, my gentle countryside, where have you gone?

I turned to him now saying, “How I wish that I had your goodness, Christalis—I wish that we all had had it before this happened to us. We could have avoided all this calamity and would not have had to suffer as we do now.”

“Halo,” his voice was quite firm now, “I wish that you would not insist on using that word. Really, if you do not use it again, it will help you a great deal

and it will help the world also. We need to be conscious of our responsibilities when we speak and think good thoughts.”

“What word? What did I say, Christalis?”—I mumbled.

“Frankly, I hardly wish to utter it myself,” he said, “but please don’t repeat this business about suffering, it is not good for you. Besides, what you complain about is experienced in one part of your being only, not in the other higher parts of you; they are largely untouched by it, otherwise they could not help you.”

I held my tongue, not wishing to offend him further, although I longed to ask what other parts of me was he speaking of. But my thoughts gave me no peace.

Good for him, he knows all these things, but as for ourselves, poor us, we are still besieged by a million and one things. What about that? What of the way things are for us? I wonder if he truly knows how badly off we are. Some die from cold, others from excessive heat. Where is equal distribution in this? How does equality figure here? And how much does this child of wisdom really know of pain and suffering? Can he hear, as I have heard, the cries of the wounded, the agony of the dying and the piercing pain of losing the ones we love? How much does this child of harmony know of our loneliness—left to stand sole, where two or more stood before? I felt my tears swell inside me again. Ashamed of them, I turned my head to hide my eyes from him.

“So then, your mind ran wild tonight, like a galloping horse without the rider’s consent,”—he spoke in a soft tone, almost inaudibly—“and threw you off at the very point we had visited just a while ago. Do you really think that I am insensitive to those conditions, Halio?” He looked at me penetratingly, perhaps with a little pity, I thought.

“Please do be patient, you will understand things in due course. There is much for you to learn and we have only just begun our meetings. Are you not glad about it? Have I not promised to take you to places of learning, where you can see for yourself the truth of all you rebel against in your state of ignorance?”

“Above all things, I ask of you this; have trust in the framework of the Supreme Law, which is based on perfect balance and harmony. Your comprehension of it will come to you a little later. Can you do that, you think? Here, take my hand.”

He came to where I was sitting and the touch of his hand sent a current of calm through my entire body... I felt great peace and contentment within me.

Perhaps to divert the attention of my restless mind, he proceeded to tell me how much he loved Christopher and how beautifully his inner light was growing—of which I was of course quite unaware and thought how little I did really know my own child. In fact, he was getting a little naughty of late and becoming a bit wilful.

“This is simply wonderful, Christalis, thank you so much for telling me this, he was a little tired tonight and went off to sleep quite early, but how I wish that

he could meet you too. Can he, you think?"

"Not just yet, Halio, but when he is a little older and his development will be more stabilized. Be not impatient, a bud cannot be forced open without damage to it. Everything has its proper time and when that is observed, everything happens spontaneously.

"He went off to sleep early, you said, because he felt tired. But in truth, it was his inner being that suggested it to him, because he went with his father to the amusement place tonight—he enjoys that."

"Christalis, what are you saying? With his father?" My heart leaped—"Is this true?" Foolish with joy, words came gushing out of me. "With his father? My boy? His son!—they are together in the night?"

"Once or twice, Halio, not all the time. That would not be advisable as he too has his work to attend to. You must know that every able soul participates in the reconstruction now, without a pause. Besides, you have the habit of asking me often: 'Is this true, is it true?'—Do you think that I speak untruth? Then why should I speak at all, if what I say were not the truth? What silly nonsense! Really, it is not becoming of you, Halio."

I had done it again. I thought—"Christalis, do not be angry please, I never doubt your word, never! It is only a habit of speech, I mean to express my surprise, that is all."

"Surprise! Does the truth surprise you so? Would you rather that I did not speak? I don't wish to startle you all the time."

"No, please, never stop speaking to me... It is I who have to learn to keep quiet and not speak unnecessary words."

"So glad you understand this, Halio. You see, words have energy and a creative force, the same way as thoughts have. They are meant to create things for a positive and good end and should not be wasted. Economy is most important, as are right application and measure in all things. I am really very pleased that you understand that..."

This time I kept my silence, 'I did not like to tell him that I did not know this at all until he had told it to me just now. How could I have known? Who would have told me, when all we did was talk. In our world, if you did not talk a great deal, you were considered a bit simple and of little consequence.—So talk we did, day and night; at home, at school, on the radio, on television, endlessly. In the parliament, in meetings and sermons, debates, arguments... and how we relished these! And at election times! Heavens! Did we talk? Like talkies wound up we carried on. Who would have even suspected that all we did was wasting energy. God forgive us, we didn't know better.'

He must have waited till my mind settled down—he was silently observing me before he spoke again.

"Speech was created for communication, you understand. For teaching and for learning, for receiving knowledge from the wise, the great teachers among

men. Theatre, literature, poetry and oratory for high purpose lead to the same end. Right thoughts and right speech are for upliftment. These are not wasted either in thought or in sound. It is only when these abilities are wrongly used that they become harmful, or else—just wasted energy and that is not good. These energies create images and their forms remain in the atmosphere for a very long time. They can pollute or uplift the thoughts of others without their knowing from where they came to them.”

He read my thoughts again, that was certain, and grateful was I to receive his pearls of wisdom in answer to them.

How could I hide anything from this wonderful boy even in unconscious thought? I still haven't grasped how large was his love for me, and his understanding of our ignorance. How deeply he cared, how infinitely vaster was his vision of things, whereas we are nearly blind to them. Even during this short period of time I had noticed that his crystal-clear observation never missed an opportunity to teach and to correct what he had found corrigible—where there had been a gap to be filled right away.

“This is so, Halio, I came for that. But have no regrets and no remorse, they are harmful. You are extremely sensitive and receptive and learn fast. I will enhance this capacity in you, you will develop it more by and by.

“You, and so many others have called to heaven for guidance. Therefore, I and some others have come in answer to that call. Trust me please, when I say that all will be well again. When the rubble is removed from thoughts and matter, we will lay the foundation of a new world that is to be built in place of the old. I say this again, Halio; above all things, do have faith!—Now I must go, but will come again.”

For a long time after he had gone, I remained indrawn. All he had said permeated to the very core of my being. Here was wonderment and I had no wish to break it or lose one drop of it.

The unbelievable had happened, I had called out to a vision to become real, and it had.

The lotus-dream was true... Christalis, who rose from it, came to me.

(To be continued)

ESSAYS ON THE MAHĀBHĀRATA (XI)

(Continued from the issue of March 1995)

Saints, Sages and Ascetics

(1) JARATKĀRU

IF we study the lives of great ascetics in the epics and Purānas, we will recognize a certain ever-recurring pattern. The ascetic mortifies himself and goes to incredible extremes in his discipline. At the end the tension between his body (which is part of Nature as such) and his spirit becomes unbearable, for other beings even more so than for himself. This one-sided concentration seems to upset the universal harmony. It is like a violent individual will, mercilessly hammering Nature for a result which She is not prepared to produce. Then, inevitably, something happens to interrupt the ascetic in his *tapasyā*. The Gods send a beautiful *apsarā* to distract his mind and direct it towards pursuits which are more 'natural'. In most cases the *apsarā* succeeds in her task and there is a temporary marriage. The best known example is that of Viśvāmitra and Menakā who became the parents of famous Śakuntalā. Or else, if the Gods do not intervene, the ancestors appear before the ascetic and persuade him to produce offspring so that their line can be continued. This is the case with Jaratkāru. The etymology of the name is given by the bard Ugraśravas in the following lines:

Jarā, they say, means "destruction", and *kāru* denotes "monstrous".⁵⁴ He had a monstrous body, and this body, so it is said, the sage destroyed little by little with severe mortifications.⁵⁵

The text further tells us that during his wanderings Jaratkāru once saw his forefathers hanging in a cave upside down. A rat was slowly eating through the single string of grass on which they were suspended. The unfortunate elders inform Jaratkāru, on his enquiry, that they suffer this mishap because their line is threatened with extinction. They are the Yāyāvaras who have fallen from heaven—"austerities have caused our downfall". The single thread on which they are suspended is none else than Jaratkāru:

He is known as Jaratkāru, scholar of the Vedas and their branches, controlled, great-spirited, observing his vows, and of massive mortifications. He is the one who out of greed for more austerities has brought us to this pass. He has no wife, or son, or any kin.⁵⁶

This statement gives a typical description of the one-sided ascetic who has

mastered the Vedas, restrained his senses, is a *mahātman*—and yet allowed greed to creep into his discipline and make his ancestors suffer now. For such an over-ambitious ascetic who is carried away by his spiritual striving, a homely married life is advised as a means to restore the balance. This is the deeper import of the story. The Yāyāvaras advise Jaratkāru (whom they have not yet recognized) to tell Jaratkāru if he meets him that he should marry and have children. This would save their lives. They pronounce a teaching which is quite understandable in the context of their situation:

Whether mortification or sacrifice, or any other great purification, *nothing equals offspring*; this is the view of the strict.⁵⁷

Even though Jaratkāru has no desire for marriage and children, he is willing to oblige his elders, under three conditions: 1) his bride must be a virgin who is his namesake; 2) she must be freely given him like alms with her own free consent; 3) he must not be obliged to support her. The latter two conditions can easily be understood. Jaratkāru makes sure that his marriage will be trouble-free psychologically and financially. A woman who comes out of her own free will and not under pressure, may be expected to be more cooperative and less likely to expose her husband to angry or jealous moods. But why should she be his namesake? We can imagine two answers. The first would be something like a test to the Truth: “If it is destined that I marry then let there be a wife of my name.” The second would be that the fact of her having the same name signifies some soul affinity, a person with ascetic tendencies as indicated by the etymology of the name.

Jaratkāru finds his mate after a long search and all conditions are fulfilled. He advises her never to displease him, otherwise he would send her away. One day, after she had already conceived a child, Jaratkāru was resting in her lap. As it became dusk, she became worried, for it was time for the ritual. She found herself facing a typical conflict of *dharma*: either she had to wake him up and displease him, or he would miss the *agnihotra* and lose merit. That would be due to her negligence. She decides to rather face his anger than allow him to lose merit. But he does get angry and scolds his wife:

Snake woman, you have insulted me! I will no longer live with you. I shall depart as I came! I know in my heart... that the sun does not have the courage to set at its appointed time while I am asleep! No one likes to tarry when he has been insulted, let alone me, who practise the Law, or one like me!⁵⁸

Jaratkāru’s word is final, his wife’s pleadings are in vain. It is clear that the destined relationship between the two Jaratkārus has been fulfilled and that

Jaratkāru will go his own way henceforth. He assures his wife, however, that she will give birth to a child who will be a great Ṛṣi. Then he leaves her and continues his lone wanderings.

We may well compare this story of Jaratkāru with that of Agastya, one of the greatest Ṛṣis of India.

(ii) AGASTYA

Some facts about Agastya's life are to be found in a few chapters of the Third Book of the Mahābhārata (Vanaparva). Chapter 101 gives us the following story which confirms his well-known association with South India: Once the Vindhya Mountains obstructed the course of the Sun because the latter did not circumambulate them according to their wish. Then the Gods asked Agastya to intervene and he told the mountain to stop growing until he had returned from the South:

“Best of mountains, I demand you give me passage. I am going to the south on some business. Wait until I return from there. When I have come back you may grow all you want!”⁵⁹

It is interesting to note that by tradition Agastya was considered to be the guardian spirit of Pondicherry where Sri Aurobindo established his own Ashram. Pondicherry was once called “Vedapuri” and was, according to the French scholar Prof. J. Dubreuil, the centre of Vedic studies in the South. He is even believed to have found evidence that the site of that centre was identical with the site of the present Ashram.

The Mahābhārata tells us of an incident which is in essence the same as Jaratkāru's meeting with his ancestors:

At this time the blessed Agastya saw his forebears hang in a cave with their heads down. He asked his hanging fathers, “What is your object, sirs?” “Offspring!” replied the scholars of the Brahman. They said to him, “We are your own ancestors and have ended in this cave, hanging down because we are wanting in progeny. If you, Agastya, were to beget a sublime child, we would be released from this hell and you, son, would attain to the goal!” That man of splendour, always bent on the Law of truth, said to them, “I shall do your desire, fathers. Let the fever of your minds depart.”⁶⁰

As compared to Jaratkāru's meeting with his ancestors, we note three differences here: Agastya is not scolded for practising selfish *tapasyā*; the two parties recognize each other immediately; and the plight of Agastya's ancestors

seems to be less acute than that of Jaratkāru's. However, the great sage is facing the same difficulty as Jaratkāru, namely to find a suitable wife with a compatible nature. After some fruitless searching he decides to design (in a subtle, occult way) a woman, collecting limbs from different creatures; "and with those limbs he fashioned a superb woman."⁶¹ Thereafter he gave her to the king of Vidarbha as whose daughter she was born.

This story may seem fantastic at first sight, although it makes sense in the light of an incident reported by the Mother. In the context of prenatal education, she once made the following remarks:

It is not rare to see a woman who, while pregnant, had looked at constantly and admired a beautiful picture or statue, giving birth to a child after the perfect likeness of this picture or statue. I met several of these instances myself. Among them, I remember very clearly two little girls; they were twins and perfectly beautiful. But the most astonishing thing was how little like their parents they were. They reminded me of a very famous picture painted by the English artist Reynolds. One day I made this remark to the mother, who immediately exclaimed: "Indeed, is it not so? You will be interested to know that while I was expecting these children, I had, hanging above my bed, a very good reproduction of Reynolds' picture. Before going to sleep and as soon as I woke, my last and first glance was for that picture; and in my heart I hoped: may my children be like the faces in this picture. You see that I succeeded quite well."⁶²

So we may say that Agastya had mentally prepared a perfect woman, he had made a 'formation', taking inspiration from various females who had special grace or beauty. He kept the image ready in the subtle-physical plane and a child of these features was then born in the house of the king of Vidarbha. Evidently people must have known that Agastya was related to the young beautiful princess, for the text says, "no man chose her, out of fear of the great-spirited sage".⁶³ Agastya then married the perfect woman, even though the king was unwilling to give his consent at first. Finally he yielded when Lopāmudrā herself pleaded to be given to the sage—in any case no one else would marry her. Agastya asked her to discard all her beautiful ornaments and garments and wear simple bark skirts and deerskin. The two lived happily together and Lopāmudrā served her husband well.

After some time Agastya found that the time was ready for offspring and he invited his wife. Lopāmudrā pleaded humbly with the sage that they might come together on a royal bed, decked with ornaments, as it would make her feel more comfortable. Agastya was willing to comply with her request, but he lacked the needed wealth. So he went out in search of funds and met three kings. They placed their account books before him giving all information about income and

expenditure in the kingdom. Agastya was satisfied that there was a perfect balance between income and expenditure and refused to take any money from the kings since this would mean hardship for the subjects. This incident is quite remarkable and shows the extraordinary noble attitude of the sage. His great honesty is quite in contrast to the demanding attitude of other ascetics like Durvāsā who expect gratification of their wishes from worldly people

The sage and the three kings then proceeded to the Asura Ilvala who was famous for his abundant riches. However, he had a cruel habit of feeding Brahmins with the cooked meat of his brother Vātāpi whom he called back to life afterwards so that he came out of the unfortunate victim, killing him. Agastya too ate Vātāpi but managed to digest him completely; he had sufficient Light in himself to dissolve the *asura* Ilvala gave twenty thousand cows to Agastya and a golden chariot after this stunning feat (the sage was also required to guess what gift Ilvala would give to him and the kings). The wealth is rushed to Agastya's hermitage. He placed a choice before Lopāmudrā whether she wished to have a thousand sons, or one hundred who would have each the value of ten; ten having each the value of one hundred, or one who was worth one thousand. Lopāmudrā chose one great son, who was soon born and given the name Dṛḍhasyu. He became a great ascetic and scholar

(iii) AṆĪMĀṆḌAVYA

Two passages in the Ādiparva give us information about this unfortunate seer who was under suspicion of theft and got impaled on a stake by the king's police. The first passage⁶⁴ is only a short summary in five *ślokas*, whereas in chapter 101 of the Ādiparva we are given a more lengthy description. We learn that the ascetic practised hard *tapasyā* standing under a tree with raised arms and observing a vow of silence. One day thieves came running into his premises, hotly pursued by the royal police. The latter suspected the saint to be conspiring with the robbers and the king had Aṇīmāṇḍavya put on a stake. Later the king released him when he came to know that he had wrongly implicated a great seer who miraculously survived the ordeal of being impaled. He was lowered down, but the stake could not be pulled out of his body. Therefore the ends were cut off and the unfortunate sage had to wander about in this condition.

One day Aṇīmāṇḍavya approached Dharma himself and asked him about his sins because of which he suffered such mishap. Dharma answered that he had stuck blades of grass in the tails of little flies as a boy. (In the other text, Aṇīmāṇḍavya says, "When I was a child, I speared a little bird on a stalk of reed. That sin I do remember, Dharma, but none other.") Aṇīmāṇḍavya considers this punishment for a small sin entirely disproportionate and declares that nothing should be a sin up to the age of fourteen. Moreover, he curses Dharma that he should take birth in a human body, in the low womb of a serf.

This is basically the story. It is easy to guess why it has found entry into many summaries. The fact of the sage surviving the impalement and his cursing of the Law itself are two near-fantastic aspects of the story. The first incident reminds us of Christ. As Christ forgave his tormentors, so Anīmāṇḍavya forgave the careless king when he tried to appease him. But unlike Christ he was not released from the pain through death and had to live on with a piece of the stake in his body. This feat alone would have sufficed to make him famous.

His second feat of cursing Dharma himself is something amazing indeed. It is not rare that a God draws upon himself the curse of a seer, but Dharma is justice itself. However, he too does not escape. We see how anthropocentric the Mahābhārata is: human beings are not helplessly tossed about by the superior Gods but on the contrary they can even bring down to earth the *devas* by the power of their *tapasyā*. There is a humorous element in this episode. The listener can laugh and enjoy the defeat of Law itself by a human being. Sometimes we may despair of the iron laws governing this world, but here there is someone who has managed to turn the tables on them.

The ascetic Anīmāṇḍavya is well known to the Purāṇas too, even though more commonly as 'Māṇḍavya'. The *Garūdapūrāna*, for instance, reports his impalement after he had come under wrong suspicion (1.142). The *Padmapūrāna* (6.141) tells the story with a slight variant: Once king Sulaksan was hunting in the forest and left his horse tied to a tree. When he came back, he found the horse missing and asked Māṇḍavya about it. But the sage kept silent according to his vow. Later the king found the real thief and released Māṇḍavya in whose body a piece of the stake remained. Therefore he was called Anīmāṇḍavya, says the text (*aṇī*=linch-pin, stake).

The *Skandapūrāna* (5.3.169-172) reports of Māṇḍavya's marriage with Pramodinī, the daughter of king Devapanna. The *asura* Śambara had stolen the king's daughter and thrown some of her ornaments into the premises of Māṇḍavya's Ashram, whereupon the innocent sage was suspected to be her abductor and put on the stake. Later however the king recovered his daughter from Śambara and gave her to Māṇḍavya as his wife.

After having related the amazing life-story of a most patient and compassionate, even though not weak and helpless sage, we turn to a well-known figure in ancient Indian tales, to Durvāsā, the angry man-of-God *par excellence*.

(iv) DURVĀSĀ

Once Sura, chief of the Yadus and father of Vasudeva, made a promise to his cousin Kuntibhoja, who was childless, that he would give his own first child to him for adoption. Therefore, when his daughter Prthā was born, he sent her to his relative in whose house she grew up.

In the house of her new father she was charged with honoring Gods and guests; and so she once came to serve that awesome and dreadful brahmin of strict vows whose decisions on law were mysterious, him whom they know as Durvāsā. This awesome man of honed spirit she satisfied with all her efforts, and, with a foresight of the Law of Distress that would apply, the hermit gave her a spell combined with sorcery and said to her: ‘Whichever God you call up with this spell will favour you with a son.’⁶⁵

Unlike many others, Kuntī was able to please ‘that awesome and dreadful brahmin’ and obtain a boon from him which is the most important in the whole eventful history of the Mahābhārata, because through it the five Pāṇḍavas as well as Karṇa were born. Kuntī is curious to know the efficacy of the *mantra* and calls the Sun God who approaches her and becomes the father of Karṇa. The same story is told again in 1.113, when Kuntī points out to Pāṇḍu that they need not remain childless in spite of the curse which fell on her husband when he shot a couple of mating deer. The latter turned out to be a Ṛsi and his wife, who had assumed animal bodies to satisfy unfulfilled lower impulses.

Kuntī tells Pāṇḍu of King Vyusitāśva and his wife Bhadrā Kāksīvati. When the king died prematurely due to consumption, Bhadrā was desperate, since she was without offspring. Then one day she was told by a hidden voice to lie with the corpse of the king on the eighth or fourteenth day of the moon, and doing so she gave birth to seven sons. “And so you too, bull of the Bhāratas, will be able by the lasting power of your austerities, to beget sons on me with your mind.”⁶⁶ This latter verse is important insofar as it suggests the possibility of non-sexual birth. It is interesting to note that in the Āśramavāsika Parva (Chapter 38, verses 20-21) Vyāsa in a talk with Kuntī takes up this subject and mentions five special ways of the Gods in which they are capable of producing offspring, namely by thought, word, sight, touch and sexual union. In chapter 114 of the Ādiparva we are given the following information regarding a process of supernatural conception:

When Gāndhārī had been with child for a year, Kuntī called imperishable Dharma to conceive a child. The queen at once brought offerings to Dharma and solemnly muttered the spells that Durvāsā had given her. *She lay with Dharma, who had assumed a yogic body...*⁶⁷

The latter sentence reads in the original:

saṅgamyā sā tu dharmeṇa yogamūrtidhāreṇa vai.

Speculations about the meaning of this statement could include the assumption that an unknown procedure of giving birth to children is being described here.

However, other interpretations are also conceivable.

The meeting of Durvāsā and Kuntī is told more elaborately in chapters 287-291 of Book III. We are also given a physical description of Durvāsā:

... Of yore a certain Brahmin appeared before Kuntibhoja, a Brahmin of fierce luster, most luminous, wearing a beard, staff, and hair tuft, handsome and flawlessly built, as though ablaze with splendour. His skin was honey-coloured (*madhupiṅgaḥ*), his words were honeyed, and he wore the jewels of austerities and Vedic study.⁶⁸

Prthā serves the difficult-to-please Brahmin for a year and pleases him all the while without making any mistake. This was a rather impossible task because of the irregular habits of Durvāsā who would come at any time and who asked her for attendance, food etc. Moreover, he was not a polite speaker, abusing mercilessly those who were his hosts. At the end Durvāsā offers a boon to Kuntī who is happy to have pleased her father by having pleased the irascible sage. She refuses to accept any gift, but Durvāsā gives her a *mantra*:

Whichever God you call with this spell shall have to fall under your power, good woman. Whether willing or unwilling, that God is bound to be in your power and, controlled by your spell, to bow to your word like a servant.⁶⁹

Kuntī accepts the *mantra* out of fear of his curse, says the text here.

Thereupon the brahmin taught the flawless maiden a series of spells that are revealed in the Atharvaśiras.

After some time Kuntī reflects on the power of the *mantras*. While she is thus pondering, her period occurs even though she is still a child. Gazing at the Sun, she is enamoured with his beauty and calls him towards her. The Sun makes an emanation and approaches Kuntī who gets frightened now and asks him to go, but he is not prepared to leave her, since she called him. Otherwise he would lose his face before all those Gods who are watching them. He threatens Kuntī with the worst consequences if she would send him away without coming together with him. Kuntī finally yields when the Sun assures her that she will become a virgin again and her son will be a great hero with a divine armor and earrings which Aditi herself (the Mother of the Gods) gave to the Sun. The latter unites with Kuntī *in his yogic person*, which again suggests a mysterious, occult process.⁷⁰ Hiding her pregnancy, Kuntī gives birth to her extraordinary child (Karna), “as lustrous as an immortal by the Grace of God.” Following the advice of her nurse, she sets the child afloat in the river Aśva, after having very carefully prepared a comfortable basket, sealed with beeswax. “Though she knew that an

unmarried girl is forbidden to bear a child she lamented piteously out of love for her son.”⁷¹

(To be continued)

WILFRIED HUCHZERMAYER

Notes

- 54 *Kāru* usually means ‘agent’, but is explained here as *dārūna*
- 55 Mahābhārata, 1 36 3-4
- 56 Mahābhārata, 1 41 18-19
- 57 Mahābhārata, 1 41 28
- 58 Mahābhārata, 1.43 22-24
- 59 Mahābhārata, 3 102 11-12
- 60 Mahābhārata, 3 94 11-15
- 61 Mahābhārata, 3 94 17
- 62 *How to Bring up a Child* (Sri Aurobindo Society), p 10
- 63 Mahābhārata, 3 94 25
- 64 Mahābhārata, 1 57 77-81
- 65 Mahābhārata, 1 104 4-7
- 66 Mahābhārata, 1 112 34
- 67 Mahābhārata 1 114 1-3
- 68 Mahābhārata, 3 287 4-5
- 69 Mahābhārata, 3 289 17-18
- 70 Mahābhārata, 3 291 24-29
- 71 Mahābhārata, 3 292 9

AMAL-KIRAN: POET AND CRITIC

A REVIEW-ARTICLE*

THE poet and critic are only two of the many facets of Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna) celebrated in this volume published on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday on 25 November, 1994. His intensely visionary poetry and his penetrating criticism packed with fresh insights into a number of the famous enigmas of literature are among the contributions by which K. D. Sethna is or deserves to be best known. Another achievement is his work on ancient Indian history. Based on years of meticulous research, his cogent arguments for rejecting the "Aryan invasion" theory and his proposed revisions in chronology are just beginning to receive serious consideration from open-minded scholars. But in addition to the poet, critic, historian, philosopher and exponent of Sri Aurobindo's world-view, the present book also embraces in its scope the more private sides of Amal Kiran—Amal as sadhak, teacher, friend, humorist and inimitable personality.

This is appropriate, for the book is likely to be read and enjoyed mostly in circles connected with Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where Amal has quietly devoted most of his life to the service of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother rather than to making a brilliant name for himself in the world. This readership was obviously what the editors had in mind, since they have chosen the name Amal-Kiran rather than K. D. Sethna for the title of the book. A facsimile of Sri Aurobindo's handwritten message of 3 September 1930 bestowing this significant name on the young aspirant appears on the cover, superimposed on a photograph of Amal from the same early period. It may be noted in passing that "Amal Kiran" is usually written as if "Amal" were the first name and "Kiran" the last name. Sri Aurobindo himself usually shortened it to "Amal", but the facsimile shows that he originally wrote the full Sanskrit name as a single word in Devanagari and spelled it in transliteration with a hyphen and a small "k": "Amal-kiran". He also wrote its meaning, "The clear ray".

The editors, borrowing a term from the world of scholarship, have applied the word "festschrift" to this felicitation volume. The German expression usually refers to a collection of papers by colleagues of a distinguished scholar in whose honour such a book is brought out. Normally, his own work need not be the subject of most of the papers. The label has been extended here to a rather different type of publication. Though some of the contents of the present book are indeed of a scholarly nature, it should be noted that it is conceived on a plan of its own and in a spirit which sets it somewhat apart from the academic "festschrift" tradition.

The articles which form the bulk of the book are preceded by two shorter

* *Amal-Kiran Poet and Critic*, edited by Nirodbaran and R. Y. Deshpande. Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1994. 457 pages. Price Rs. 150.

but nonetheless substantial sections. In the first, some important stages in Amal's life are documented through his correspondence. The second section is a judicious sample of his voluminous writings, selected to emphasise the "poet and critic" aspects. There is also a short miscellaneous section at the end of the book. Here one's attention is immediately drawn to the photographs of Amal at various ages, from five to two months short of ninety. The "Christ-Amal" of the thirties will come as a surprise to those hitherto unaware of Amal's striking resemblance at one time to Jesus of Nazareth. But it is the last photograph, taken as recently as September 1994, which seems most to radiate the light Sri Aurobindo saw and wished to bring out in the one he named Amal-kiran.

The facsimiles in the opening section heighten the sense of an authentic documentation of Amal's spiritual and literary development. Of particular interest are his letters to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at some of the most crucial moments in his life, and their replies. Here we get a moving glimpse of his spiritual odyssey—his difficulties, so typical of the modern intellectual temperament, his hopes and misgivings, his ultimately unshakable faith, his triumphs and his still-to-be-realised possibilities. A few other documents are also reproduced. These include a non-committal but thoughtful letter from Albert Einstein, who took the trouble to read Amal's paper, *Mysticism and Einstein's Relativity Physics*, and found it "partly interesting".

The facsimiles of the less legible letters are accompanied by the editors' transcripts. This will save the readers the trouble of struggling unduly with Sri Aurobindo's difficult handwriting of the later period. Unfortunately, in some places the editors themselves have not deciphered the writing very convincingly, compelling a very scrupulous reader to make his own attempt. I have not systematically compared all of the transcripts with the facsimiles, but I will suggest a few emendations for the benefit of those interested in these minutiae. Others are requested to skip the next paragraph.

Sri Aurobindo's last handwritten letter to Amal, dated March 18, 1945, is reproduced on p. 17 with a transcript on the next page. In the second half of the second sentence the transcript's "but it has a modernist tendency" does not read quite right in the context. It appears to me that Sri Aurobindo wrote "that is", not "it has". In the last sentence of the paragraph, the word "so" has been omitted before "damnatory". More serious, near the end of the letter, the transcript attributes to Sri Aurobindo the puzzling statement that he was continually revising *Savitri* "so as eventually pass which was not upto mark". On close scrutiny of the facsimile, it seems likely that "eventually" is a misreading of "let nothing". Such an improbable-sounding error was possible because the words are run together and several letters are not distinctly formed; only the "t" which the two readings have in common is prominent (though it could have been read as an "l"), while the "th" could just as well be "ll" and the "g" might have been a "y". The word "to" was presumably intended before "let nothing" but

was omitted in the speed of writing, just as “the” was omitted from the expression “up to the mark”. In the previous sentence, the word transcribed as “enormously” should perhaps be read “immensely”, but this is a little less certain. An apparent mistake also occurs in the transcript of the first item on p. 14. The second sentence, as transcribed, questions the possibility of converting a certain intellectual conceit into “the enduring poetic image”. But “enduring” does not seem very relevant here, and the third letter is a “t”, not a “d”. A more plausible reading is “entirely”.

In pointing out a few small flaws, I have no intention of disparaging the admirable work the editors have done on the whole. The presence of some minor defects such as occasional typographical errors is due, no doubt, to the fact that the entire task of soliciting contributions from dozens of persons in various parts of the world, collecting additional material and editing and printing a 457-page book, impressive in content and in appearance, was completed in the very short period of four or five months in order to present it to Amal on his ninetieth birthday. For this the editors, the contributors and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press are all to be congratulated.

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The longest section of the book consists of thirty-six articles by different authors. A few have been reprinted from past publications, some of them dating back as much as fifty years and enriching the perspective of the present with some touches of the atmosphere of earlier days. These include a passage from a book by Dilip Kumar Roy first published in 1952. Besides expressing personal admiration, Dilip hailed Sethna as the foremost proponent of Sri Aurobindo’s poetic greatness at a time when most of his compatriots had “elected to cling to a cautious if not timid silence” on this subject, for fear that their “highbrow English tutors” might reverse a too favourable verdict.

Keenly appreciative of Amal’s own poetry, some of which he had tried to translate into Bengali, Dilip Kumar quoted *This Errant Life* as an example which had drawn superlative praise from Sri Aurobindo himself. This exquisite poem’s universal appeal is suggested by the number of times it reappears in the present book. While several other poems are also cited more than once, this one is repeated again and again like a mantra of the heart yearning for intimacy with the Divine. Even Kathleen Raine, the well-known authority on Blake and a condescending “highbrow” critic of Indian poetry in English throughout her long and lively correspondence with Amal, confessed that she wished she had written its last three lines herself. Her letter apropos of Amal’s collected poems, *The Secret Splendour*, is reproduced on p. 36.

The articles constituting the main section of *Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic* vary widely in subject, style, length, seriousness and other respects. Differences

in quality are inevitable, but the diversity itself is refreshing. The weightier pieces are balanced by others whose unpolished spontaneity and sincere feeling or good-natured humour have their own charm. Probably few will read the book from cover to cover, but there is much to choose from. Some of the articles are very beautifully written indeed, and on the whole they do not fall below a certain adequate level of content and language. Only occasionally does one feel the effects of the limitation of time unavoidably imposed on the writers. A very minor complaint is that now and then, on reading a fine piece of writing with an unfamiliar name at the end, one wishes that a little information about each of the contributors had been provided at the back of the book.

Each article is in its own way an approach or tribute to one or more of Amal Kiran's many aspects and accomplishments. His poetry is deservedly the single topic which receives the most attention. Its thrill is perhaps captured most vividly by Sonia Dyne in "A Priest of the Muses", but there are other excellent studies. Prema Nandakumar, for example, goes to the heart of Sethna's "sunny genius", noting that there is nothing in his poetry of the "mole-like burrowing into the darknesses of one's own vital and lower-vital consciousness that is the hallmark of most of the anthologised poets of post-independence Indo-Anglia". Finding the secret of its characteristic "triumphant note" in the conviction that a creative Ananda is the source of poetry as of all things, she sees a kinship with the Vedic Rishis in this respect and in the frequent "incantatory" quality of Sethna's lines.

The Vedic affinity is highlighted from another angle by R. Y. Deshpande, who examines the symbolism of "Two Birds" with reference to the sources of the parable in the Rig Veda and the Mundaka Upanishad. The subject of this poem was illustrated, incidentally, by the poet himself with the painting that has appeared on the cover and as the frontispiece of *The Secret Splendour: Collected Poems*. An early talent for painting is a little-known side of Amal Kiran, who was among the first artists in the Ashram.

An interesting point in Deshpande's discussion of the poem is the contrast he makes between Shelley's skylark and these symbolic birds representing "the soul and the Oversoul in the cosmic scheme of evolution". It is observed that "whereas a nature-bird becomes airy and insubstantial in the romanticist's imagination, a symbol-bird acquires vibrant substantiality in the mystic's vision." The authentic Vedic-Upanishadic mode of symbolism has therefore been successfully recreated, though the language and rhythm of the English poem are found to be more lyrical than the ancient Sanskrit verses.

The most systematic and scholarly treatment of Amal Kiran's poetry as a whole is Ranajit Sarkar's "The Locus of K. D. Sethna's Poetry". Prof. Sarkar deals, among other things, with the question of the originality of Sethna's poetry which is so obviously and powerfully influenced by Sri Aurobindo. He distinguishes influence from imitation, and is of the view that the Master's spiritual influence has not inhibited the disciple's individual expression. On the contrary,

it has enabled him to explore a world to which most poets do not have access:

Thus, in spite of his intimate association with Sri Aurobindo's poetry Sethna has a voice that is personal, although his poetic personality is formed by his Master. A disciple is not he who apes the ways, speech and thoughts of the master, but he who accepts to be shown his own way, be encouraged to walk on that way independently and firmly.... In a poem called *Sri Aurobindo* Sethna writes:

... only shadowless love can breathe this pure
Sun-blossom fragrant with eternity.

Influence is this fragrance of eternity that does not prevent the soul from flying freely. One cannot imitate the fragrance ...

One hopes that this article has been or will be published also in some literary journal with a wide circulation. One of the most salutary purposes the present book could serve would be to stimulate more people to discover the treasures of this unique body of poetry. This might help to set in motion the process which will establish K. D. Sethna's name in its rightful place in the literature of our time.

Despite the book's subtitle, "Poet and Critic", Amal Kiran's literary criticism is not represented as fully as his poetry, except to some extent in the selections from his own writings in the second part. One reason for this is undoubtedly that some of his major works of criticism have not yet been published in book-form—for example, his fascinating inquiry into the inspiration of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.^{*} This is a fresh approach which could arouse new interest in a great poet who has gone somewhat out of fashion.

But "Sethna's Wordsworth Criticism" by P. Marudanayagam is a perceptive assessment by one who is clearly well-qualified to write on the topic. It refers primarily to the *Talks on Poetry*, about which the author explains:

The undergraduate classroom-context and the disarming casualness of the lecturer should not blind us to the fact that many seminal ideas and splendid insights are to be found in Sethna's criticism.

Compared with several of the best-known critics, Sethna is shown to be at times more balanced and convincing in his judgments as well as more profound in his insight than his Western counterparts. The Indian mind perhaps has an advantage in understanding the deeper things in Wordsworth. There is, of course,

^{*} *The Inspiration of Paradise Lost*, now in the press, appeared serially in *Mother India* from July 1984 to July 1985

nothing essentially new in the observation that there are two voices in Wordsworth's poetry—the second described by Sethna with humorous exaggeration:

One is of the deep, that “now roars, now murmurs with the changeful sea, now birdlike pipes, now closes soft in sleep” and “one is of an old half-witted sheep which bleats articulate monotony”.

But Sethna goes further and discovers in Wordsworth a universal vision which he characterises as Vedantic. Marudanayagam notes Kathleen Raine's enthusiastic response to this suggestion:

Your illustration of the resonance of Vedantic utterance from Wordsworth gave me great delight. Surely that is the very quality in him that is great and I am glad you find in Wordsworth something of the Indian soul.

K. D. Sethna's book-length analysis of Wordsworth's “A slumber did my spirit seal” is based on Sri Aurobindo's mystical reading of this much-discussed and little-understood poem. Unfortunately, this is not yet available to the public and so is not mentioned in Marudanayagam's article. Its publication will certainly enhance Sethna's growing stature as a critic. Meanwhile, Nirodbaran in the course of his extensive article, “Sixty Years of Unbroken Friendship”, gives the gist of the unpublished commentary under the heading “Amal Kiran as Critic”. He also describes what is surely Amal's most brilliant feat of criticism, his unravelling of the mystery of Blake's “Tyger”, surprisingly revealed to be a symbol of Christ.

Nirodbaran covers several aspects of Amal Kiran's life and work and provides first-hand biographical details on the basis of their long association. (Other information about Amal's life can be found scattered through several articles, especially the one by P. Raja, “The Multi-Faceted Seeker of Light”.) At the end, Nirod raises the question of how one person could have done so much. He suggests an answer, to whose implications I will return later:

We know that Amal has been inspired by the Master's Yogic Force, particularly in poetry, and since he is a sadhak the Master's Force could work with his remarkable mind and unshaken faith as the instruments to achieve such exceptional results

A challenging and stimulating piece is Pradip Bhattacharya's “High Adventure in Historiography the Historical Vision of K. D. Sethna”. Here the

central arguments of Sethna's three major books on ancient India are succinctly but adequately summarised. The writer shows an admirable command of the complex issues involved and manages, as the title implies, to convey a sense of adventure in what might look at first sight like dry scholasticism. Sita Ram Goel, who has published the three books in question with a high-minded disregard for commercial considerations, brings out the importance of this part of Sethna's work. After describing the domination of contemporary Indian academia and media by a "state-sponsored version of India's history which is eulogised as the secular version", he concludes:

It was in the midst of this stifling atmosphere that K. D. Sethna's work came like a breath of fresh air. To start with, his was a lonely voice. But now a whole school of historians is coming forward for a scholarly defence of India's indigenous historical traditions. All of them recognise K. D. Sethna as the forerunner in the field. Future generations are bound to hail him as the harbinger of a new dawn.

No overview of the life-work of Amal Kiran could be complete without giving full value to his long labour of love as the editor of *Mother India*. The launching of this journal, originally as a fortnightly published from Bombay, is one subject of the informative article by Nilima Das. At a critical moment not long before the date fixed for the first issue, close to February 21, 1949, there were doubts about the wisdom of beginning publication without having collected adequate material in advance. An urgent request for guidance was sent to the Mother. In reply there came a telegram which left no room for hesitation: "Stick to the date. Live on faith. Blessings—Mother." The force the Mother put behind these words has sustained *Mother India* to the present day. Its editor not only continues to "live on faith", but has managed incredibly to "stick to the date" month after month for almost half a century.

Some of the articles in this book touch on several topics or are otherwise not easily classifiable. Since a grouping according to any logical system was hardly feasible, they have been put in one long section and arranged impartially according to the alphabetical order of the authors' names. This may not always be the ideal sequence to read them in, but it was a sensible solution and has resulted fortuitously in quite appropriate opening and closing items.

On the first page of the first article, we get a charming glimpse of Amal's daily routine at the present time:

It is indeed a beautiful sight to see Amal coming to the Ashram, to the Samadhi, to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This is his delightful daily pilgrimage. A happiness hovers around him.

The author, Aditi Vasishtha, quotes Amal's poems with ease and speaks of Amal as a true poet—not merely a writer of poems, but one who lives poetry—and as “A Golden Bridge to Sri Aurobindo”.

The series closes on a buoyant note with the words “Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!” Thus ends the tribute from Udar who, like Nirod, has been a friend of Amal's for the last sixty years. The choice of Shelley's line is most apt, not only in view of Amal's unconquerable joy in life which Udar appreciates so much, but because in his poetry Amal has indeed, like the skylark, often poured his full heart “from heaven or near it”.

The contribution by Jugal Kishore Mukherjee should not be overlooked. It assumed such large proportions that it has been published as a separate booklet.* The author's remarks under sixteen headings serve to introduce well-chosen excerpts from Amal's writings which illustrate effectively the many-sided theme, “The Wonder that is K. D. Sethna”. It is not only Amal's intellectual abilities that are enumerated and exemplified. The qualities of character and yogic poise fostered by a life of sadhana are equally attested. Take Amal's graphic description of an accident in 1986 (not the still more agonising fall which he had in October 1991) and the psychological state experienced immediately afterwards. This is cited as a convincing example of “K.D.S.'s Radiant Equanimity”:

I was getting up from my chair... suddenly my knees sagged. With a twist in my waist I fell backward and one of the corners of the small table fixed to my chair butted into me like a bull—or rather I was like an idiotic matador backing into the horns of a bull waiting for him. The butting was just near my spine and somehow it affected my breathing. The pain caused by it as well as by the contorted way I fell on the floor was of a kind unknown to me: it was as if swords of fire were slashing into me at a number of places....

As I lay supine in great physical distress I made a strange discovery. In the midst of the intense pain my mind and heart were absolutely at peace. Not a twinge of fear, not a tremor of anxiety! Utter tranquillity seemed the very substance of my consciousness. I had never realised that such perfect calm had been permanently established in me by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. To the inner being, nothing had happened. I am almost inclined to say that the fall was worth while just for me to discover this profound serenity.

4

Surveying as a whole the articles in *Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic*, one finds that they range from informal reminiscences with no literary or intellectual

* *The Wonder That is K. D. Sethna alias Amal Kiran*, by Jugal Kishore Mukherjee. Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1994. 39 pages. Price Rs. 25.

pretensions to critical and philosophical essays demanding some concentration from the reader. Those of the former type will give the book a broad appeal. One or two in the latter category may be difficult to follow for those who are not specialists in the fields concerned or gifted with minds as acute and flexible as Amal's own. Yet with a little patience and effort to understand them, these may be among the most rewarding.

I might mention as an example the erudite paper, "Are Philosophical Questions Self-Answering?" by J. N. Chubb. A retired professor of philosophy, when Dr. Chubb was asked to send something for a "festschrift" volume in honour of his long-time friend, he responded as he would have for a philosopher-colleague. But the short personal note at the beginning has an amusing touch, as well as reflecting on Amal's wide-ranging intellectual acumen and amiable, imperturbable temperament. Dr. Chubb recalls:

We have spent many happy hours together in academic philosophical discussions and though we do not always see eye to eye the dialogue always remains non-polemical and never degenerates into a shouting match. This does not mean that we never raise our voices against each other but when we do the reason for doing so is that we are both hard of hearing!

Apart from this introductory note, Chubb's paper makes no explicit reference to Amal or even to Sri Aurobindo. At first glance it may seem out of place, and perhaps not many readers of this volume are likely to get to the end of it. If so it is a pity, for the paper leads up to a reconciliation of the claims of reason and faith which is interesting in itself and relevant to the appreciation of a spiritually minded thinker like Amal Kiran. The peculiar-sounding question with which it begins, "Are philosophical questions self-answering", becomes meaningful when Chubb comes to a clear statement of the relation between the questions philosophy starts from and the answers it arrives at:

The question thus adumbrates the point of view underlying the process of thinking and the answer is the point of view elaborated into a coherent system.

Thus philosophical questions are self-answering in the sense that our questions are not open but reflect a commitment to a point of view. They contain and provide their own answers similar to the way in which the seed contains and makes possible the development of the tree.

From here, Chubb goes on to compare the philosophical thought-process, so viewed, with "a higher movement of consciousness which effects a transition from faith to supra-rational knowledge or direct realisation". As philosophical questions are self-answering, so faith is self-justifying. The question of the

attitude of philosophy towards faith inspires Dr. Chubb to some surprising flights of poetic prose near the end of a paper which seemed academic enough at the outset. One such passage is a memorable evocation of the spiritual adventure to which Sri Aurobindo calls us, the adventure which has been and is the life of Amal Kiran:

Faith is self-justifying in the sense that once we receive the glimmering of something new and what to us is a higher possibility in a virgin apprehension there is something in us which compels the pursuit of this apparition though it lead us beyond the utmost bound of human thought and break down all our carefully built fences of security. We seek it because it lures us and we give ourselves gladly to its enchantment.... The voice of the sceptic or the so-called rationalist raised in warning or cavil is the voice of the philistine that would seal off all hazards and prevent the soul from venturing out into the vast unknown and unpossessed

5

The articles forming more than three hundred pages of the present book are too numerous and varied for me to try to review them one by one. Let me rather focus on the total impression they create, the powerful cumulative effect produced by the multitude of individual voices heard, and particularly on the sense that emerges from them of the significance of a remarkable life that has already spanned all but a few years of this century and shows no sign of nearing an end.

The sheer breadth of Amal Kiran's creative and intellectual activity, the depth of his knowledge in so many fields and the originality of his insights and discoveries have aroused the admiration of virtually every contributor to this volume and are reflected in the diversity of topics discussed. Several people have described him as a polymath, a man of vast and varied learning. But all recognise that he is not only this. For amid the astonishing variety of interests revealed by even a casual perusal of the titles of Amal's published and unpublished books (see the lists on pp. 447-48), there is an underlying unity of purpose which makes his life's work amount to something more than a dazzling exhibition of intellectual virtuosity.

It is no secret that the theme of Amal's life, the "one and quivering note" heard through all its variations, even through its struggles and vicissitudes, has been his dedication to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, to their Integral Yoga and to their epoch-making work in the world. In the nearly seventy years since he arrived in Pondicherry from Bombay, having learned of Sri Aurobindo Ashram from the sheet of a newspaper in which a box containing a pair of shoes had been wrapped, all else has been secondary, incidental or subservient to this single all-

inclusive preoccupation and inescapable destiny.

Once such an orientation has been taken, the distinction between the spiritual life and other activities loses its meaning. Sri Aurobindo, as is well-known, rejected the ascetic and other-worldly tendencies which have long been dominant in the Indian spiritual tradition. Even the almost universally observed separation of spiritual from secular pursuits was in his view and experience a temporary convenience at best, not an inherent necessity of the spiritual path when followed to its highest consummation. As he wrote in *The Synthesis of Yoga*:¹

The spiritual life does not need, for its purity, to destroy interest in all things except the Inexpressible or to cut at the roots of the Sciences, the Arts and Life.

A little further on in the same chapter,² Sri Aurobindo makes a still more positive statement which is particularly relevant in the present context:

On the other hand, it is possible at any period of the inner spiritual progress that one may experience an extension rather than a restriction of the activities; there may be an opening of new capacities of mental creation and new provinces of knowledge by the miraculous touch of the Yoga-Shakti. Aesthetic feeling, the power of artistic creation in one field or many fields together, talent or genius of literary expression, a faculty of metaphysical thinking, any power of eye or ear or hand or mind-power may awaken where none was apparent before.

Quite a number of Sri Aurobindo's disciples have experienced something of this sort in different fields and to varying degrees. The Master by his own example strongly encouraged a many-sided development of mental capacities as part of the preparation for a higher consciousness and a dynamic spiritual action, contrary not only to traditional notions of spirituality but to the modern trend towards narrow specialisation in the name of "professionalism". Rarely, however, has the Yoga-Shakti been offered such a promising mental instrument to work with as in the case of Amal Kiran.

This does not mean that his natural abilities by themselves were sufficient to account for his uncommon achievements after taking to Yoga, in fields of art and scholarship so diverse that the creative and analytical faculties required are often considered mutually exclusive, or at least unlikely to coexist in a single mind at such a high level of development. Amal himself once wrote in a letter:³

I may honestly testify that if I have any more-than-ordinary proficiency in any sphere it is Sri Aurobindo's creation out of whatever little potential I may have had to start with.

The humility shown in this letter is no doubt characteristic of Amal. But the statement should not therefore be interpreted as merely an expression of exaggerated modesty. We should rather take it as a simple fact that Amal's exceptional development not only as a poet and critic, but as a thinker, scholar and writer capable of masterfully handling nearly any subject he might choose to deal with, has been largely the result of Sri Aurobindo's inspiring example, enlightening influence and shaping touch. Yet the value of his achievement, far from being diminished by the recognition that it is not due purely to his individual merit, is from the spiritual point of view immeasurably enhanced.

The genius or Vibhuti may be vaguely aware of a higher Power acting through him, but he normally takes personal credit for most of what he does. In this respect the Yogi represents a more advanced stage in the evolution of consciousness, though he may be less "great" in his visible accomplishments. The Yogi or ideal sadhak, even in the midst of the most extraordinary display of intellectual or other faculties, does not fall into the egoistic error committed by other men, the error attributed in the Kena Upanishad even to the gods.

As it is told in the Upanishad, when Brahman had triumphed through them in the perennial struggle with the powers of darkness, the gods thought, "Ours is this victory, ours is this greatness". But in reality, all victory and greatness in whatever sphere belong to the One Divine. In the Kena this is conveyed by a striking parable. Knowing that the gods believed their triumph to be their own, Brahman placed a single blade of grass before Agni and Vayu, the cosmic godheads of Fire and Wind, lords of material energy and the life-force that animates it. These mighty deities discovered to their consternation that they could not touch even a blade of grass when the sanction of the Supreme was withdrawn from their action. Expressing the same truth from a psychological point of view, the Mother once spoke of a state in which one realises that without the support of the divine Force, one could not so much as lift a finger.⁴

Keeping this in mind, let us return to the book under review and join the editors and the host of contributors in celebrating the arrival of Amal Kiran at the radiant age of ninety—Amal Kiran who is a "clear ray" of the light whose full splendour was manifest in Sri Aurobindo. A ray does not exist independently, but owes its beauty and brightness to the source from which it emanates. Something of this kind, at the deepest level, may be divined in the relationship of the ray that is Amal Kiran to Sri Aurobindo, its "parent sun".

It was from Sri Aurobindo himself that Amal Kiran received his name. The Mother affirmed the same perception of his inner nature and potential when, in the early days of the Ashram, it was decided to put in each sadhak's room a flower-painting done by Amal himself. She selected for Amal's own room the flower signifying "Krishna's light in the mind". Apart from these revealing gestures from the Gurus, Amal the visionary poet and versatile thinker, lame in one leg from childhood, can claim the distinction of having been immortalised by

Sri Aurobindo in two lines in *Savitri*:⁵

But Mind, a glorious traveller in the sky,
Walks lamely on the earth with footsteps slow.

This “glorious traveller” in the skies of thought and vision has walked “lamely on the earth” only in the most outward sense. But in recent years, Amal’s footsteps have become slower after each serious fall until today he has to move about in a wheel-chair. Despite this circumstance added to his “advanced” age, judged by conventional standards, those who know him cannot really think of him as getting old. Old age comes, according to the Mother,⁶ from “the incapacity or the refusal to continue to grow and progress”. She added, “I have known old people of twenty and young people of seventy”. Amal Kiran is a young man of ninety, still looking towards the future.

Even his fall three and a half years ago, in which he emulated Sri Aurobindo’s famous accident and broke exactly the same thigh-bone, turned into an opportunity for a spiritual breakthrough. Amal has described the unprecedented peace and bliss he began to experience even physically while lying in complicated traction in the Ashram’s Nursing Home. However excruciatingly painful and apparently catastrophic the accident may have been, both the awkward fall and its inner sequel might be summed up in a short sentence found at the beginning of an entry in Sri Aurobindo’s *Record of Yoga*:⁷ “Sudden advance in several directions.”

“Doing verily works in this world,” says the Upanishad,⁸ “one should wish to live a hundred years”—not out of mere attachment to bodily life, but to fulfil to the maximum the purpose of our earthly existence. Amal is still “doing verily works in this world” with hardly diminished energy, as he continues to edit an issue of *Mother India* each month and oversees the publication of one after another of his many books which have waited so long to see the light of day—five are now in the press and no less than seventeen still standing in line for their turn. At least a hundred productive years, then, we may surely anticipate for him even if the time has not yet arrived for Amal Kiran to become, in transformed flesh and blood, Amar Kiran: “the undying ray”.

RICHARD HARTZ

References

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- 2 *Ibid* , p 137
- 3 Quoted in *The Wonder That is K D Sethna alias Amal Kiran*, p 23
- 4 The Mother’s talk of 5 April 1951
- 5 *Savitri* (1993), p 615
- 6 *On Education*, Collected Works of the Mother, vol 12, p 259
- 7 Entry of 3 July 1915, *Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research*, April 1992, p 6
- 8 Isha Upanishad, verse 2, translated by Sri Aurobindo, *The Upanishads* (1981), p 19

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

(Continued from the issue of March 1995)

56. THE DANCER'S DAUGHTER

"YOUR paramour is axed to death. His wife has burnt down the city of Madurai," reported a well-wisher.

The words kept ringing in Madhavi's ears as tears cascaded down her cheeks.

Madhavi adored Kannaki for her valiant action. If Kannaki, the most chaste woman, could burn down a city, Madhavi, the dancer, could burn down her desires at least.

"I will... I will," Madhavi said in a determined tone and looked at her teenage daughter named Manimekalai by Kovalan.

"I am disgusted with the world, my dear," said Madhavi amidst her tears. "I've decided to spend the evening of my life in prayer and meditation. A Buddhist nunnery will be the right place for me."

"For us," corrected Manimekalai.

Manimekalai was permitted to stay in the nunnery under the influence of her mother, now a Buddhist nun.

Employed in the service of gathering flowers, Manimekalai used to go to the flower gardens, far and near. It was on one such occasion that the son of the ruling monarch chanced to see her.

The mere sight of Manimekalai excited the prince beyond all reason. He grew madly passionate and searched for a way to satisfy a desire he had never felt before.

Seeing the prince Udayakumaran come in quest of her, Manimekalai shut herself up in a nearby crystal pavilion.

The prince went away disappointed.

Manimekalai was unaware of what had happened to her. But when she woke up she found herself on the island of Manipallavam.

She squeezed her eyelids and blinked. Afraid, she looked around. As she was about to cry for help, there came into her view the seat of Buddha.

Happy at heart, she went around the seat and prayed.

In answer to her prayer, there appeared before her a tutelary deity, after whom she had herself been named.

"I only brought you here," said the deity, "to tell you of your past and future... Udayakumaran, who was after you in the flower garden and from whom you wanted to escape, is none else than your husband from a previous birth. But you are not born to lead a family life in this birth. You have a mission in this life."

Manimekalai listened to the deity in all humility.

“This mortal body,” continued the deity, “is fuelled by food. Your mission in life is to feed the poverty-stricken multitude. No stomach should go hungry. You’ll be blessed with an inexhaustible bowl of alms, called *Amudhasurabi*.¹”

Manimekalai smiled and continued to listen to the deity.

“And to do this great service to needy mankind, you’ll have to go to far-off places too. Therefore you are blessed with two more boons,” so saying the deity moved closer to Manimekalai and chanted a couple of mantras.

Manimekalai listened with rapt attention. As soon as the chanting was finished the deity said: “Remember... These mantras are meant for your ears only... If you chant the first mantra, you can take any form of your choice, beyond anyone’s recognition. If you chant the second, you can go to any place of your choice by travelling in the air.”

The deity vanished. Manimekalai moved deeper into the island.

“What’s in store for me on this miraculous island?” she asked herself as she came nearer to the pond called Komuki. She sat on its banks, stretched herself and conveniently slept.

A gurgling noise shook her out of sleep.

She looked up. The sky was a brilliant silver from the full moon. Her eyes moved around and then remained glued to a spot in the pond. Ripples and bubbles and the sounds were vying with one another to tell her of the oncoming boon from the bottom of the pond.

The noise stopped all of a sudden. And hey-presto! There emerged Amudhasurabi.

The inexhaustible bowl of alms raised itself above the surface of water and came floating in the air towards Manimekalai. She cupped her hands and Amudhasurabi sat snugly on them.

“It’s yours.” The voice was heavenly. “This empty bowl should be filled by none other than a chaste woman. Go to Kaviripoompattinam and you will find Ādhirai.² She is a blessed woman. Once she fills this bowl, it will be ever full and never empty.”

Manimekalai thanked the deity profusely, chanted the mantra and zoom... she was flying in the air.

At Kaviripoompattinam, Ādhirai filled the heavenly bowl, *Amudhasurabi*, and Manimekalai went about giving food to the needy.

Kayasandikai, cursed with a twelve-year long disease of excessive morbid hunger,³ happened to hear of *Amudhasurabi* and went in search of Manimekalai.

Manimekalai gave her a handful of food. Kayasandikai ate. To her great surprise her hunger was gone... gone without a trace.

¹ Refer to legend no 52

² Refer to legend no 53

³ Refer to legend no 55

Her canine appetite satiated, Kayasandikai remembered the forgotten mantra to fly in the air. And she zoomed up.

As soon as the Vidhyadharar woman left Kaviripoompattinam, Manimekalai chanted a mantra and transformed herself into Kayasandikai. This she did only to escape from Prince Udayakumaran, who was always on the look-out for her.

But the prince was clever enough to separate the fact from the fiction. One day when Manimekalai, disguised as Kayasandikai, went about providing food to the poor, the prince followed her, all the time ogling at her.

Just at that moment, Kanjanan descended from the sky in search of his wife Kayasandikai. The sight of the prince following Kayasandikai made him jealous at heart. He pulled out his sword.

Prince Udayakumaran fell down dead.

It took some time for Kanjanan to understand the truth of the matter. He felt sorry for his action and ascended into the sky.

The king, when he happened to hear of the murder of the prince, threw Manimekalai behind bars.

But the queen didn't want to leave the mendicant at that. She wanted to avenge the murder of her son in her own way. She requested her husband to release Manimekalai and hand her over to her.

The king obliged.

The queen gave a grand welcome to the mendicant and said: "Sorry for the unruly action of my husband, the king. He does not know your worth. As a recompense, I request you to stay with me as my royal guest for a few days. I'll be benefitted by your stay here if you teach me the right way of life."

"I am honoured, Your Majesty!" said Manimekalai.

That same day Manimekalai had the honour of dining with the queen.

The next day the angry queen punished her physician with fifty lashes on his bare back.

"Spare me, your Majesty!" the physician was heard yelling in pain as the punishment was meted out to him. "I gave you the appropriate herbal potion. Whosoever takes it is bound to go mad within an hour. And there is no antidote for it. I am sure I gave you the right potion."

"I'm sure I have administered the potion to the mendicant. Twenty-four hours have passed. But Manimekalai shows no sign of insanity... You deserve the punishment," she said and moved to her chamber.

It was true that the physician gave the queen the right kind of potion. It was true that the queen mixed it with the food offered to Manimekalai. It was also true that Manimekalai ate it. But neither the physician nor the queen knew that the potion would fail in the case of people who meditate... for they have a complete control over their mind.

The queen then sent a young man to Manimekalai's chamber in the dead of

night with instructions to molest her and thereby defile her sanctity.

But Manimekalai, who saw a young man approaching her with evil intent, transformed herself into a very hefty man. The young man ran for his life.

The queen then had Manimekalai confined in a dungeon. She expected her to die of suffocation in that dark airless place.

But the yoga she had practised in the nunnery helped her to survive such an ordeal.

The queen shivered at the sight of Manimekalai, who stood hale and hearty after a fortnight's stay in the dungeon.

"Forgive me, O mendicant! Forgive this sinner. I troubled you only to avenge the death of my son, whom I loved much. Forgive me for my ignorant act," pleaded the queen amidst her tears.

"You are weeping over the death of your son... Do you weep for his body or for his soul?" asked Manimekalai.

The queen blinked.

"If you weep for his body, why did you cremate it at the burning ghat? Why didn't you keep it in your palace? And if you weep for his soul, have you ever seen it in your life? Do you know into whose body it has entered now? If you have love for your dead son, that is, for his soul, you should be affectionate to all lives on earth, since you are not sure what body it has chosen to enter."

The queen learnt her lesson and released the mendicant.

Manimekalai wandered throughout the country feeding the hungry with food and the listeners with spiritual knowledge.

(More legends on the way)

P. RAJA

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Deshpande, R. Y. 1994. *Under the Raintree*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pages 37, Rs. 40.

UNDER the Raintree of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram 'with all its million branches / As if beckoning its own infinity' are sheltered the devotee-birds like Amal Kiran, Nirodbaran and Deshpande who have gone there 'from far away to invite / The ever-wakeful dreams of light / And what so long unseen unknown / To come in a rain of delight' (*Raintree*: 31) Here is Deshpande's third collection of poems, 37 in number, precisely lyrics wherein the ephemeral takes an ascent to the lofty through the mutuality of the Integral Yoga. The general mood pervading the collection is that of a willing resignation of the earthly in favour of a spiritual transformation. Time and Death loom large in the poet's mind since he is waiting for a call from his Master to become part of the Infinite and the Timeless and of eternity and immortality. The Light and the Shade crisscross his mind. The Sun (a symbol that figures throughout) and the Stars twinkle in the firmament of his spiritual consciousness that has been initiated and nurtured for years by his twin Gurus, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Deshpande's mystic vision is clearer in this collection than in his previous two. The way the poems have been chronologically arranged seems to indicate suggestively his spiritual evolution over the years. It is a mysticism arising out of a Divine Life and an intuition spiritualised to the core.

Generally the major approach of the Indian to poetry has always been spiritual. Inheritor of a past that is spiritually sublime, the Indian poet cannot escape looking at life through a spiritual aesthesis. There is ever a soaring upwards to higher reaches of consciousness. It is more so in the case of Aurobindonian lyricists. As birds of the same feather, they have repeatedly achieved this ascent to a higher consciousness. Even an apparently common experience gets a spiritual elevation and transforms itself into a heavenward-groping mood and ultimately into an ardent prayer. The written word, charged with the poet's experience of man, nature and the twin Rishis of the Ashram, is meant to be a stairway to the Infinite. Through his Aurobindonian lyrics, Deshpande tries to transcend what is human, seek the Divine Word and find inner peace and spiritual enlightenment. The appropriate approach has already been outlined by his Master in *Savitri*:

This world is a beginning and a base
Where Life and Mind erect their structured dreams;
An unborn Power must build reality.
A deathbound littleness is not all we are.
Immortal our forgotten vastnesses

Await discovery in our summit selves;
Unmeasured breadths and depths of being are ours.

Anchoring his poetic sensibility in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga in which the physical and the spiritual are complementary to each other and not mutually exclusive, Deshpande writes poems not to be read as food for intellectual digestion but as a springing upwards for experience. Symbols abound in his poetry, represent enlightened visions in contrast to dark, shadow-like mirages. Symbolism is a twin sister of mysticism. What is unseen by the naked eye is clarified, illustrated and caught by the mind's sight through symbols. For instance, like a hill's soul experiencing 'a burning splendour of the sun,—

To lift the dark and fallen sky
Out of a depth yet unwon
For the mountaineering mystery
To conquer peak after tranquil peak (O Hill: 1)—

the poet's soul is touched by the Aurobindonian Yogic Ray and lifted by stages to the level of Transformation from its erstwhile state marked by mundane afflictions. The poet's work is not yet done here since

No gleaming call
I hear in the profound
Beckoning me
To shoreless sound. (I Have No Ship: 2)

He laments that he has 'no ship / Built with the rays of thy sun / To voyage far / When work is done.' So he sincerely wishes that 'The ancient bell / Must ring with utter ease / And gather tides / In thee to cease.' The outer sight of Kanchinjanga creates a spiritual stir in him and embeds a thirst for merging with the Infinite:

One day I must cross these great distances
Suddenly leaping over all whitenesses
And claim your grandiose proximity
When a serene thought embraces
Miracle of the upsoaring infinity. (Kanchinjanga: 4)

A committed, dedicated and evangelistic Aurobindonian, Deshpande has set his heart and mind on whatever things are lovely and he has experienced many times a great joy. The exterior rhythm of a thousand sparrows quickening 'Early hues of the morn / With ceaseless chirping everywhere / Secret name

Sri Aurobindo will show you the way if you have burning faith in him.

The key is splendid and sure
 When absolutely still
 You wait upon the truest
 In his luminous will. (The Great Key: 25)

The Mother's benediction makes the task easier. She dwells 'in the deep and living beat of the heart.' She is omniscient and omnipresent. 'The honeyed tongues of flame / Even in silence blaze / As through the night stars in their pilgrim march / Her name chantingly praise.' The poet fervently hopes that he may be able to reach the heights of the Infinite since the Mother rains her blessings on his soul infinitely and his body too responds to the sublime thrill:

Her smile is a wonder
 That kindles in each cell
 The alchemic truthfulness of a great and sunlit day
 Divinity to dwell. (Her Name: 5)

The Mother is 'a deathless rose'; 'the joy of haloed boon / Treasured in soul's faith, / As if leaning from the sky a fiery sun, / Entered into body to conquer death' (Too Great is Her Gold: 36).

Her love is mirrored in a flame
 Set burning in quiet of the heart
 It has come from such a distance
 That now it would never depart. (All the Songs: 27)

Sri Aurobindo was at once the first prophet and practitioner of the Divine Word on our planet 'That has purple stirred / A silence mystic and infinite-wise....'

As if another sun from below
 And gave to this magic earth
 The completeness of its birth. (You Have Given the Word: 28)

The poem (I Could See...: 33) symbolically describes the inexplicable but experienceable mystic consciousness. It is a yogic state characterised by an illumined power of inwardness. It carries a concrete sense of some occult and spiritual Infinite. Deshpande extends a helping hand to all the souls in distress:

O restless soul, be quiet
 And listen to singing poet

That on top of the hill
You may the heart with a sky fill. (Worth A Dime: 37)

In conclusion, I would like to recommend to all readers a poet like Deshpande.
Surely you know the heart's secret

Of infinite bliss
Burns in a quintessential flame
When whitely calm all is. (Heart's Secret: 35)

Deshpande's poetry, despite its being laden with mystic connotations, ensures a pleasant reading with an aura of Wordsworthian romantic spirituality. The collection has been nicely got up with beautiful paper and print that match the poet's leaning towards spiritual perfection.

D. GNANASEKARAN

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 Sunayana Shukla

WE live in an age of marvels. We have only to look at the field of communications. If we want to speak to someone on the other side of the earth, we have only to pick up a phone and dial a number. Why only the phone, today we have the fax and the satellite television which have bridged the gap of thousands of kilometres. We have conquered the space that was until recently dividing people geographically. But, ironically, there is a terrible regression in another area. There is an absolute vacuum when it comes to the communication with our own inner spaces. Can we speak to our own inner self? How strange that the Vedic man, sitting in the middle of undisturbed nature, three thousand years ago, had found out that there is a being within us "no bigger than a man's thumb" who guides and governs our life.

How lopsided our progress is! Most people think of themselves mainly as the body and a confused mass of thoughts and feelings and sentiments. We can pass our entire life, and we do, focusing ourselves on the activities of the mind and the usual ups and downs of the passions of our vital being, without going any deeper. In fact, most people imagine the refined sentiments to be the best of themselves. But if we are fortunate enough or if the Divine Grace acts, we stumble upon our true self which is our soul, our Psychic Being.

In the integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo we have to develop all the different parts of our being. But first of all we have to know and distinguish these different parts. When we enter into this great adventure of discovering the fourth dimension of our being which is within us then we understand that the Psychic Being is the core around which all the other parts are organised.

But how to make a contact with this Psychic Being? How can one reach out to this silent person within us? In stillness and calm. By "switching off" the mind and just feeling that silence. In some moments, which are touched by the Grace, we can feel that there is something within us that has always been, something immortal. Some vague intimation tells us that this world is not new to us. We

have lived here repeatedly, in one body or another. And this part of ourselves sends us signals to guide us, but we often ignore them, because they seem to be so incomprehensible to our rational mind or simply because the voice is too faint.

We live in the outer self and our gaze is always on the external world. We pass our lives as spectators of events outside us. But if we want to know who we really are we have to make a complete about-turn and look within ourselves. "Who am I?" is a question which takes a long time to be answered.

"Who am I?" we ask, "Surely I am not the same person from birth until death. A long time ago I was a baby and after a certain number of years I will be an old person. In the years in between my way of thinking will change and so will my passions and cravings. If nothing is constant then who am I?"

This "I" is not the body since it is in a constant state of change, the cells are not the same, and even our internal organs are not the same. This "I" is also not the mind, because if we could go back in time we would be astonished to see the things we used to say or strongly believe in. "How could I think in that way?" we often exclaim when we are confronted with something we had written or said in the past. As for our vital, it changes from one day to another. When we look back and see the things we intensely desired or people we dearly loved we say, "Oh, that was not me. That was another person." So, we come back to the original question: "Who am I?" We have to accept then that there is some part of our being which is not only there from birth to death but also from one birth to another.

By reading Sri Aurobindo we are reassured that indeed the Psychic Being is seated within us, gathering into itself all the experiences of a lifetime. I say "reassured" because the question often comes to my mind: "Of what use is it to live if it is only to die?" Another recurring question in my mind is: "Why learn, why read, why achieve perfection in a skill if in the end all this will be reduced to nothing?" And most of all when I see people suffering I say, "Why all this unnecessary misery? Why must people live through difficulties brought about by no fault of theirs?"

I am satisfied with the answer which says, "Because no experience is lost. All that we gain in one life is passed on to another life and the Psychic becomes richer and more evolved. The experiences we have in the different parts of our being are gathered and their essence is stored in the Psychic Being."

And the Psychic Being is not all that secret or unknowable as we might imagine. Each one of us has surely felt that there is within us a secret garden which is always in bloom, a place where we are at peace and which is deep within us. If we have not felt this then at least we know of people who are somewhat special and who have a depth to their nature which is not there in common people. They are the ones who seem to be more alive but not in the vital way.

Our yoga, which is called the Integral Yoga, cannot even start before we are conscious of the different parts of our being and no progress can be made if this

central Psychic Being is not brought to the front. Once it becomes the guiding principle all life is filled with its sweetness and light.

To end my speech I would like to quote a few lines from *Savitri* on this subject:

“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.”¹

¹ *Savitri* (Cent Ed Vol 29), p 486