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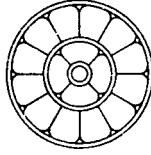
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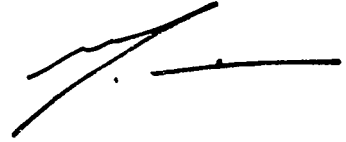
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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Editor K D SETHNA
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WORDS OF THE MOTHER

STEPPING BACK

MOST of you live on the surface of your being, exposed to the touch of external influences. You live almost projected, as it were, outside your own body, and when you meet some unpleasant being similarly projected you get upset. The whole trouble arises out of your not being accustomed to stepping back. You must always step back into yourself—learn to go deep within—step back and you will be safe. Do not lend yourself to the superficial forces which move in the outside world. Even if you are in a hurry to do something, step back for a while and you will discover to your surprise how much sooner and with what greater success your work can be done. If someone is angry with you, do not be caught in his vibrations but simply step back and his anger, finding no support or response, will vanish. Always keep your peace, resist all temptation to lose it. Never decide anything without stepping back, never speak a word without stepping back, never throw yourself into action without stepping back. All that belongs to the ordinary world is impermanent and fugitive, so there is nothing in it worth getting upset about. What is lasting, eternal, immortal and infinite—that indeed is worth having, worth conquering, worth possessing. It is Divine Light, Divine Love, Divine Life—it is also Supreme Peace, Perfect Joy and All-Mastery upon earth with the Complete Manifestation as the crowning. When you get the sense of the relativity of things, then whatever happens you can step back and look; you can remain quiet and call on the Divine Force and wait for an answer. Then you will know exactly what to do. Remember, therefore, that you cannot receive the answer before you are very peaceful. Practise that inner peace, make at least a small beginning and go on in your practice until it becomes a habit with you.

(Collected Works of the Mother, Centenary Edition, Vol. 3, p 160)

SRI AUROBINDO

THE AIM OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA

To know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilit or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realise the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation,—this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in Matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution.

(Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 18, pp 1-2)

“OH, THAT’S ONLY POETRY!”

IN a certain class of so-called sensible people, the most damning judgment that can be passed on any idea or phrase is. “Oh, that’s only poetry!” Well, this particular phrase is, without the least doubt, the opposite of all that one would consider poetic: it has no imaginative fire, no power to cast a spell by its words, no subtlety of rhythm. But has it even a core of sensible idea?

Poetry and a Beautiful Face

What is the crime with which poetry is charged? The crime is precisely its quality of haunting word-music carrying with it a vision that holds the mind in an ecstasy. Such a magical influence, it is said, takes one’s thought away from things that matter in the actual world, and sends it roaming among unrealities. But do not the detractors of poetry see that whatever it does is primarily by means of beauty and that there is no reason why a poem’s beauty should be condemned as a slip-hole into unreality while no one condemns the beauty of a woman’s face which makes a man turn round again and again—an exercise he deems quite worth while for the sake of such ravishing perfection? Surely, if beauty is real and valuable when perceived in a human being, it is just as real and valuable when its marvel leaps at us from that rarer creation, a faultless poem?

Has Beauty Any Use?

An objection may be raised: “A beautiful woman is useful. what use is poetry?” But this is to shift the ground of the argument. We are talking of beauty. What is the use of a woman’s beauty? A woman as such has many functions—she may be of use as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother, as a friend, as a member of society. Her beauty, in itself, has no use. What is used is never her beauty, for to no use, as commonly defined, can beauty be put. The same is true of the Niagara Falls or a Himalayan summit or the Lake of Geneva as of a human being. They can be used scientifically, but not as specimens of beauty. And when we choose a beautiful place to build our house in, or hang up beautiful things in our house, we may serve various ends but the sheer sense of the beautiful can be justified by none of them. It is justified only because it gives a specific inner experience which we feel to be somehow enriching life. So, everything that is beautiful is, as far as use is concerned, on an essentially equal footing.

“A Light that Never Was...”

One may still argue “Poetry brings about beauty by expressing purely imaginary things that have no bearing on earth-realities, ‘a light that never was

on sea or land.' Is not a dwelling upon such matters a distraction from vital issues?" The answer is: "Even if poetry did express a light of this kind, would not our acceptance of beauty as a valuable experience point also to the value of that light? After all, beauty does not produce just a sensation of pleasure: it brings a 'transport' in one degree or another, a thrilled amazement as if at an ideality that is more than of the earth, a response as though to some supremely blissful Secret of the universe. The more, therefore, we have in beauty the power of a light that never was on sea or land, the more truly and profoundly do we have the presence of the beautiful and the greater is the power to enrich life and to manage earth-realities with the touch of a hidden Perfection."

Winged Journey

Besides, all poetry is not of the mystical order and does not express even a seemingly unearthly substance. No doubt, it weaves a chain of similes and metaphors which are often a surprise to the realist sworn to call a spade a spade if not a "bloody shovel." And, as the familiar Latin tag tells us, every simile limps—that is, falls short in some respect of commonly observed straightforward fact. But if similes and metaphors limp, they also have the power to fly—maybe because limping interferes with walking but not with making a winged journey! Now, what is the benefit of flying? It shortens the long laborious route taken by feet that are not, like the Mercury-feet of poetic metre, shod with pinions. This shortening of the usual route brings distant objects or ideas closer, removing the gap of difference, of strangeness, that lay between them. The sudden closeness is expressed in poetry by similes and metaphors comparing apparently dissimilar things, and discovering in them a kinship that pulls open our eyes to wonders and significances in life we are liable to ignore with our pedestrian mind-movements habituated to forget one thing before reaching another that is far away.

Take any fine burst of poetry, as an instance:

Love took up the harp of life and smote on all the chords with might—
Smote the chord of Self that, trembling, passed in music out of sight!

All of us have seen a chord vibrating so rapidly when plucked that it becomes invisible; still, Tennyson alone could use this simple observation to lay bare the exquisite loss of selfishness, the thrill of freedom from our ego, that is caused by the harmonising touch of love. It is a flight of the imagination with the help of metaphors, limping metaphors, yet how unerring and revelatory its quick reaching out from fact to deeper fact!

Poetry and Action

Poetry, it is also argued, is often like a dope unnerving us from effective action of a practical kind. It may give us a rich inner life that brings a high quality of happiness and harmony, but does it render us dynamic? I am afraid history provides evidence to disappoint the enemies of poetry. Several of the most tempestuous men of action have been those whose nerves tingled to the magnificent sweep of vivid verse. Cromwell passed his days constantly under the spell of translated Hebrew poetry—the Old Testament. The Moors rushed across half the earth on the breath of the Koran which at its best has all the rhythmic word-passion of poetry. And what was the chief spur to that terrific outburst of energy known as the French Revolution? *La Marseillaise*—a poem, a mere poem! What was the motive-power behind India’s awakening to the need for freedom? The brain may have rattled with political slogans, but the heart throbbed to the “mantra” of *Vande Mataram*!

Is it even true that the poets themselves are not men of action? Aeschylus fought at Marathon Dante was not only a politician but also took part in the cavalry charge at Campaldino Goethe acted as an administrator in Weimar T. S. Eliot shared in business concerns. Sri Aurobindo was for six years the active leader of Nationalist Bengal against British rule. Hardly any great poet has been a mere lotus-eater.

What high poetry does is not to make one turn away from the world’s work but to bring to its maker as well as to its hearer a refinement in their dynamic parts. And this because of the very nature of this art.

The fact is that sterling poetry is born of the highest activity possible to the human consciousness—the activity of that mysterious gift, intuition. Intuition, of course, is not confined to poetry: it can take many forms, yet when it comes on poetry’s breath of rhythmic ecstasy it does most intensely its work of seeing deep and seeing far and gripping both the inner and the outer. It may miss its aim in us if we are not properly prepared. But in itself it is above blame and is most precious. So, when it is said, “Oh, that’s only poetry!” the truest retort is: “Why, what more can anything ever hope to be?”

K. D. SETHNA
(AMAL KIRAN)

“THE LORD’S PRAYER”

TODAY is Sunday, and something made me think of the prayer that is being repeated in Christian churches all over the world, in different versions and different languages, but always essentially the same. It is called “The Lord’s Prayer” because it is based on some words attributed to Jesus, and many Christians repeat it every day. So far as I remember, the version I learned in my childhood runs like this:

Our Father
which art in Heaven,
hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those that trespass against us
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil,
for Thine are the power and the glory.
for ever and ever
Amen

Apart from an irreverent and irrelevant memory of a small boy reported to have believed that God is called Harold Witchart (“Our Father Witchart in Heaven, Harold be thy name...”), this prayer, which is not without beauty and significance, made me think of Bede Griffiths’ remark about the difference in Christian and Hindu perceptions of the Divine: he says that he once asked a group of young Indian children “Where is God?” While the Christian children unhesitatingly pointed skywards, the Hindu ones equally spontaneously indicated their hearts.

It seems as if a prayer like this, repeated again and again, not only *expresses* a concept of the Divine, and an attitude towards “Him”, but also *constructs* one. Into my mind flow some words which express more accurately, I think, the feelings of a soul touched by the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother:

Our Mother and Beloved
seated in the heart of all existences
we remember You with gratitude and happiness

Help us to recognise You giving us everything we need, at every moment of every day.

Teach us compassion—
the compassion You pour out constantly to all Your children

Protect us and guide us through all the ways of life.

Help us to become aware of Your will and purpose
so that we follow it ever more gladly and fully
until we no longer feel in any way separate from You
because our whole consciousness and nature
is filled to overflowing with You alone.

May the whole earth awaken to the sweetness of Your embrace!
Tathastu.

SHRADDHAVAN

MUSINGS ON PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

(Continued from the issue of April 1996)

In Vain

MILLENNIUMS are followed by millenniums. Yet, unheedful of the flight of Time, like the constant refrain of a madman, we keep on repeating endlessly our inane round of thoughts and activities. Some sort of action is necessary to keep living but in addition to such necessary activities we humans add an ant-like incessant activity. A mad merry-go-round of thoughts and feelings goes on throughout a hundred lives. Still more chaotic is the life's outer field. We rush here and there tilting at the windmills of our current goals which inevitably lead us to another and yet another thing to become agitated about. And if we find nothing pressing to do, we march on other countries and indulge in incessant warfare with them. By our ingenuity we have turned these wars into hell's worst scenarios. The more the bounties of Mother Nature, the more we demand of her, or rather we strip and loot her. Where are the life-sustaining dense forests capable of absorbing all the human poisons? Who has fouled those limpid waters rushing in riverbeds to replenish the parched lands? And where is the hand which humans used to extend to others without calculation, without expecting a reward? Where is gone the rest and content of our days?

A terrible listlessness and urge for activity has pervaded humanity. By the help of speeding motorised vehicles, by the means of instant communication at our disposal, by the aeroplanes and helicopters, we try to cram the work of a dozen lives in one. Yet how has this plethora of activities profited us? In what way are we happier and purer than our forefathers who lived in hermitages? How is the quality of a president living in a Rashtrapati Bhavan or a White House better than that of a simple householder? Are these leaders of humanity wiser than the sages living in a hut? If anything, we, the most spoiled citizens of this century, are the poorest, having lost our soul to the million courtesans of supposed success. Nothing sates and satisfies the modern humans, who would not hesitate to bankrupt their opponents for gain, never pausing to think of the injury and heartbreak they cause which leads to suicide, to drinking and drugs and crime.

We humans have lost all foresight. We imagine the Divine is very partial to us and will condone all our errors and even our wanton cruelties. Otherwise how could humanity have ignored the law of Karma or forgotten the day of Kayamat or Judgment, in which most human beings believe in some measure? Who is perpetuating the scores of wars in Rwanda, Angola and Bosnia? Who after all is responsible for the decades-old perpetual warfare in the Middle East, the horrible October Revolution, the terrible atrocities of the Great Leap Forward

of China? How is it that there is never any dearth of even highly sophisticated military grade weapons at any of the 50 or so warfronts of the world? And who supports the avaricious dictators and drug barons?

The picture is too dark to be contemplated with complacency. When in the thirties the hour of destruction by the Forces of Evil neared, human beings listened to their soul and fought the Adversary as one during the Second World War. Yet after that Divine Moment of valour and glory has passed, we continue in our old egoistic and gory ways, as if peace and contentment have vanished from human hearts. On November 29, 1913, the Mother wrote,

Why all this noise, all this movement, this vain and futile agitation; why this whirlwind carrying men away like a swarm of flies caught in a storm? How sad is the sight of all that wasted energy, all those useless efforts! When will they stop dancing like puppets on a string, pulled they know not by whom or what? When will they find time to sit quietly and go within, to recollect themselves and open their inner door which screens from them Thy priceless treasures, Thy infinite boons? ..

How sorrowful and miserable seems to me their life of ignorance and obscurity, their life of mad agitation and unprofitable dispersion!—when one single spark of Thy sublime light, one single drop of Thy divine love can transform this suffering into an ocean of delight!

We are forever agitating and in the process do irreparable damage to the world and to ourselves, the worst result being a cleavage between our inner and outer being. For some ephemeral or even imagined gain we lose the Lord's *priceless treasures* and *infinite boons*. And what do we gain if in the process of gaining the world's riches we lose our Divine Birthright? All here is a mixed bag of prizes. The riches of the world never quench our inner thirst. Sometimes we wonder how is it that the Lord has not or does not lose patience with us and why does the Divine Mother trouble herself with us? With an unwavering love she prayed to the Lord for us, beings totally unworthy of her solicitude.

O Lord, my prayer soars towards Thee: May they know at last Thy peace and that calm and irresistible strength which comes of an immutable serenity—the privilege of those whose eyes have been opened and who are able to contemplate Thee in the flaming core of their being.

But the hour of Thy manifestation is come.

And soon hymns of gladness will burst forth on every side.

Before the solemnity of this hour I bow down in devotion

Here lies our salvation, here is hope with its iridescent colours and joyous wings. The Mother pleads and prays to the Lord on our behalf and she would

have us become like those seers *who are able to contemplate Thee in the flaming core of their being.*

The Epiphany is near. O Human Race! Let not the Hour of God pass by in vain.

In Her Hands

Howsoever hard we may try to ascend in a straight line, our feet keep slipping on the greasy slopes of desires. With each hill conquered, another more rugged and sheer faces us. It is like a race where winning is made more and more difficult following each success. In the unending marathons of life, Time's curvature becomes more bewildering, the maze keeps extending beyond the limits of our endurance. Many a time we sit in dejection, hanging our heads in shame, yet we cannot quit, for going back is not possible, is not acceptable. The green valleys of life lure us no more, the ordinariness of things palls, yet the small habits of our being, the tiny toeholds of security—a nice home, a congenial work, some soulmates walking the same path and having similar aspirations, become an obstruction. Some, who have renounced family, wealth, power and prestige, become glued to the midlands of the Godward journey. A peaceful hermitage, a few disciples and the company of some *sattwic* saints holds them back from making a total surrender, a sincere and integral progress. They try to protect their congenial environment at the cost of further progress.

But on this highest of paths even a tiny latitude is not allowed. The Divine Mother with supreme compassion breaks our worlds of make-believe. As long as anything or anybody is needed for us to be happy, we shall be unworthy of Grace. When the tortures by the enemies of the Lord, the most contrary and irritating circumstances, even a hostile world and a sterile environment cannot break our concentration, then and then only are we worthy of the *summit*.

The needed courage and concentration can be had only by the Grace of the Lord. On December 13, 1913, the Mother wrote,

Give me Thy Light, O Lord, grant that I do not fall into any error. Grant that the infinite reverence, the utter devotion, that intense and profound love I bring to Thee may be radiant, convincing, contagious, and be awakened in every heart.

O Lord, Eternal Master, Thou art my Light and my Peace; guide my steps, open my eyes, illumine my heart, and lead me on the paths that go straight to Thee.

O Lord, Lord, grant that I may have no other will than Thine and that all my acts may be an expression of Thy divine law.

A great Light floods my whole being, and I am no longer conscious of anything but Thee....

Peace, peace, peace upon all the earth.

Indeed so *radiant, convincing, contagious* was the Love our Mother manifested that thousands were inspired to surrender to her all that they had or could be, to advance on the paths of divinity. She created a small heaven, here, on this earth, where the Dark Lords rule. That selfishness could not enter some hearts, that some of her children became akin to high Gods and even went beyond, was due to the great Light with which she flooded them. She became the perfect Intermediary between the earth-children and the Lord.

The great transformation goes on. We can become conscious of her high ways and great power if we would come out of the prison of our ego and hold on to her feet

The Power of Divine Love

Intellectual knowledge, in general, instead of being a help is an obstacle on the path of the spirit. The pundit believes he knows all that is known or can be known about the Divine. Therefore he finds it easy to sit in judgment on all spiritual phenomena, which are unknown to him. This belief in the omniscience of scriptural knowledge is false on two obvious counts. Firstly, the Divine is Limitless—beyond the limits of Time and Space. That is why he cannot be imprisoned in or limited by any manifestation whether temporal or spatial. It might please the Divine to negate in his later manifestations all that he has established in his earlier ones. After all Sri Rama banished Sita because she had lived imprisoned in Ravana's Lanka, thus opening to question her chastity. Yet in his later Avatar the Divine as Sri Krishna married 80,000 princesses who had been imprisoned by the Asura Bana. Sri Rama established the ideal of love for one queen, one woman; Sri Krishna had numerous spouses. Sri Rama established, like the first of the ten commandments, that obedience to father and mother was of supreme importance while the earlier Avatar Parashuram had beheaded his mother on the orders of his father.

Various religions throw various tenets into prominence. These tenets may differ greatly. The truth is that the Divine holds all contraries in Himself and any number of manifestations cannot exhaust the glories of the Inexhaustible. Our mental knowledge is mostly limited by the manifested phenomenon and is therefore partial and circumscribed. The lack of understanding of the fact that the Divine is ever expanding, ever growing, is the cause of all the religious rigidity, bigotry and fanatical bloodshed in the world. That is why the Mother wrote in a prayer on December 16, 1913,

Those who follow the path of intellect may have a very high and true conception: they may have all the information about the true life, the life One with Thee, but they do not *know* it, they have no inner experience of that life and are ignorant of all contact with Thee. These men whose knowledge is intellectual and whose action is confined to a construction

which they believe to be the best, are the most difficult of all to convert; it is harder to awaken the consciousness of the Divine in them than in any other person of goodwill. Love alone can work this miracle, for love opens all doors, penetrates every wall, clears every obstacle. And a little true love does more than the most beautiful speeches

Here, the Mother is not speaking of the emotion commonly called love, which the poets have extolled to the heights and human passions have dragged into the mud. It is not the urge to devour the object of our desire, physically in the animal creation, emotionally in the humans. She is talking of that sublime state which holds the stars in their course, which binds the atoms to become the nucleus of this Creation. She is talking of the emotion which makes the Divine descend into this creation of Matter and hold it on its upward course. She writes,

Pure and disinterested love, Thy love in what we are able to perceive and manifest of it, is the sole key that can open all hearts that seek for Thee...

Lord, let this pure flower of love blossom in me, that it may give its fragrance to all those who come near us, and that this fragrance may sanctify them.

In this love lie peace and joy, the fount of all strength and all realisation. It is the infallible healer, the supreme consoler; it is the victor, the sovereign teacher

O Lord, my sweet Master, Thou whom I adore in silence and to whom I have entirely consecrated myself, Thou who governest my life, kindle in my heart the flame of Thy pure love that it may burn like a glowing brazier, consuming all imperfections and transforming into a comforting warmth and radiating light the dead wood of egoism and the black coals of ignorance.

Her prayer was granted, she became a golden glow of this supreme love which burnt out all the intellectual *dead wood and black coals of ignorance* not only amongst her disciples, but in the world of intellect at large. Today, the intellectual creeds of the world stand discredited. There is no panacea for all ills. All such creeds as Marxism are being flouted by the intelligentsia. There is a turning within, a search at the very source of life. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, after the materialistic prosperity's resultant degradation, even the die-hard materialists are turning within, where rules the divine Love through Unity in Identity. The Mother closes this prayer with the sweet invocation,

O Lord, I turn towards Thee with a devotion at once joyful and solemn and I implore Thee:

Let Thy love manifest,
Thy reign come.
May Thy peace govern the world.

In spite of the present chaos and bale, when violence rules the world, the Law of divine Love will triumph. The world is paying the debt of Rudra before Vishnu manifests.

(To be continued)

SHYAM KUMARI

THE VISION AND WORK OF INDIAN CULTURE

THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

INDIAN Culture had a great vision of life and made an equally great attempt to realise its vision in the collective life of the community. Its vision of human life and existence is the deepest, highest and greatest ever conceived by the human mind; its attempt to mould the collective life of the community according to its ideals is the noblest attempt ever made in the history of human civilisation. The spiritual vision of our Vedic sages has still a living relevance for the future evolution of humanity. To rediscover this vision, give it a new form suited to the conditions of the modern age and illumine the consciousness of humanity with its creative light are some of the future tasks of Indian Culture. But in its attempt to realise its vision in the collective life of the ancient Indian Civilisation it achieved only a limited and partial success. Here comes the most important part of the future work and mission of Indian Culture. We have to discover the cause of our past failures and find the right and corrective remedy in conception as well as in execution. This article is an attempt to trace the vision and work of Indian Culture from its past to the future—its spiritual vision of life and human development, its great attempt to shape the communal life according to its vision and ideal, the causes of its limited success and the new and greater vision of the future of India and the world revealed by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The Spiritual Vision of Life

It has been said over and over again that India is the land of “spirituality”. But the word “spiritual” is nowadays used indiscriminately for anything and everything beyond or below the realm of science and reason, from mysticism, the occult and the paranormal, mental or moral idealism, religious and emotional fervour, to psychism of all kinds. So first of all we have to be clear about the meaning of the word “spirituality”. Sri Aurobindo explains with a luminous and crystal-clear precision the meaning of spirituality contrasting it with what it is not:

“... it must therefore be emphasised that spirituality is not a high intellectuality, not idealism, not an ethical turn of mind or moral purity and austerity, not religiosity or an ardent and exalted emotional fervour, not even a compound of all these excellent things; a mental belief, creed or faith, an emotional aspiration, a regulation of conduct according to a religious or ethical formula are not spiritual achievement and experience. These things are of considerable value to mind and life, they are of value to the spiritual evolution itself as preparatory movements disciplining, purifying or giving a suitable form to the nature; but

they still belong to the mental evolution,—the beginning of a spiritual realisation, experience, change is not yet there. Spirituality is in its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul which is other than our mind, life, and body, an inner aspiration to know, to feel, to be that, to enter into contact with the greater Reality beyond and pervading the universe which inhabits also our own being, to be in communion with It and union with It, and a turning, a conversion, a transformation of our whole being as a result of the aspiration, the contact, the union, a growth or waking into a new becoming or new being, a new self, a new nature.”¹

The important point to note in the above passage from Sri Aurobindo is that morality or religion is not spirituality. They are part of the mental evolution of man or, in other words, they are the expressions of the aspiration of the higher mind of Man for the higher values of life. But they are not able to bring any decisive transformation in the human consciousness and nature. At best they are able to effect some refinement and purification of the external being of man and impose a precarious and forced control on his lower nature, but not able to change the root and source of his life and action. We will not go into the reasons for this inability of the mind and the inherent limitations of the human mental consciousness. This will be discussed in detail in subsequent articles. But in general the approach of the human mind tends towards modification and control of the outer action and behaviour of Man through machinery and formula without making any attempt to discover and transform the root cause of his behaviour and action. This remains untouched and unchanged by the superficial refinement of the outer life brought in by the mental culture. So what we need at present is to discover and release into human life a new power greater than mind which can deliver mind from its own limitation and transform life at its roots and not merely modify behaviour at the surface. The Indian culture—as well as the spiritual and mystic traditions all over the world—assures us that such a power exists within each human being and it is the very nature and power of our own true, highest and universal self and spirit. The individual life and mind are the expressive instruments of this spirit and all the energies in man and Nature and the universe are multiform expressions of its creative energy. To discover, grow into and live in the consciousness of this one Spirit and Self in all and to make the individual and collective life a living image and manifest expression of the Spirit is the highest aim of Indian culture. The spiritual and cultural history of India is a glorious story of the discovery of the Spirit and the great attempt to mould the individual and collective life in the light and power of the higher values of the Spirit. This is the spiritual conception of life of the Indian culture which Sri Aurobindo describes succinctly as

“India’s central conception is that of the Eternal, the Spirit here incased in

matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas and realm of conscious morality, *dharma*. This achievement, this victory over unconscious matter develops its lines, enlarges its scope, elevates its levels until the increasing manifestation of the sattwic or spiritual portion of the vehicle of mind enables the individual mental being in man to identify himself with the pure spiritual consciousness beyond Mind. India's social system is built upon this conception, her philosophy formulates it; her religion is an aspiration to the spiritual consciousness and its fruits; her art and literature have the same upward look; her whole Dharma or law of being is founded upon it. Progress she admits, but this spiritual progress, not the externally self-unfolding process of an always more and more prosperous and efficient material civilisation. It is her founding of life upon this exalted conception and her urge towards the spiritual and the eternal that constitute the distinct value of her civilisation. And it is her fidelity, with whatever human shortcomings, to this highest ideal that has made her people a nation apart in the human world."²

The greatest achievement of the Indian culture, its most precious contribution to humanity is this spiritual vision of life and the systematic development of the great Science of Yoga to realise this spiritual ideal in the consciousness and life of the individual. The undying vitality of our Indian Civilisation lies in this unbroken tradition of spiritual quest, discovery and realisation which continues even upto this modern age exemplified in the realisations of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The Indian Vision of Human Development

To realise this ideal in the individual and collective life, Indian culture evolved a scheme of human development based on the four aims of human life called in the Indian tradition Purusharthas. These aims are: fulfilment of the material and economic needs and interests, Artha, satisfaction of vital desires and enjoyment, Kama; mental, moral and cultural development or, in other words, development in the realm of "ideas and conscious morality", Dharma; and finally, the realisation of the ultimate spiritual aim of life, Moksha, spiritual release and self-realisation. These aims correspond roughly to the physical, vital, mental and spiritual needs of the human being. They form a system of shared values, accepted almost by all the sections of Hindu Culture.

Thus we can see that this culture is not otherworldly and ascetic as it is normally understood, especially in the West. The legitimate needs and desires of man are not rejected but accepted and given their right place in an integrated evolutionary perspective. Life is not denied, but used as a means and field of

experience for the evolutionary progress of the soul. The needs and desires of each level of the human being have to be fulfilled before he can rise to a higher level. The satisfaction of the natural needs and propensities of his physical, vital and mental being and the fulfilment of his duties and responsibilities are not denied in an ascetic spirit: they are accepted as indispensable parts of his evolutionary growth and development.

But Indian culture insists that there must be balance, restraint and discipline in whatever we do; the fulfilment of the Artha-Kama needs and desires of the individual and community must not be allowed to degenerate into greed and lust. Even in the satisfaction of the desires of the lower nature, or in the fulfilment of our social function there have to be the governing control of the enlightened reason and will and the uplifting guidance of some mental, moral, aesthetic and professional values or in other words the discipline of Dharma. In all these stages of evolution, the individual and the community have to be constantly reminded that neither Artha nor Kama nor even Dharma is the ultimate aim of life but only a preparatory stage of progress towards the spiritual aim of Moksha. This spiritual aim, its meaning and significance have to be constantly kept alive in the individual and communal mind so that they are permeated with the aspiration to realise this spiritual goal and, when they are ready and well-equipped, the higher spiritual values find a ready acceptance and self-expression in the society. This is the Indian scheme of human development. Sri Aurobindo brings out the grandeur of this vision of development in a masterly fashion:

“A well-governed system of the individual and communal existence must be always in the first instance an ordering of the three first powers recognised by Indian thought. The claim of the natural functionings must be recognised in it to the full, the pursuit of personal and communal interest and the satisfaction of human desires as of human needs must be amply admitted and there must be an understanding combination of knowledge and labour towards these ends. But all must be controlled, uplifted and widened to greater aims by the ideal of the Dharma. And if, as India believes, there is a higher spiritual consciousness towards which man can rise, that ascent must be kept throughout in view as the supreme goal of life. The system of Indian culture at once indulged and controlled man's nature, it fitted him for his social role; it stamped on his mind the generous ideal of an accomplished humanity refined, harmonised in all its capacities, ennobled in all its members; but it placed before him too the theory and practice of a highest change, familiarised him with the conception of a spiritual existence and sowed in him a hunger for the divine and the infinite.... Spiritual freedom, spiritual perfection were not figured as a far-off intangible ideal, but presented as the highest human aim towards which all must grow in the end and were made near and possible to his endeavour from a first practicable basis of life and the Dharma. The spiritual idea governed, enlightened and

gathered towards itself all the other life-motives of a great civilised people ”³

Now what are the “practical” implications of this Indian vision of human development to the modern society? How to apply this spiritual vision of life to its progress and development? In principle, the Indian vision of development demands an upward transference of the motives and aims of development from the physical and vital levels to the moral and spiritual levels, that is from the Artha-Kama motives and aims of economic development, vital enjoyment, social progress, political expansion and military strength to the Dharma-Moksha aims and motives which lead to the moral, cultural and spiritual evolution of the community. This means the primary aim and motive of development should be the self-discovery of the spiritual self of Man in the individual and the collectivity and the progressive manifestation of its higher law and values of Unity and Harmony in the society. In practice, this involves a conscious and planned effort towards a reallocation of the resources and the creative energies of nations for the realisation of these higher aims and the creation of a new social order based on these higher motives. But we must remember here that this does not mean abandonment of the lower Artha-Kama motives but only a shifting of the priorities of development to higher levels of motives and values and subordination of the lower to the higher aims. For example, India and many of the developing countries of the world still need a lot of development in the economic, social and political sphere. But even these lower aims can be better pursued if the development effort is inspired by the greater motives and aims of a higher level of consciousness. This will be the decisive step towards the future. But it is not enough. Our ancient Indian Civilisation made this great attempt but somewhere along the way the attempt broke down before it could take hold of the entire human life. To prevent this collapse from recurring, we have to examine the cause of failure and rectify it and move on to a higher ideal which will lead to the fulfilment of the destined mission of the Indian Culture. This mission is, in the words of Vivekananda, the work of “spiritualisation of the human race”. It is this spiritual mission which must be the unifying ideal of our national endeavour.

Thus, an all-embracing spirituality which views human life and progress as an evolutionary pilgrimage to the spirit and not a life-negating asceticism is the essence of Indian Culture. The ancient spiritual culture of India recognised the legitimate needs, desires and interests of the body, life and mind of man, the satisfaction of these natural needs and desires, full development of the powers and potentialities of the physical, vital and mental being of man and the fulfilment of his social responsibilities, all these demands of nature and life and society were accepted, but only as preparatory stages of evolution towards the highest spiritual goal of life called in Indian terminology Moksha which means freedom or liberation, freedom from ego and desire, an immense spiritual

release and transcendence of the ego-self into the egoless, universal and infinite consciousness of the Spirit. And as a result, a vast, universal and uplifting compassion which flows from a concrete experiential identity with the one indivisible Self and Spirit in all. This discovery of a higher than mental life is the *raison d'être* of Indian culture.

(To be continued)

M. S. SRINIVASAN

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SRI AUROBINDO'S CONCEPTION OF WOMAN AS SHAKTI

IN many of Sri Aurobindo's major literary works the title itself suggests the great importance given to the heroine. *Savitri*, *Rodogune*, *Vasavadatta*, *Chitrangada*, *Urvashi*. Thus Sri Aurobindo's intention in many of his major literary works has all along been to reveal the grand feminine power. The portrayal of these heroines highlights his aim of bringing out the overriding power of woman and her unique consciousness.

An analysis of what women meant to Sri Aurobindo offers a key to interpret his literary works. To him woman is not merely a material being, she is an embodiment of consciousness also. The material body of woman as an object of beauty and pleasure, capable of giving love and bliss to man, is not very important for Sri Aurobindo. To him the psychic relationship between man and woman is more important than the physical relationship.

He advocates the theory that a "veil of Inconscience", a veil of insensibility of Matter hides the universal Consciousness-Force which works within it. Matter itself is unconscious but in living Matter the unconsciousness struggles towards mentality. Consciousness develops slowly till in the most organised form of living Matter, the human being, it reaches its climax of intelligence. Man, the thinking animal, has developed into the reasoning mental being. Mental man has still to evolve out of himself the fully conscious being, a divine manhood or a spiritual and supramental supermanhood which shall be the next outcome of evolution. The theory of evolution of consciousness is succinctly put forth by Sri Aurobindo in the following words:

A spiritual evolution, an evolution of consciousness in Matter in a constant developing self-formation till the form can reveal the indwelling Spirit, is... the key-note, the central significant motive of the terrestrial existence.¹

In the future life of man there remains the possibility of achieving an ascending grade of consciousness. The life of man is designed to win victory over Matter by a greater progression of consciousness impelling Matter to become a means for the full manifestation of the indwelling Spirit. Thus we see that the material being of man has no final importance because it has to become the means for a greater progression of consciousness. Man may be one pattern among the multitude of patterns in the manifestation of Matter, but he is the most complex among the created beings, the richest in content of consciousness; he is the head of earthly creation.

In tune with Sri Aurobindo's ideas of different levels of consciousness, woman is thought of as manifesting her power and consciousness in different ways. In his view, the feminine consciousness manifests itself as the *shakti* of

man. Woman as *ardhangini* is the *shakti* of man, his *élan vital*. As *shakti* she enlivens and invigorates the life of her husband. She brings to him love, bliss and fulfilment. She rescues him from frustration, despondency and loneliness through inspiration and solace. Woman's avowed duty is to protect man and guard his self-interest. In bringing love, bliss and prosperity to him she goes to the extent of sacrificing her own joys and comforts in life. She shares the joys and sorrows of her husband, and by her grand power of love she becomes a transforming agent in his life.

The basis of this feminine power is woman's love for man which is a great force in the world. It is through love that man and woman come closer to each other. Love is the hidden force, the creative and generative power, which binds the entire universe. Love is that occult force and spiritual urge that binds man and universe to God. In Sri Aurobindo's futuristic scheme of divinisation of manhood, selfless love has to play a significant role. Stressing the purity of love and its grandeur, Sri Aurobindo says that love should not get confined to sex and animality; it should transcend the baser human passions so that it may transform the world into a better place of peace, happiness and bliss.

Woman plays a significant role in the manifestation of love.

This ideology of love issues out of Sri Aurobindo's concept of woman as *shakti* of man, particularly the *hladini* aspect of *shakti*, the divine joy. In Sri Aurobindo's opinion: "Love conquers everything"; all aspects of man's lower nature—envy, hatred, doubt, disbelief, jealousy, lust, anger, egoistic desire and sense of possession—surrender to the alchemical power of love. Love between man and woman gives significance and meaning to human life, and it can lead them too to achieve higher spiritual goals in life. Love can establish the bond of universal brotherhood, eliminating cruelty, discord, disharmony, and violence from society.

Human love is made up of emotion, passion and desire to possess, therefore limited to the vital nature of man. In Sri Aurobindo's view, love as an experience of life has two faces. Vital love is a way of ego and desire full of cravings and its continuance depends upon the satisfaction of its demands. If its demands are not fulfilled, it at once turns to sorrow, wounded feeling, anger or all kinds of distemper, and finally it ceases. But love in its greater aspect is a flowering of joy in union and mutual trust, self-giving and *ananda* by its very nature.

Divine Love, on the other hand, is a transcendent experience and human love struggles to fulfil itself in the experience of that higher love. The essence of Sri Aurobindo's 'Integral Yoga' is to bring Divine Love and Beauty and *ananda* into this world, to establish 'the life divine' on earth. Love between man and woman is ordinarily blinded by the confusion of the human consciousness and is lost in the "frailty of man's inferior nature." But once the confusion is transcended it can partake of the Divine Love. In *The Synthesis of Yoga* Sri Aurobindo presents the mystery of the relationship between Divine Love and human love:

For there is concealed behind individual love, obscured by its ignorant human figure, a mystery which the mind cannot seize, the mystery of the body of the Divine, the secret of a mystic form of the Infinite which we can approach only through the ecstasy of the heart and the passion of the pure and sublimated sense, and its attraction which is the call of the divine Flute-player, the mastering compulsion of the All-Beautiful, can only be seized and seize us through an occult love and yearning which in the end makes one the Form and Formless, and identifies Spirit and Matter. It is that which the spirit in Love is seeking here in the darkness of the Ignorance and it is that which it finds when individual human love is changed into the love of the Immanent Divine incarnate in the material universe ²

Man is drawn towards God through spiritual love; true love between man and woman is a foretaste of the divine love. In his drama, *Eric*, Sri Aurobindo points out: "Love is the hoop of the gods / Hearts to combine." In *Savitri* too we find—"Love is the bright link twixt Heaven and Earth."

The nature of human beings is such that people are separated from each other through their ego-centric minds. Social cohesion, peace and happiness of family life, community-living, are constantly marred by imperfect sympathy, apathy, lack of love, gross misunderstanding, cut-throat competition and mutual jealousy. Love alone can bridge the vast gulf of difference existing between individuals, between different groups and sects in the society. Woman as the *shakti* of man has a significant role to play in the future spiritual evolution of man and in his urge to achieve the higher consciousness. Some of Sri Aurobindo's prose writings, particularly his letters to Mrinalini, throw a good deal of light on his conception of woman as an embodiment of the feminine power.

These letters were seized by the Calcutta Police during the search of the Grey Street house in connection with the Alipore trial case at Calcutta. They underline Sri Aurobindo's relationship with his wife, whom he loved and respected as his *shakti*. In the letter dated 30th August 1905 he elaborates his conception of the role of the wife in the life of man.

The wife is the husband's partner in the practice of Dharma. She helps him in the execution of the work that the husband has chosen as his Dharma. She gives him counsel and encouragement, she regards him as God and she feels his happiness as her own, even as she does his suffering ³

It is to be noted that Sri Aurobindo upholds the traditional Hindu concept of the wife. As a partner and helpmate the wife assists her husband in the execution of his various works and devoutly follows his *dharma*. The wife is considered as a guide, giving him counsel and encouragement in every matter. Sri Aurobindo further shows the identity of self between wife and husband and says that the

wife feels his happiness and sorrow as her own. He underlines the deeper significance of marriage in the life of man and woman. marriage not only unites two bodies but also joins two hearts and minds. The wife and the husband share the joys and sorrows of life and face the problems of life unitedly. Stressing the sense of sacrifice on the part of the wife, Sri Aurobindo further points out that the wife sacrifices a lot for her husband, at times forgoes her personal joys and comforts so as to enrich her conjugal life with unwavering love and bliss. The wife discharges several functions together—those of mother, sister, counsellor, and companion. Man's duty is to choose his own vocation and field of action but it is his wife who assists him, encourages him and rejuvenates his zeal and strength.

In his letters to Mrinalini, Sri Aurobindo expects from his wife a role greater than that of just the *sahadharmini* because he considers the wife as the husband's *ardhangini*, the better half.

During the revolutionary days when Sri Aurobindo was passing through critical times he sought help and inspiration from Mrinalini. In his letter he categorically points out that woman is man's power and force to act, to fare forward in his life's mission. If woman withdraws her love and fellowship, man becomes lonely, powerless and loses the moorings of his life. Absence of her love creates a void, a death-in-life in man and it becomes very difficult to invigorate him again. Hence, Sri Aurobindo goes to the extent of observing that a wife should provide fellowship at any cost and follow the path (*dharma*) of her husband even though he neglects his family in the interest of a greater cause and the good of the people. Explaining the duties of the wife of such a husband, he lays down that instead of sitting in a corner and weeping for her neglect by the husband, the wife should join her rash husband in his career and become devoted to his cause, thereby befitting her unconventional husband like Gandhari, the queen of Dhritarastra, who covering her eyes with a piece of cloth passed herself off as blind like her husband. Disregarding the slander and ridicule of people, the wife remains firmly devoted to her husband, acts as his helper and instrument in the discharge of his work and never stands as an obstacle to her husband's goal in life. The rise and fall of her fortune gets inextricably linked up with her husband's. When the husband passes through critical situations, the wife does not get upset, neither does she add to the anxiety and worry of her husband. She rather gives him consolation, encouragement and comfort. The wife, thus, acts as the agent of transformation in the life of her husband. For Sri Aurobindo this role of the wife as the guiding agent in critical situations of man's life is crucial to his conception of woman, and he elaborates it in one of his letters to Mrinalini.

I am passing through very anxious times, the pressure from all sides is sufficient to drive one mad. And at such a time if you also get upset it will

only add to my anxiety and worry; a letter of encouragement and comfort will give me special force, and I will overcome all obstacles and dangers with a cheerful heart.⁴

Thus, in the Mrinalini-letters the wife is viewed as the vibrant half of her husband, *ardhangini*, and man is conceived to remain incomplete without the woman.

But the letters have other important implications too. Sri Aurobindo is not merely content to assign the roles of *sahadharmini* and *ardhangini* to the wife, he has also a grand vision of woman's power as the *shakti* of man. He goes beyond the traditional Hindu concept of wife as an equal partner of man and helpmate. For him, the woman is man's *shakti*, the source of all his power and achievement in life. It is the wife who brings to light what is best in man and makes him a perfect being:

...the wife is the *shakti* of the husband. The husband sees his own reflection in the wife, he finds the echo of his own high aspiration in her and this doubles his own force.⁵

The wife changes the husband's life and gives meaning and significance to his life. Like Lord Shiva and His *shakti* or the fire and its burning power, the woman is man's *élan vital*, the force that sustains his life. When man falls into the grip of evil forces and his lower nature overpowers him, it is woman who rescues him by the power of her love. As the *shakti* of man, woman is the incarnation of love and joy, and transforms not only his life but also the world he lives in. Hence, Sri Aurobindo desires that Mrinalini should become his *shakti* and be the source of his inspiration and joy in all his actions.

The view of woman as the *shakti* of man underlines the fact that man has to subdue his characteristic male ego and accept woman as vitally integrated into his own being. She has the power to alter his life through the force of her love and devotion. As the *shakti* of man she brings good fortune and prosperity to her husband or lover by negating her individual ego through love and sacrifice. Thus, the grandeur of the life of woman lies in being lived not for herself but for others.

SABITA TRIPATHY

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INDIA AND THE CHANGING WORLD

THE grip of the Cold War upon the world has loosened. A raging flux of events is sweeping everywhere. The flow of powerful forces has tipped the balance; strong nations are trying to breathe easier and weak ones suffocate as the jigsaw pieces move. The Soviet gambit of relinquishing superpowership and backing off from a stagnant stalemate may sow the seeds of a productive change in Russian society. The European Community is trying to make the whole larger than its European parts. Japan is industriously gnawing away at every niche and has drawn blood through anaesthetised wounds. The United States has leapt like a mighty submerged whale trying to shake off weighty barnacles, with the United Kingdom riding its fin. China has lashed its dragon-tail. The Gulf potentates long for quiet opiation. Uneasiness and chill have given India pause from its self-indulgent pettiness.

In the press of all these events certain fundamental changes stand out as characteristics of the world today. For one, we have witnessed the collapse of communism such as we knew it. Quite interestingly, capitalism as a principle increasingly opposed communism, and along with the collapse of its antagonist we will witness the downturn of capitalism itself. Due to the decompression of these two major forces, we have scope for freedom of smaller nations. And in the midst of all this, in however left-handed a manner, we are seeing the prominence of the United Nations as an emerging world-body.

There are many factors which bring about these changes. On the surface are the tactical ones, and as such the most obvious. The age being deeply steeped in commercialism and industry, the economic factor is the most immediate. The collapse of communism, especially in the USSR, was engineered through economic competition with capitalism. In China too the spirit of communism is dwindling through economic liberalisation. Apart from economics, there are social and individual factors as well. Access to information, technology, education and mainly access to a freer vision of the world played on the society. Finally, individuals themselves do not want to be regimented by the State, but would rather breathe a freer air.

But beneath these tactical surface factors run deeper reasons. Both communism and capitalism as implemented display extremes of somewhat exclusive principles—in communism the principle of equality and in capitalism the principle of liberty. In the USSR and China everyone was first made equal in however negative a manner, and in that whatever individual freedom could exist was given. On the other hand, in the US and originally in the UK liberty was the main principle and each individual was free to develop as needed or possible. But since this would soon lead to chaos, some equality of law and order needed to be brought in to support a viable liberty of individuals. The origin of both liberty and equality is in the objective scientific press of the 18th and 19th

centuries Emerging from theocracy and feudalism, Europe discovered science as a liberating force, since its truths were universal, available to everyone, neither interpreted by some theocracy nor controlled by any feudal lord Liberty found its genesis in science's throwing off the social yokes of theocracy and feudalism So also the universality and objective nature of science removed the difference between one person and the next This engendered equality The objective material principle worked in another way as well. Capitalism was organised as a means of bringing out and exploiting properties of matter directly by the individual, and communism was organised as a principle of interaction in collective matter.

The fundamental principle of science progresses by discovering objective truths in physical nature based on previously discovered objective truths and new objective perceptions of matter. Yet two utilitarian processes hijacked the progress of science One was the capitalist-imperialist impetus to science, and the other the economist-consumerist impetus to science The former came about because in capitalism one needs to preserve markets and suppliers outside the capitalist system For that one needs a prominent military and state infrastructure based on advanced technology We see this development in colonial Europe and the US In the latter paradigm, each individual is a consumer of tools and conveniences required for personal development, and technology is used to make these conveniences available—thereby giving science another impetus for growth. We can see this as the predominant factor in the resurgence of Japan and to some extent of the European Community. In capitalist systems, factors of production are privately owned, and production continues to shift to where they are the cheapest. In particular, production from the US has shifted outside it to places where it is more economical. At the same time, it needs to sustain its consumer base and as well to develop strong military alliances and techniques to maintain markets and suppliers abroad. Hence it is susceptible to the economic interdependence promoted by consumerist systems. Similarly, the economic interdependence model does not fare well against the capitalist one, since it can be militarily muzzled In addition, in this model, while freedom of individuals as consumers is assumed in the rest of the world, internally that freedom is denied, as can be seen in Japan Further, Japanese economy has been organised on a military footing to meet the consumerist paradigm. Thus there is a contradiction planted in both these models which is the root cause of their eventual downturn The exclusivity of both will not suffice for the emerging world

However, science itself has come to a threshold where the objective principle has to be widened, and we have to look for an intuitive-subjective impetus to science This has come about through the methodologies of science itself In spheres of atomic physics it is quite apparent that the observer cannot be independent of the observed system, but rather is within it This also happens in other organisations of matter such as economic and social systems In that

sense, there are no more any objective perceptions of matter. Science will be led through subjective means. But this is only the very objective way by which subjectivism is entering science. There is an even deeper way of intuitive inspiration in science. We can take a clue from the Kena Upanishad:

yaccaksusā na paśyati yena caksūmsi paśyati

“That which sees not with the eye, that by which one sees the eye’s seings.”

This is the essence of the intuitive subjective approach. Consider two men, one of normal sight and another born blind. There is the objective reality of day and night—the diurnal cycle of nature. One sees it but the other cannot. Is it that since the blind man cannot distinguish night from day there is no distinction? And how would the man with sight communicate his physical perception to the externally blind man? Based on the Upanishad we see that in fact there is a faculty even in the blind to perceive light and it is this faculty that needs to be invoked in communicating objective truths for subjective perception. Language also enters this equation as the objective vocable for subjective perceptions, though the development of language itself proceeds through inner subjective means. Proceeding merely from this scientific viewpoint, we cannot see the exclusiveness of liberty and equality surviving. We need also to bring forward the third principle of the French revolution embodying subjective faith, the principle of fraternity, amidst a balance of liberty and equality.

But even beyond these scientific reasons, there are yet deeper spiritual reasons. As Sri Aurobindo has said, “there is a spiritual possibility of the race,” and a basis is being created for that to work out. In this possibility, we shall see the development and fulfilment of the individual soul and the collective soul simultaneously and harmoniously. This nexus between the individual and the collective shall shape the character of the emerging world. Externally we shall see internationalism in individuals and heterogeneity in nations, a diverse expression of the innate spiritual unity. Liberty, equality and fraternity are outer reflections of deeper soul-principles—freedom, unity and godhood: freedom of the soul behind from the bond of existence and action, unity of the inner soul throughout manifestation; godhood of the soul’s identification with the Supreme in and above manifestation. The soul’s freedom could open the path of escape from manifestation into some individual liberation. But more concrete and true is the World-soul’s fulfilment in realising the Supreme here on earth. Events on earth ever press towards this realisation, and the current changes prepare a superhuman step in the unfolding evolution. We shall see not just a tactical balance between liberty, equality and fraternity, but a living harmony of freedom, unity and godhood. Harmony is the ineluctable principle of any permanent vision of the world.

But what precisely will be the character of the emerging world? As we have seen, we need integral development of the individual's personality. This would mean certainly that individuals should have access to education, information, technology, work and culture. But more than that, in participation in the collective, individuals will have to bring forth several faculties, not just a single prominent one, in a well-rounded manner, and press the individual soul on the collective soul, just as the collective soul would press on the individual soul to become more and more well-rounded. In the collective character we should see resolution of national and international issues not through imposition—right now we see imposition through theocracy, monarchy, even democracy as imposition by the majority—but through multilateral discussions, or shall we say multilogues, in national and international fora. This character we see even today in most democracies. Almost everywhere there are either hung parliaments or narrow and threatened majorities. This situation will continue until there is a political restructuring to accommodate complex and multilateral considerations. And, finally, we should see a rich diversity of culture in the midst of a world-union. Suppression of any culture would disappear and even classical forms of culture would give way to new expressions and their commingling.

For such a novel character of the world to emerge we need novel world institutions. For the individual's fulfilment we need educational, cultural, technological and commercial institutions which give scope for individual development. In the collective we should see local government with organic legislative, executive and judiciary aspects close to the community. There would be a thin layering and hierarchy between local, national and international organisations. The national body will emerge in a very multifaceted manner—there will simultaneously press on one another a nation based on language, a nation based on culture, a nation based on education, geography, history, tradition, a nation based on spirituality—press until they congeal into one national unit. For example, India is one such nation, not some bland homogeneity but a rich diversity pressing on itself to create a nation state. The state apparatus of such a nation needs to be decentralised into local and organic forms of government. In particular, the local bodies would form a layer of laterally interacting networks throughout the world. At the same time, the national umbrella organisation is required to participate in international fora. And for resolution of complex issues in a multilateral manner, we would see development of channels for specific and general communication laterally and vertically.

Before seeing how we could cast such a future world, let us examine the existing landscape. In the capitalist model as exhibited in the US and the UK the principle of liberty alone is exclusive and needs to incorporate into itself the principle of equality to which it was set up in opposition: ironically, if a certain principle is opposed by a certain other, then the harmony of a higher truth lies in the synthesis of both. In Europe the economic interdependence is rather limited

since it is by nature commercial alone. In particular, it is an obvious prey to the capitalist model. We should also consider the resurgence of a reunited Germany. There are fears especially in Europe that Germany might go again the fascist way. But we have hope that she would settle instead into leadership of the European community and also be checked by it. We may characterise the resurgence of Japan as imitative. She has weakened her own cultural and religious tradition and hence may not be able to dig deep enough to chart an independent path, though of course she has amassed a great amount of money power. Russia right now we see is passing through a transitional phase. She seems to be going the imitative route, though she is invested with past mystical experimentation. In any case, whatever be the resurgence of Russia, we have doubt that it will happen in time to make a central contribution in shaping the future world. In China, communism still seems to linger on, but it must go. It has led to complete suppression of individual freedom. Seeds of its end have already been sown in the economic liberalisation on market principles by the Chinese leaders. We did see the beginning of a pro-democracy movement in the intellectual circles of Chinese polity. However, it was not unmixed with arrogance. From speeches we have heard of student leaders we find that this arrogance cannot tolerate the peasants of China as voting members of the democracy. Even though the Chinese cultural tradition, with its mysticism and spirituality, has been weakened by communism, it is so cast and is so long-lived that it may revive and grow from the current trickle to a mighty stream. The main difficulty with the Chinese resurgence and influence in world events may lie in that seeds of her break-up might already have been sown as well. The economic liberalisation of China has happened through development of pockets of market structures which have grown independently, evolved different mechanisms of dealing with customers, government and foreign countries. Further, China needs to incorporate into herself Hong Kong and Taiwan. Also, international pressure on account of Tibet and human rights' violations is certain to mount against China, pushing her into habitual isolation or even break-up. And finally there is Islamic fundamentalism vying for some sort of audience. With the freedom of nations in Central Asia and East Europe there is an Islamic belt right through East Europe, the Middle East, West China, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Of course, this is an anachronistic development. Theocratic attempts have been made but they are now done for; their time is over. They are centralising and arbitrary. In essence they have the principle of fraternity but complete suppression of liberty and equality, and hence cannot survive. Their sole use may be to serve as opposition to the capitalist principle which is spoiling for antagonists.

Through all this we see that India is indeed in a unique position to come up with a model that the world could hark to. We see in India a concentration of all the ills in the world. We see teeming diversity, lopsided prosperity, factional

militarism, resurgent right-wing appeal and we also see frustration of vision. There is no direction in which people know that they are going. But more than all this, India has maintained a very long and continuous tradition of the deepest spiritual seeking. At this time in the world we need to delve into our roots and come up with a vision for the future, and India has preserved that knowledge for which we should search. The path to individual liberation has already been shown by India and extensive collective experimentation as well has been conducted by her. These have lapsed due to an inertia in the Indian milieu, but need to be revived in this new age in a new way. And, finally, also quite importantly, India has a test-bed in which to try out whatever models she develops. The Indian subcontinent is the natural domain of India and if any paradigm can harmonise it, then surely it will inspire the world.

At the same time, there are a lot of problems facing India. There are problems both at the individual and the collective levels. The basic problems of the individual in India are pettiness in personal dealings, lack of pride in work, poor professionalism, no dynamism and no aggressiveness. Drive for the superlative is a 'must'—wanting to be the best, the highest, the fastest, the smallest, and so on. Another problem of the individual is an emasculated intellectualism. This intellectualism has very weak receptivity to India's cultural and spiritual heritage. This is all the more prominent in Indians abroad, who would rather make a clean break with it, or an embarrassed admission of it. In contrast, the Chinese outside China have maintained robust cultural ties much to their advantage. What we need is a full-blooded expression and embassy of Indian culture and spirituality. Finally, for the Indian individual, there is the pseudo-spiritual, sentimental religious piety, the fatalistic, other-worldly attitude. Indians do not seem to be fully engaged in existence in the physical. This is exhibited in our divergent trichotomy between what we learn—our education, what we do—our work, and how we live—our homes. There are problems for the collective as well. Every concept that needs implementation has been corrupted. Democracy has been interfered with through poll-rigging, booth-capturing and gerrymandering and, as seen in Punjab, Kashmir and Assam, its results are obvious. Socialism has spawned a massive bureaucracy which has become the double bond of India—double because first it cannot implement what it is set to and second it smothers any organic effort which could change India's character. Another problem which is the outgrowth of the first is its growing factionalism. The solution to this lies in the solution to the first. But what may in the international context be India's nemesis is that there is too much slack in the system. We are not on the frontier of our possibilities and capabilities. Nations cannot respond to social, political or international pressures by becoming smaller, but have to steer themselves always on this frontier. Otherwise they are threatened with trivialisation. This is precisely what has happened to India. In this commercial age the main lines of commerce are

skirting our shores rather than going through it.

What course of action then should we take as individuals, as citizens of India, and certainly as citizens of the world? As individuals, we have to fulfil ourselves in the fullness of the spirit by whatever path we choose. In the collective, we have to participate in the various institutions, local, national and international, while being imbued with the spirit of the emerging world, and not on terms of these institutions. Our every act of participation in them must to some extent chip away at their rock of inertia and sculpt for them bodies of the future. We have to lead, cajole, maybe threaten, and sometimes even flog India and her institutions towards world-citizenship. But, of course, this has to be done with a deep sympathy. Finally, as individuals we have to act with the deeper motive of preparing ourselves and humanity for the next evolutionary step towards which the world is being moulded.

Certainly we need some signs, some telling touchstones that show us we are on the right path. The one thing we should look for is a solution to a deep problem in the world today—a complete absence of personalities that can lead the world forward. As a natural outcome of the subjective-intuitive age we should see the emergence of personalities that can house the world-afflatus. We should also look for efflorescence of cultures, not just classical ones but also new creations, and their harmonious commingling. Lastly, we should look more and more for multilateral solutions to international issues and problems through multilateral fora for their development, discussion, communication and implementation, rather than through imposition. Through all this shall emerge a new world-order starting from the very external liberty, equality and fraternity but growing ever towards an expression of inner freedom, unity and godhood, already charted by the Lord of destiny—India's and the world's.

AKASH DESHPANDE

MONEY

“All wealth belongs to the Divine and those who hold it are trustees, not possessors. It is with them today, tomorrow it may be elsewhere. All depends on the way they discharge their trust while it is with them, in what spirit, with what consciousness in their use of it, to what purpose.”

Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*

MONEY IS a valuable force which is indispensable to the development and fullness of existence. In reality it should be used to enhance the consciousness of individuals and of humanity. Yet, it is being used in a variety of other ways. This article will examine some of these uses. Further, it will suggest why it is being used in this manner. Finally, it will suggest alternative uses for it.

Some Uses of Money

Some pieces of art sell for thousands and thousands of dollars. A Picasso was recently auctioned for twenty-one million dollars. It is a painting, and can certainly bring out a perspective or an aspect of beauty which provides its viewers with satisfaction and a glimpse, or at best a vision, of deeper aspects of life. Its value is in its potential of awakening the viewers to that deeper perspective that may ordinarily be not considered by them.

But because people are in possession of money that they do not know how to use, they rush to buy the object which wise observers and art critics have praised as valuable. This onrush of money causes the price of the desired object to rise deliriously. The value of the money has in this bargain been bastardized. Further, the art object which might have inspired a larger public is now the sole property of an individual.

The art object now takes on an entirely different meaning and is equated more with its perceived monetary worth than its ability to inspire and satisfy. Being of such high monetary value it now draws the attention of thieves and scoundrels, thus contributing to criminal activity and intent in society.

Money has lost its meaning. At one time, not too far in the past, fifty thousand dollars a year was considered an excellent salary. Today, graduate students from leading management institutions are barely satisfied with salaries of eighty-five to one hundred thousand dollars a year. The problem is two-fold. Firstly, due to inflation and the continuing rapid decline in the value of money, essential and even non-essential products and services have escalated in price. Thus more money is needed today to buy the same set of items that yesterday could be purchased for a much lower price. Secondly, an unfortunate attitude has increased in our minds and habits. This is the attitude of saving money for the sake of saving it.

Thus, while it is essential to save money to prepare for one's old age and for emergency circumstances, in many cases saving money has become a hobby and the end rather than the means of our existence. Many want to invest their money where it will offer the highest rate of return. There is no consciousness as to how the institution where the money is being invested is going to realize that rate of return. They could very well be funding a crime ring in some inner city, or funding an arms company that is providing weapons to extremist groups around the world. There is no sense of responsibility for how one's money is being used. The primary interest of most is in getting the promised rate of return.

The easy access to money, especially in western society, has spawned another unfortunate tendency—that of transience. Myriad consumer products ranging from clothes to electronics to automobiles are discarded prematurely. Instead of caring for an object and taking the extra steps to maintain it and prolong its life, at the first signs of deterioration people will discard the object in favour of a new one.

This habit has also promoted a false sense of power. People believe that they are powerful because they have the money to acquire what they need, and to quickly replace items when they desire to. It has crystallized an attitude of acting primarily in the short-term, and today people and corporations are suffering for it.

The easy access to and frivolous use of money has also promoted the tendency amongst consumers to hoard. Thus, people are in possession of more clothes and shoes, for example, than they actually need. They may end up never actually, or rarely ever, wearing these items. But these remain in their possession, and remain unutilised. This amounts to waste.

Further, most companies advertise to appeal to unreasoning instincts in human beings. They successfully create an image of a brand which causes people to be willing to pay more for it. In fact, if consumers do not then buy that brand they begin to feel unsatisfied, and plan on how they might acquire that tea or perfume or pen or whatever else it is that has been so cleverly advertised, and which in reality they may not even need.

Whilst large cities tend to be prime business centres where many want to be located, in today's age of global telecommunications it is possible for many companies to conduct business from anywhere. Yet, because they have the money or can easily raise it, they will spend a fortune to enter an already overcrowded city. The warning signs against entering the city are many. The most obvious is the rapidly escalating real estate prices. By pushing their way into that city they contribute to overburdening its already taxed infrastructure. The population and pollution levels go up. The demand for entertainment and recreation begins to exceed the supply. Traffic congestion increases. Crime levels rise because of the rising number of wealthy people in the city. The psychological price of living in that city rises. Dissatisfaction levels increase. The

entire atmosphere of the city begins to get coated by a layer of frustration and gloom

Companies too, display the unfortunate tendency of wanting to accumulate money rather than spend it effectively. Money has a value. Money is a force. Its best use is in circulation, not accumulation. It takes on its greatest value when it is spent. Yet the tendency of society is to accumulate it. Consider the recent stock market example in Bombay, India. Companies that went public received an in-rush of money as a stamp of the public's approval and belief in the future of those companies. The millions of rupees that many companies received were not used to enhance their production facilities and capacities. Rather, it remained in a state of limbo and most companies used the money to restructure their financial positions. That is, they rearranged their financial assets to unload debt. The money was not used for a productive end. It was used so that the companies looked better on paper.

It is a natural law that the more one breathes out the more one can breathe in. If one is in the habit of expelling breath in a shallow manner, then the breath taken in is also shallow. Similarly, when one does not use the money in one's possession, no new money will come. The most successful businesses are those that are not attached to their money, but are able to spend it freely on new projects and in developing their own capacities and capabilities.

Money will go where it is used. And it will go more where it is used most effectively to raise the consciousness of humanity as a whole.

In the field of education, the norms that dictate our society cause many children to pursue an education which will assure them of receiving the right diplomas and certificates so that they can acquire the right job and the right amount of money when they are older. And that very money is then used to make more money, and used to destroy its value, and used seemingly to fulfil the million desires which are impossible to fulfil, and which like a clever virus transmute into another million desires if ever fulfilment seems close, thereby to ensure that the same petty and destructive cycle continues unendingly.

What about the value of learning to acquire knowledge? What about the value of learning to understand and know the secrets of Nature? What about learning for the love of learning? What about the value of education in developing traits and abilities and drawing out the inherent uniqueness in each child? What about learning to become the master of one's character, and learning to fulfil a sublime destiny?

This vicious circle that most of the society is in falsifies the use of money and causes even children to cast aside precious opportunities of pursuing their inner dreams, preferring the pursuit of diplomas and a falsity which will assure the continuance of today's depraved society.

Countries that have money, and even those that do not, have spent it on building weapons of mass destruction, so that they may have what their

neighbours have, and be equally equipped to play their part in destroying their fellow beings, countries, and our world. Those billions of dollars being spent in the construction of weapons could and should be used as a force to benefit humanity, not as a means to lay waste what has been developed through thousands and thousands of years.

In countries with large bureaucracies money has acquired another perverse use. Many public servants require additional incentive in the form of bribes in order to perform their regular jobs. Thus, ministers have been known to take bribes to issue licenses to industrialists; police officers have been known to void traffic tickets if offered a bribe; and even busdrivers have been known to drive at an accelerated pace if tempted with additional money.

This very money should be used to shrink the bureaucratic organizations, grow the private sector, and retrain the public servants so that they may begin to do something of use.

Why is Money Used in this Way?

Why does this distortion exist? Quite simply, its roots are in the belief that each human is separate from every other human. If I believe I am separate from another then my money must be used for me. And then, what are all the ways in which this 'me' can achieve its satisfaction? How many different kinds of foods and liquors can I consume? How many and which models of cars can I buy? How many houses can I acquire for my seasonal use, and how many species of animals can I raise as pets? How many different designed shirts and dresses can I purchase? How many varieties of jewelry can I collect, and where can I go on vacation this year so that others may realize that I have a lot of money and do not know what to do with it? In what other ways can I flaunt my power? In what ways can I satisfy this 'me', this individuality, this piece of being, which surely and absolutely is separate from the rest, and surely and absolutely deserves special treatment and periods of joy through fulfilling all the million suggestions that constantly arrive in its realm through the course of the day and the night.

And so the ignorant thinking and the ever-wanting cycle continues. People use all their energies in pursuit of things which assure that they will remain unendingly in those same restricted grooves of being. It is these very grooves of being which determine the quality of one's thought. Thus the cycle continues forever.

Yet it is this very habit and structure which must be broken with the agent that has realised it in the first place. Rather than perpetuate the smallness which we think we are, money must be used to help us break out of this meaningless cycle which makes us the slaves of our desires and the impoverished warriors and upkeepers of our destitute thought.

The state of our earth with its race wars, drug wars, rampant crime,

impoverished children, starving communities, and trapped human beings is largely the result of the thoughts and desires of those who have the money, but do not know what to do with it. These are the millions who make up the driving class of societies across every country of our earth

This belief that money must be used for small satisfactions keeps it tied up in a groove which makes it lose its value and pauperizes its user. That very money, directed in another way, can loosen the hold that the million varieties of meaningless fulfilment have upon humanity and, through the enlightened thought and action that can follow, can reverse the wars, crime, poverty, destitution, and most importantly the impoverished view. unknowingly, that each has of him or herself.

Alternative uses

Imagine when money is no longer used to acquire land in a place like Tokyo. That same money can then be used to develop another piece of land in some underdeveloped place on earth. Imagine when money is no longer used for idle and conspicuous consumerism. That same money can then be judiciously spent to meet the necessary outer as well as deeper needs of people, thus developing them into more conscious human beings. Imagine when money is no longer used to build weapons of destruction. That same money can then be used to enhance the understanding and relationship between countries. Imagine when money is no longer used to bribe public servants to do their regular jobs. That very money can then be used to educate these public servants and build a noble, productive, and efficient public sector. Imagine when money is no longer used to acquire drugs which destroy our children and adults. That same money can then be used to help the children grow so that the special qualities they possess may have a chance to flourish, and to help the adults to better realise their places in the harmony of life

Money in its true role must be used to raise the consciousness of humanity. Why is this the rightful goal? And what does raising the consciousness of humanity mean?

All our present efforts are aimed at experiencing joy in whatever forms we know. Thus some may take a walk in the countryside, others indulge in drug use, yet others chant hymns of adoration, and others go for a hunt in the forest. While all actions stem from our perception of the world and our perception of what will help us become happy and joyful, not all perceptions, either of the world or of what will bring us joy, are complete and true

While drug-use may provide us with an immediate and temporary euphoria, more often than not it has destructive after- and side-effects which harm us both physically and psychologically. In fact the short-term joy is vastly overshadowed by the long-term pain inflicted upon us. Yet, through no fault of ours, we believe

that its use is beneficial, and therefore use it. Our own perceptions are a function of our experience and evolution, and the perceptions we have at the moment are necessary for the experience we need to lead us to our own further growth.

Yet, there is a subtle balance and always a choice that exists in our every thought and action. We can continue to follow the actions which are in harmony with our limited perception or we can choose to enlarge ourselves so that that limited perception begins to yield to a more enlightened perception.

The seed contains in it the mighty tree, and even the minute trickles on mountaintops enlarge in their downward flow until they empty out into the vastness of the ocean. These metaphors of existence embody the concept of growth. We too are here to grow into mighty trees reaching toward the sun, and into vast oceans reflecting the whole atmosphere in our silent depths.

Growth is the inevitable law of life. Everything around us is in a phase of growth. To assist in that growth is to enter into harmony with the hidden laws of life, and to fulfil overtly the covert intention of all individual and world movements. The very act of consciously assisting in our growth will provide us with the unending joy that we unconsciously seek through the myriad groping of our thought and action, many of an ignorant and self-defeating nature, throughout the course of our everyday existence.

Money employed to assist this inner growth would be money used for the rightful purpose. Our growth could take many forms. We could develop our physical natures to become strong, flexible, supple, and beautiful, and to possess stamina, endurance, agility, and speed. We could develop our artistic qualities and appreciation for beauty, our writing abilities, our speaking abilities. We could get the opportunity to develop our thinking and reasoning abilities, and even our capacities for intuition, revelation, and inspiration. We could develop qualities such as goodness, perseverance, courage, humility, sincerity, gratitude, generosity, peace, and equality.

There is no end to the ways in which we can grow. Yet, current norms and ways of being tend to arrest our growth and slow it down, and this is what must be changed through the judicious use of money.

Put to its right use money will assist in the transformation of the earth to make it truly a golden globe moving happily amongst the stars.

PRAVIR MALIK

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of April 1996)

SRI AUROBINDO had passed through many stages—rationalist, agnostic, sceptic, advaitin, bhakta, shakta—and he had to gather into one vast synthesis the variegated, and sometimes conflicting and contradictory, elements of his own and the world's spiritual experience and of the several yogic disciplines of the past. But once he had discovered the key to the synthesis in the Supermind, the rest was not very difficult. The new synthesis of knowledge called also for a new integral Yoga. This Yoga had to be a delicate, powerful and multi-pronged movement in consciousness, comprehending and exceeding the two fundamental categories of experience: Matter and Spirit. It was a significant victory, no doubt, but this victory was also tinged with disappointment. As he told Dilip Kumar Roy:

“It was then that my outlook changed with the knowledge born of my new Yogic consciousness. But then I found, to my utter disillusionment, that it was my ignorance which had led me to think that the impossible was feasible here and now... in order to help humanity out, it was not enough for an individual, however great, to achieve an ultimate solution individually, humanity has to be ripe for it too.”¹

“In another letter written in August 1912 to Motilal Roy, Sri Aurobindo was even more specific about his realisations and objectives. He wrote:

‘15th August is usually a turning-point or a notable day for me personally either in Sadhana or life,—indirectly only for others. This time it has been very important for me. My subjective Sadhana may be said to have received its final seal and something like its consummation by a prolonged realisation and dwelling in Parabrahman for many hours. Since then, egoism is dead for all in me except the Annamaya Atma, the physical self which awaits one farther realisation before it is entirely liberated from occasional visitings or external touches of the old separated existence.

‘My future Sadhana is for life, practical knowledge and Shakti, not the essential knowledge of Shakti in itself which I have got already—but knowledge and Shakti established in the same physical self and directed to my work in life. I am now getting a clearer idea of that work and I may as well impart something of that idea to you: since you look to me as the centre, you should know what is likely to radiate out of that centre.

‘1. To re-explain the Sanatana Dharma to the human intellect in all its parts from a new standpoint. Sri Krishna has shown me the true meaning of the Vedas ... He has also shown me the meaning of all in the Upanishads that is not understood either by Indians or Europeans. I have therefore to re-explain the whole Vedanta and Veda in such a way that it will be seen how all religion arises

out of it and is one everywhere. In this way it will be proved that India is the centre of the religious life of the world and its destined saviour through the Sanatana Dharma.

‘2. On the basis of Vedic knowledge, to establish a Yogic Sadhana which will not only liberate the soul, but prepare a perfect humanity and help in the restoration of the Satya Yuga. That work has to begin now but it will not be complete till the end of the Kali.

‘3. India being the centre, to work for her restoration to her proper place in the world; but this restoration must be effected as a part of the above work and by means of Yoga applied to human means and instruments, not otherwise.

‘4 A perfect humanity intended, society will have to be remodelled so as to be fit to contain that perfection.’

“So completely absorbing was Sri Aurobindo’s sadhana that he rarely moved out of his residence. But this did not mean that he cut himself off from all contacts in Pondicherry. Indeed many notable persons in the town were very much aware of his presence and held him in high esteem. How deep and genuine was this regard could be seen from an incident which occurred when the British once again tried one of their tricks. There was a law in French India known as the Allen’s Act which required that a foreigner who wished to stay for any length of time in Pondicherry had to produce a ‘good conduct’ certificate from a high Government official of the place from which he came. Or else, he had to produce a similar certificate signed by five men of standing in Pondicherry. In this context Nolini Kanta writes in his memories: ‘I need hardly say that the first alternative was for us quite impossible and wholly out of the question. We chose the second line and the five noble men who affixed their signatures were these: (1) Rassendren, (2) De Zir Naidu, (3) Le Beau, (4) Shankar Chettiar (in whose house Sri Aurobindo had put up on arrival), and (5) Murugesh Chettiar. The names of these five should be engraved in letters of gold. They had shown on that occasion truly remarkable courage and magnanimity. It was on the strength of their signatures that we could continue to stay here without too much trouble.’”²

“Do you know what Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose wrote about Sri Aurobindo in his autobiography of the period 1897-1920? We reproduce below some excerpts from it:

‘In my undergraduate days (1913-15) Arabinda Ghose was easily the most popular leader in Bengal, despite his voluntary exile and absence since 1910. His was a name to conjure with. He had sacrificed a lucrative career in order to devote himself to politics. On the Congress platform he had stood up as a champion of left-wing thought and a fearless advocate of independence at a time when most of the leaders, with their tongues in their cheeks, would talk only of colonial self-government. He had undergone incarceration with perfect equanimity. His close association with Lokamanya B. G. Tilak had given him an all-

India popularity, while rumour and official allegation had given him an added prestige in the eyes of the younger generation by connecting him with his younger brother, Barindra Kumar Ghose, admittedly the pioneer of the terrorist movement. Last but not least, a mixture of spirituality and politics had given him a halo of mysticism and made his personality more fascinating to those who were religiously inclined. When I came to Calcutta in 1913, Arabindo was already a legendary figure. Rarely have I seen people talk of a leader with such rapturous enthusiasm and many were the anecdotes of this great man, some of them probably true, which travelled from mouth to mouth .

'In those days it was freely rumoured that Arabindo had retired to Pondicherry for twelve years' meditation. At the end of that period he would return to active life as an 'enlightened man', like Gautama Buddha of old, to effect the political salvation of his country .

'As a College Student it was not the mysticism surrounding Arabindo's name which attracted me, but his writings and also his letters. Arabindo was then editing a monthly journal called *Arya* in which he expounded his philosophy. He used also to write to certain select people in Bengal. Such letters would pass rapidly from hand to hand, especially in circles interested in spirituality-cum-politics. In our circle usually somebody would read the letter aloud and the rest of us would enthuse over it. In one such letter Arabindo wrote, 'We must be dynamos of the divine electricity so that when each of us stands up, thousands around may be full of the light—full of bliss and Ananda.' We felt convinced that spiritual enlightenment was necessary to effective national service.

'But what made a lasting appeal to me was not such utterance. I was impressed by his deeper philosophy. Shankara's doctrine of Maya was like a thorn in my flesh. I could not accommodate my life to it nor could I easily get rid of it. I required another philosophy to take its place. The reconciliation between the One and the Many, between God and Creation, which Ramkrishna and Vivekananda had preached, had indeed impressed me but had not till then succeeded in liberating me from the cobwebs of Maya. In this task of emancipation, Arabindo came as an additional help. He worked out a reconciliation between Spirit and Matter, between God and Creation, on the metaphysical side and supplemented it with a synthesis of the methods of attaining the truth—a synthesis of Yoga, as he called it. Thousands of years ago the Bhagavad Gita had spoken about the different Yogas—Jnana Yoga or the attainment of truth through knowledge, Bhakti Yoga or the attainment of truth through devotion and love, Karma Yoga or the attainment of truth through selfless action. To this, other schools of Yoga had been added later—Hatha Yoga aiming at control over the body and Raja Yoga aiming at control over the mind through control of the breathing apparatus. Vivekananda had no doubt spoken of the need of Jnana (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion and love) and Karma (selfless action) in developing an all-round character, but there was something original and unique in

Arabindo's conception of a Synthesis of Yoga. He tried to show how by a proper use of the different Yogas one could rise step by step to the highest truth. It was so refreshing, so inspiring, to read Arabindo's writings as a contrast to the denunciation of knowledge and action by the latter-day Bengal Vaishnavas. All that was needed in my eyes to make Arabindo an ideal guru for mankind was his return to active life.

'Of quite a different type from Arabindo was Surendra Nath Banerji, once the hero of Bengal and certainly one of the makers of the Indian National Congress. I saw him for the first time at a meeting in Calcutta Town Hall in connection with Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha campaign in South Africa. Surendra Nath was still in good form and with his modulated voice and rolling periods he was able to collect a large sum of money at the meeting. But despite his flowery rhetoric and consummate oratory, he lacked the deeper passion which one could find in such simple words of Arabindo: 'I should like to see some of you becoming great, great not for your own sake, but to make India great, so that she may stand up with head erect amongst the free nations of the world. Those of you who are poor and obscure I should like to see that poverty and obscurity devoted to the sacrifice of the motherland. Work that she might prosper, suffer that she might rejoice.'''

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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HINDUISM IN CRISIS

THERE has been a new “Quit India movement” in recent years. Unlike the old Quit India movement, which was established by Indian freedom-fighters in the early part of the century to remove the foreign influence of the British from India, the recent movement has an opposite intent. to embrace western culture and materialism and abandon traditional Hindu culture and spirituality perhaps altogether. This movement is very strong in India itself, particularly among so-called modern Hindus, who are largely western educated and trained to look at their tradition with alien values and suspicious eyes. The intellectual elite of India is highly westernized and takes pride in being in contact with the latest developments in western culture, art, science and technology, while remaining ignorant and unappreciative of traditional Hindu teachings.

Not all of these westernized Hindus have actually studied in the west, nor do they need to. The educational system of India itself today follows primarily western standards and values. While the British may have left India physically, their Hindu emulators still run much of the country and see it largely as the British did, as a realm to be remade in a western image. However, it is not merely a British model that they follow but also a Marxist-Socialist model with its atheistic and anti-nationalistic orientation. The stifling bureaucracy of India is not the product of Hinduism but an imitation of the Soviet style of administration introduced through Nehru to thwart the development of Capitalism

Part of this Quit India movement has expressed itself in a number of Hindus emigrating to other countries, particularly for better job benefits. There are now small but significant Hindu minorities in many western countries including the United States and Great Britain. Yet Hindus abroad generally appreciate their own traditional culture better than westernized Hindus in India. The reason for this is that Hindus abroad, being apart from their cultural base, have developed a nostalgia for it. They have also seen the limitations of western culture—with crime, drugs, promiscuity, greed and an almost total lack of spiritual values—which is demonstrated to them daily, particularly through the western mass media.

Modern Hindus in India see more the social problems of India today, which they would like to blame on the Hindu religion. This is rather strange because India has been ruled by such westernized Hindus since the Partition of India over forty years ago and prior to that had the foreign rule of the British for two hundred years and over five hundred years of Islamic rule by Afghans and Turks before that, who all along have been blaming the Hindu religion for the problems of India under their rule.

However, there is now developing a movement counter to this westernization phase. A number of Hindus now are looking to rediscover their Hindu roots. This has also become a strong movement among Hindu emigrants. This

includes discovering the value and importance of Hindu spirituality, art, and culture, and the Hindu view of society and government. A number of Hindus in India are working to make Hinduism a more living presence in the country, with a social and political as well as cultural and religious influence. This I would call the "new Hinduism", those who are embracing Hinduism from both viewpoint of tradition and that of modernity, recognizing its real meaning as Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism as the eternal tradition) and its relevance for the entire world.

For example, the new Hinduism is bringing back traditional Hindu accounts of history, that recent archeological discoveries also prove, and rejecting the idea that the history of India should be written from a western perspective, as if anything good in India only came from the west (which is the present view). They hold that Hindu values, a culture of dharma, has its place in the educational system of India, which should not merely imitate western intellectual or political views, like the Marxist views which have dominated most of the universities of India over the past several decades.

Westernized Hindus try to hide their Hindu roots. They do not like to be seen going to temples, though they may go to churches and mosques as a demonstration of their universality in religion. They ignore Hindu social causes like the mistreatment of Hindus in Fiji or in Islamic countries like Bangladesh or Malaysia. However, they will take a stand for the rights of the Palestinians in order to show their humanitarianism and global awareness.

Such westernized Hindus are extremely suspicious of the new Hinduism. They label it out of hand as fundamentalist, backward, or Fascist, even though Hinduism is the most liberal, universal, syncretic and diverse of all the world's main religions with its many gods, sages, scriptures and yoga practices. Westernized Hindus appear to take pride in denigrating Hinduism. On the other hand, they do not criticize religions like Islam or Christianity which are generally exclusive, monolithic and intolerant of other beliefs unlike the way Hinduism is. They like to paint Hinduism as fundamentalist and dangerous while promoting a tolerant and respectful view of Christianity and Islam, including their fundamentalist sides. They have little tolerance for vocal Hindu religious groups like the VHP but they have a great tolerance, for example, for the Government of Iran, which western countries like the United States have labelled as a terrorist country, but towards which the Government of India has been very friendly, even at one point considering selling nuclear reactors to it.

Contrary to this east-to-west movement has been a smaller but still important movement within western culture itself. Many westerners have developed an interest in eastern spirituality including Hindu yoga, Vedanta, and Ayurveda. There are now ashrams, temples and yoga centres throughout the western world. Gurus from India have often gained large followings in the west. Projecting Hindu spirituality not as backward but as progressive, futuristic and universal in

its orientation, they have found it appealing to people all over the world. This movement, which began largely in the late sixties, is still increasing dramatically from year to year. Now it is moving to eastern Europe as well, with the collapse of Communism. It has even proved at times popular in Islamic countries, but has been suppressed by the authorities there.

Westernized Hindus are naturally perplexed by this movement. It makes them feel perhaps a little guilty that westerners find value in their spiritual tradition which they have probably never studied or taken seriously. They would like to believe that such westerners are uneducated, misinformed, or merely some fanatic fringe of the generally progressive western society and its distrust of any spiritual or yogic practices, which many other westerners, particularly the religious fundamentalists, would label as cults. However, many of the westerners studying or practising Hindu-based teachings are well-educated. They include a number of scientists, artists, doctors and teachers. For example, while modern Hindus look down on Hindu mythology, Joseph Campbell broadcast its value on American Educational Television a few years ago. Instead of showing Hindu mythology as a strange superstition, he showed it as a sophisticated spiritual and psychological science.

I myself have been a product of this west to east movement. I discovered Hindu yoga and Vedanta teachings at a young age in the late sixties, after having studied western science, art, philosophy and religion, I found in Hindu teachings a science of spirituality that shows us how to understand ourselves and the vast universe in which we live, not as external phenomena but part of the same consciousness which transcends time and space. Such spiritual knowledge and realization is almost non-existent in western religions or in western intellectual culture, which has not yet understood the deeper layers of consciousness like the Hindu sages. Compared to Hindu yogis and spiritual giants, like Ramana Maharshi or Ramakrishna, the intellectual giants of western culture, like Einstein or Freud, appear like children in intelligence and understanding. Compared to them western religious leaders like the Pope, who don't even have a concept of spiritual realization, appear like beginners in the spiritual realm.

Later in my life, in my thirties, after I had already written books on Hindu spirituality, including some published in India, I visited India for the first time and had a number of discussions with modern westernized Hindus. There I contacted the "Quit India for the west" movement first hand. I was appalled at how little so many Hindus either valued or understood their own tradition. They would equate Hindu spirituality with a superstition on a par with caste and untouchability. They were fond of quoting Marx or Shakespeare but would certainly not mention the Bhagavadgita, which they regarded as a great mystification that confused people. They used materialists and atheists like Freud and Marx to interpret the Vedas, if they studied the Vedas at all. While I was interested in visiting temples and ashrams in India, they wanted to talk about the

latest developments in western technology. While I loved the sculpture in Hindu temples, they liked modern western art. While I liked Indian classical music, they liked western classical music or even rock and roll, if they were younger in age.

Yet more surprisingly, I discovered that the same westernized and anti-Hindu attitude abounded in the English-language press of India, which appeared more appropriately the press of a foreign or non-Hindu country than that of a land where over eighty per cent of the people are Hindus. The English-language press of India appears merely as an Indian version of the western news media, with the same basic types of news and views, only with a more leftist political orientation. There was little of anything of Hindu spirituality or little positive said about Hindu culture. In fact, there is often a remarkable similarity between the view of Hinduism as promoted by Christian fundamentalists in the west and that projected by the English-language news media of India itself. Both portray Hinduism as a bewildering set of backward cults that keep people in superstition and poverty. They are both suspicious of *swamis* and *sadhus* as controlling the minds of people.

If we look at the English-language press of India, the term Hindu occurs mainly relative to various negative appellations like fundamentalist, chauvinist or Fascist—not merely in regard to small or fringe Hindu groups but relative to some of the largest Hindu religious groups and also to the largest opposition political party. Even the western news media would rarely, if ever, apply such terms to a majority religion like Christianity or Islam in their own countries, particularly to the largest groups representing the religions. Meanwhile I saw that non-Hindu groups are rarely so designated in the Indian press, which would make it appear that Hinduism is the most backward and intolerant of the world's religions, which any real Hindu should know is not the case at all.

While in India, I also came into contact with the new Hinduism which I had begun with in my own studies. Studying the Vedas at a young age in the original Sanskrit I discovered that what the Vedas said was quite different than their modern interpretations by western scholars. The Vedas were twisted by western scholars to fit into a Eurocentric view of history that saw no significant indigenous culture in India. I saw how the earlier western colonial domination of Asia had left its mark in the intellectual realm. I was appalled to learn that these colonialistic views of the Vedas were still taught in schools in India today (and even embraced by the anti-colonialist Marxists). I decided to take it upon myself to help correct these wrong views, which I have attempted to do in various books and articles that I have written through the years.

When I visited India I met with representatives of the new Hinduism, modern Hindus seeking to rediscover their Hindu roots. They also had a broad view of Hinduism as part of a movement toward a global culture and universal spirituality, Hinduism as Sanatana Dharma. Such individuals were often highly

educated, knew a number of languages, had travelled to many countries, and valued Hinduism from a standpoint of intelligence and modernity, not out of lack of contact with the greater world. I found that these were the same people that the English-language press of India would label as fundamentalists. They were called fundamentalists not for any aggressive religious conservatism, but for finding real value in Hinduism and for not embracing leftist political values. These people demonstrated an appreciation of religion, spirituality and science, such as I found in no fundamentalist groups in America, or in even the orthodox among Western religions. As I met these representatives of the new Hinduism before I knew of the social and political polarization of India, I could not be influenced by such negative portrayals of them in the press.

Perhaps the greatest irony of this situation is that westernized Hindus are looking for a universality, humanitarianism and enlightened attitude about life, such as only exists within their own tradition that they are denigrating without ever having really examined it. True enlightened culture is not in liberal or leftist politics but in the science of yoga. There is also no conflict between traditional Hindu or dharmic values, like non-violence, and the most enlightened and global values of humanity. One can promote traditional Hindu spiritual values and yet not only be modern, but also super-modern and futuristic, not only Indian but universal in one's views. Traditional Hindu spiritual values promote a culture of dharma, a yogic way of life, a life in harmony with the universe, through recognizing the same Self in all beings.

There is certainly much wrong with India today. Yet it is wrong to think that these problems are simply caused by Hinduism. Certainly they are not caused by Hindu spirituality, which is the most comprehensive, liberal and expansive in the world with its view that all the world is one family and all the universe is One Self. Some of these problems, like caste, have their roots in the Hindu social system. But these are usually not based on a real understanding of Hindu cultural forms but on their misapplication through time, in which they have become rigid.

There are some Hindu groups which could be called fanatic, backward, or superstitious. But these represent only a very small part of Hinduism and of the Hindu groups who have been accused of these things. Compared to western religions the percentage of Hindus who have exclusive and intolerant ideas about religion is very small.

Many of the problems of modern India have been caused by Socialism and Communism. In this regard the economic and social problems in India also have their roots in centuries of foreign domination which causes people to lose their self-respect and cease making efforts to improve themselves. This has been aggravated by the prevalence of anti-Hindu ideological movements, like Communism, Christianity and Islam, which still have a strong missionary presence in India.

What is portrayed in the English-language news media of India as a battle between modern secular liberals and backward Hindu fundamentalists is more appropriately a struggle between a corrupt and rigid Communist-Socialist elite and traditional Hindu spiritual groups concerned with the real welfare of humanity

Each country, like each person, has a soul and a destiny. India also has her soul and her destiny, which is to be a land of religious freedom and spiritual practices. Unless one lives up to one's soul value or dharma, one cannot be successful or happy in life. The same is true of a country. It is not the soul or dharma of India to be another westernized economic giant, which is not to say that India need remain poor. It is not her dharma to become another Communist land, and Communism is already a thing of the past. Nor is it her dharma to adopt an exclusive religious belief like that of Islam or Christianity, which claims that other religions are false, inferior or out of date. Above all, it is not India's dharma to slavishly imitate the west in culture, mind or religion.

India must wake up to her destiny, which is to revive her spiritual culture and share it for the benefit of all mankind. This requires that the intellectual elite of the country cease denigrating the soul of India in hasty and superficial attempts to be modern and humanitarian. It requires a new Hinduism that corrects the social evils of the older Hinduism while maintaining the greater spiritual basis of the tradition. Such a new Hinduism or awakening to Sanatana Dharma, the universal tradition, is essential not only for India but for the entire world. Without reconnecting with our older spiritual traditions and their yogic sciences we will not have the foundation to move forward to a real enlightened age for humanity. Fortunately India appears to be having this awakening, however slow, difficult or painful it may be.

DAVID FRAWLEY

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UNDERSTANDING THE “TWO CULTURES” DEBATE TODAY

Engaging in immediate debate on each specific point closes one's mind for good and all. Debating gives most of us much more psychological satisfaction than thinking does but it deprives us of whatever chance there is of getting closer to the truth.

— C.P. Snow

I

WHILE most lectures eventually suffer the fate of cultural obsolescence, it is noteworthy that the “Two Cultures” Debate,¹ despite a passage of over thirty years, has not lost its ardour and urgency symptomatic of a cultural crisis. If anything, one is struck more than ever before by the lectures' understanding of our milieu and the concern they show of our collective destiny.

This is not to deny that there were elements in the C P Snow-F R. Leavis Exchange that reflected national prejudice and insular attitudes towards the world. Indeed, major arguments in the debate, especially in Snow, simply took the primacy of the West and the model of development associated with the English-speaking world for granted. The paradigm seemed to assume that since modern science and industrialism arose in the West, especially in Britain, the rest of the world, especially the former colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America, must await the outcome of the ongoing conflict in the West between the scientific and literary cultures. The fact that the clash between rationality and the life of imagination, our Apollonian and Dionysian drives, could have had interesting manifestations elsewhere, such as in the Orient, worthy of a fruitful cross-cultural study, does not appear to influence the debate. On the other hand, while “paternalism” is disavowed (by Snow) the unidirectional flow of knowledge from England—the West—to the Third World ends up in endorsing a paternalistic attitude towards global welfare.

In seeking to understand the significance of the “Two Cultures” Debate today, I propose to first sum up the arguments and counter-arguments of Snow and Leavis. Secondly, I shall attempt a review of the answers provided by both, and finally I shall try and formulate an approach towards a cultural synthesis in the light of our changing attitude towards Science, Culture and Literature, and the meaning we attach to development and progress. I realize that neither am I a scientist nor do I have a specialized knowledge of the history of scientific enquiry and progress. However, the debate, when conducted, was not meant for a specialized audience; it operated in the public domain, its precise task was to assess the extent to which both Science and Literature affected the tenor of life

the citizens lived in today's vastly complex world.² I shall therefore go beyond the two critics and draw support from alternative systems of thought and civilizational traditions

II

Beginning the Rede Lecture (1959) in a carefully self-reflexive manner, C P. Snow declares that "by training I was a scientist: by vocation a writer" (p. 1). He believes that "the intellectual life of the whole Western Society is increasingly being split into two polar groups" literary intellectuals and scientists. The fact that the new definition of literary intellectuals does not include scientists like Rutherford or Eddington or Dirac, Adrian or himself deeply bothers him. Though the problem is currently manifest in Britain, there is no doubt in his mind that "by and large this is a problem of the entire West."

The consequence of the mutual separation and operation is everywhere there to see. When cornered, some scientists defensively admit that they have "tried a bit of Dickens" "as though Dickens were an extraordinarily esoteric, tangled and dubiously rewarding writer."³ The more prejudiced among them find the mention of books startling and "prefer to use books as tools." Conversely, Snow also finds ignorance among literary persons equally appalling. After all, one's ignorance of the second law of thermodynamics is as bad as not reading a work of Shakespeare. Similarly, Snow finds scientific terms like "polarised lights" and "refraction"⁴ used arbitrarily in poetry. The most unfortunate fact, according to Snow, is that "the clashing point of two subjects, two disciplines, two cultures—of two galaxies so far as that goes—ought to produce creative chances" (p. 16). Only, it does not. Instead, we seem to "have set ourselves the task of producing a tiny elite, far smaller proportionately than in any comparable country—educated in any academic skill" (p. 19).

There are two major flaws that Snow finds among the members of the literary culture. One is the tendency towards solipsism that he thinks characterizes the literary writers. In his individual self, the scientist too might believe in the essential isolation of man, that "each of us dies alone." However, the scientist's social self, Snow argues, is governed by a spirit of optimism that saves him from complacency about the social condition. Indeed, Snow claims to see a pattern here and argues that

It is hard to think of a writer of high class who really stretched his imaginative sympathy, who could see at once the hideous back streets, the smoking chimneys, the internal price... (p. 25) ⁵

Not just a lack of interest in the culture of poverty but a proneness to

nihilism or literary fascism⁶ seems to be the governing ideal of many prominent literary writers, according to Snow. As he asks:

Why do most writers take on social opinions which would have been thought distinctly uncivilized or *démodé* at the time of the Plantagenets? Yeats, Pound, Wyndham Lewis, nine out of ten of those who have dominated literary sensibility in our time, were they not only politically silly but politically wicked? Didn't the influence of all they represent bring Auschwitz that much nearer? (p. 7)

Snow concludes by saying that "there is in fact a connection which literary persons were culpably slow to see, between some kind of early 20th century art and the most imbecile expressions of anti-social feelings."

For Snow, it is clearly Science that provides the answer.⁷ Science produces the miracle of industrialism and it is presumably the industrial culture that can eradicate poverty from the face of the earth. Those who claim that the poor do not want factories are simply not telling the truth. For Snow contends that "with singular unanimity, in any country where they have had the chance, the poor have walked off the land into the factories as fast as the factories could take them" (p. 26).

However, Snow admits that scientists themselves are not free from their own sub-cultural prejudice. Many good scientists, for instance, tend to believe that "applied science was an occupation for second rate minds."⁸ The unfortunate fact is that though much money was spent in promoting the mercantile industrial culture, there was very little attempt to try and comprehend the intellectual implications of the scientific revolution. As a result, today we do not know how to cope socially with science. As Snow observes, "If our ancestors had invested talent in the industrial revolution instead of the Indian empire, we might be more soundly based now. But they didn't."

Four years after the Rede Lecture, Snow takes stock of his early viewpoints. He now feels that some of the criticism of his work "has been loaded with personal abuse to an abnormal extent." This is clearly a reference to F.R. Leavis. Citing examples from critics, Snow asks, "Do certain kinds of animosity lead to any inability to perform the physical act of reading? The evidence suggests so" (p. 58).

Culture, maintains Snow, is an ambiguous term. It may be defined as "the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties which characterise our humanity." It may also be used in the anthropological sense, which he defines "as a group of persons living in the same environment linked by common habits, common assumptions, a common way of life." Thus, scientists belonging to one culture might believe that "research is the primary function of the university whereas literary persons would not think so."

In sum, concludes Snow, it is dangerous to have two cultures. The answer to the crisis of two cultures is the spread of the scientific revolution all over the world. There is no other way. While the ideal of the Renaissance man is admittedly not possible, Snow argues that we must look up to examples such as in America where "scientists of world-standing are talking to non-specialized classes."

III

In his Richmond Lecture, "Two Cultures: The Significance of C P. Snow", Leavis employs a sharp ironical tone to attack the premises, analytical tools and approach of his adversary. The opening sentence is typical:

If confidence in oneself as a master mind qualified by capacity, insight and knowledge to pronounce authoritatively on the frightening problems of our civilization is genius, then there can be no doubt about Sir Charles Snow's. He has no hesitations. (p. 91)

Leavis adopts throughout a caustic tone, demolishing Snow brick by brick. Through a close reading of the text for which he is justly famous, Leavis demonstrates the insufficiency of Snow's knowledge of literature and culture. The latter's sweeping generalizations predictably come in for a sharp rebuke. The view that Ibsen was the "only writer of world class who seems to have had an understanding of the industrial revolution" and the casual remark that no British writer worth the name dealt with the social novel of poverty are obviously too inaccurate to merit comment by us.

Going through Leavis' essay, it is easy to see why it came dangerously close to facing the charge of libel. He is amused by Snow's credentials as a novelist. The latter's reputation, according to Leavis, is created by "the cultural conditions manifested in his acceptance" (p. 91). "He does not know what he means and does not know he does not know." "The Two Cultures' exhibits an utter lack of intellectual distinction and an embarrassing vulgarity of style." "He had done his university much harm" (p. 93). His lecture was "conceived and written by someone who had not the advantage of an intellectual discipline of any kind" (p. 93). The argument of Snow's Rede Lecture is at an immensely lower conceptual level than even "a pupil's essay" (p. 93). "Snow's 'literary intellectual' is the enemy of art and life" (p. 94). "It is a pathetic and comic and menacing illusion—illusion on Snow's part that he is capable of thought" (p. 94); "he is utterly without a glimmer of what creative literature is, or why it matters" (p. 95). Leavis rightly points out that "social condition" cannot be exclusive of the "individual condition." As he asks, "what is the 'social hope' that transcends, cancels or makes indifferent the inescapable tragic condition of each

individual? Where if not in individuals is what is hoped for—a non-tragic condition—supposed to be located?”

Similarly, Leavis finds it strange that while Wyndham Lewis is attacked for his denial of life, one of the greatest of the British novelists, D H Lawrence, is strangely left out. For as Leavis points out, in Lawrence's *Women in Love* we find “a quintessential presentment of the modern world” and “the Lawrentian maxim that nothing matters but life” (p. 96).

Of course, Leavis is careful to tell us that in opposing Snow, he is not trying to put the clock back. Indeed, he says that he is not seeking to defy or reverse “the accelerating movement of external civilization . that is determined by advanced technology.” Nor is he against the increase in “scientific education.” These are no doubt necessary, but according to him are not enough. To think that technology and productivity can create the miracle of human happiness would only be a false hope. For following Snow, we can see “the vision of our imminent tomorrow in today's America. the energy, the triumphant technology, the productivity, the high standard of living and the life impoverishment—the *human emptiness*” (p. 99) (Emphasis mine)

Thus to Leavis, Science and industrialism cannot be the answer to “two cultures,” but Literature and the University can. “For it is in the study of Literature, the Literature of one's own language in the first place that one comes to recognise the nature and priority of the third realm. the realm of that which is neither merely private and personal nor public in the sense that it can be brought into the laboratory or pointed to” (p 100). The ideal is to create “a cultural community of consciousness” (p 101)

It is therefore to Literature and the University that we must increasingly turn. As Leavis aptly remarks.

For the sake of our humanity—our humanness—for the sake of the human future, we must do with intelligent resolution and with faith all we can to maintain the full life in the present—and life is growth—of our transmitted culture. Like Snow, I look to the University. Unlike Snow, I am concerned to make it really a University, something (that is) more than a collocation of specialist departments—to make it a centre of human consciousness, perception, knowledge, judgement and responsibility (p. 101).

It is thus the Literature Departments or the English school of a University like Cambridge that could generate “a centre of consciousness (and conscience) for our civilisation.” Such units mercifully supplant the current culture of Sunday papers. For journalism is “now the menacing disease of the University” (p 101).

IV

How then do we view the "Two Cultures" Debate today? The conflict between the scientific and literary cultures is far from resolved. Both in the advanced West and in the developing nations, members belonging to scientific and humanistic domains continue to operate in separate spheres, often with mutual suspicion, disdain and antagonism. Few scientists like Einstein, Oppenheimer and Snow, or Bhabha, Ramana or Narlikar can straddle the cultural world with ease. Fewer men of letters have an access to the world of science. It is true that a Jules Verne, Isaac Asimov or Arthur C. Clarke can stir at once our scientific and literary imagination. But the legitimacy of fictional writing dealing with scientific fantasies only testifies to the vast power and outreach of Science in our everyday life. Like the denizens of a *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or *Brave New World*, modern man seems hopelessly trapped by the power of Science. Both the consumer culture and the armament industry demand a constant appropriation of Science. As captives, we become soulless victims, fatally lured to our death. We might, in this sense, recall "Rapaccini's Garden," that instructive allegory of Science and human evil by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Thus, the mystique of Science and the scientific world view are far more pervasive and more complete today. In its military use, the men of Science have perfected a special lexicon of a classic Joseph Heller. Like the diabolical protagonist of a Mary Shelley or H.G. Wells, today's scientist recognizes no sacred frontiers in his relentless drive for control and conquest covering the embryo and the stellar world.

The claim that Science through industrialism can be the panacea for poverty has been stood on its head. For science-based development—medicine, farming, industry and technology—has come to mean today all round denudation and environmental degradation, a holocaust fantasized for ever in Hollywood dystopias.

For, the Affluent Society demands more and more resources that the planet earth simply cannot yield.⁹ Its vastly depleted Ozone layer threatens to turn us into an arid Mars or Venus.

Scientific epistemology based on the primacy of sense experience considers Man basically as an atomized, sensate being that must forever appropriate in order to remain happy. Manifest in Late Capitalism, it logically entails a proliferation of desires and constant demand on resources. We might instead reconsider the constitution of the human person as other than just a hungry animal. We need to redefine our very concept of happiness, based not on spiralling wants and instant gratification but on the fulfilment of basic economic needs for our vital, emotional and spiritual existence. We might, for good measure, turn from a Keynesian to a Gandhian view of life and happiness.¹⁰

Finally, it is not just the problem of "Two Cultures" that we face today but

that of many cultures whose members seldom talk to each other. The literary world itself is hopelessly balkanized¹ into “high” or “low”, “progressive” and “reactionary”, “elite” and “popular”. The gap between what Leavis called “mass civilization” and “minority culture” has never been wider than today. While democratic compulsions take us to areas traditionally perceived as marginal, we also need to ponder whether or not classics contain wisdom of universal significance transcending barriers of class, gender and race.

To answer these vexing issues, we must increasingly turn, as Leavis rightly said, to the University. That is his great relevance. But it will not be to the Literature Department as traditionally understood. The world today is far too complicated to allow such easy options. For no discipline today has preserved its pristine form; every branch of learning in the University has taken on a multidisciplinary character. The beginning of our search for a synthesis can therefore be made with any discipline. Traditionally, the humanities provided space and rationale for a speculative and reflective task. Today they embrace all discursive practices.

Perhaps it will always be our fate to suffer from the burden of many cultures. That is what modernity and post-modernity ordain for us. Such fractures and dislocations are inevitable in a multipolar world, increasingly characterized by pluralism and diversity. Only we can decide whether such multicultures can be a source of strength, our moment of glory. Yet the drive towards wholeness and cultural universals must never be abandoned. It must proceed from the solid sense of a centre and recognition of the many different worlds we inhabit at once. That is the ultimate meaning of the “Two Cultures” debate, their legacy today.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

Notes and References

Indebted to my friend M. Sridhar for some of the source materials

1 See “The Two Cultures” (“The Rede Lecture”, 1959) by C P. Snow in *The Two Cultures And a Second Look: An Expanded Version of the Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964, rpt. 1979). Also “Two Cultures: The Significance of C P. Snow” (“The Richmond Lecture”, 1962) in *The Melbourne Critical Review*, No. 5, 1962, pp. 91-101. All references to the lectures pertain to these editions and are parenthetically given in the text.

2 The place of Poetry/Literature in society has been debated by many critics. See, among others, Sidney’s “An Apology for Poetry”, Shelley’s “Defence of Poetry”, Arnold’s “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” in his *Culture and Anarchy*, I. A. Richards’ *Sciences and Poetries*.

3 Alas, this is a common experience with all of us in the Indian University System as well.

4 A very valid charge, much of this is found in *Modern Poetry*, though a number of poets, it must be said, are very accurate with regard to the use of scientific imagery.

5 A shocking omission this—in Snow.

6 See John Harrison, *The Reactionaries* (London, Gollancz, 1966).

7 Witness where the blind faith in science has taken us.

8 A very valid remark Talk to any engineer or Professor of Engineering at an institute of technology and you will see the truth of this observation

9 Amply documented in many studies from *Limits to Growth of the Club of Rome* onward

10 The truth is being increasingly admitted today

11 See, the Multiculturalism Debate in America Among others, Arnowitz Stanley and Henry A. Giroux, *Education under Siege* (New York Bergin, 1958), Cleanth Brooks, “In Defense of the Canon”, *Dialogue*, February, 1992, Gerald Graff and Reginald Gibbons, eds *Criticism in the University* (Evanston North Western University Press, 1985), Alvin Kernan, *The Death of Literature* (New Haven Yale University Press, 1990), etc

THE DREAM

I LAY down on my pillow, as my head sunk lower down
 The night was very silent, not a stir, not a sound.
 Exhaustion then came over me, my eyes could only close,
 My mind then drifted slowly to the place that no one knows.
 The thinker grew unconscious, and I had no control,
 My feelings left my body and were followed by my soul
 Deep into eternity, at least that’s what it seems
 Until I broke the realm between reality and dreams.
 Suddenly into a place that my spirit did adore,
 Unusual shades and hues that I had never seen before.
 A friendly voice whispered to me, the voice I could recognize.
 I turned around to see it, but the face was in disguise
 The time was not in future nor in past nor in present
 But somewhere in the middle where it was quiet, soft and pleasant.
 The sky was full of diamonds and was wondrous to see,
 I pranced through all the daffodils and realized I was free—
 Free from all my worries, all my anger, all my fright—
 I developed new perspectives as I stepped into the light
 And through honest eyes and my disguise I looked out at the land.
 I grasped for the key of happiness, but only touched it with my hand.
 Everything began to fade and sink to my dismay,
 Purpose of my journey not reached, but just a heartbeat away—
 And in my mind I wondered in thought about everything I’d seen
 And to this day I still ask myself what all my dreams may mean.

AVITAI RACHMANY

FIGURING THE FUNDAMENTALS

AN extremely important message for the Integral Yoga is Sri Aurobindo's most known and displayed assertion reading "Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you; because she is, indeed, always present "

This message contains many truths.

1) This yoga cannot be practised without accepting the Mother as the Supreme Mother. The right to be an Ashramite or devotee is ultimately centred in our acceptance of the Mother

2) To say that we believe in Sri Aurobindo but not in the Mother would mean that we are not accepting Sri Aurobindo. For Sri Aurobindo's central message makes his yoga revolve round the Mother.

3) The Integral Yoga can be commenced anywhere by a sincere aspirant because the Mother is not limited by space and is everywhere. The Mother's embodied aspect of constant Grace is omnipresent for those who love Her

4) Our "behaviour" in the context of Her "looking" at us does not limit the meaning to our actions and thoughts, being at no time unworthy of Her presence. The message indicates that our "behaviour" must be always Sadhana-Oriented. She is most pleased when we progress in Sadhana, and Her look would reflect Her pleasure because Her "looking" at us is not a still image Her "looking" radiates love, light, beauty and force Her look can conduct our Sadhana if *we allow Her* to do so

5) The expectation of Her "looking" in terms of our "behaviour" is that we ultimately do everything that helps us grow in the divine life—that is, in the Mother's consciousness.

6) This message contains the central truth of the Integral Yoga—the total and complete surrender to the Mother All the rest that is written about sadhana by Sri Aurobindo is a commentary and an elaboration of this central truth

7) The assertion of the message also implies that the Mother is multi-dimensional and by Her sheer look She acts on all the dimensions of our being, namely, physical, vital, mental and psychic Thus Her being can fulfil all aspirations Her look is fully responsive to our sincere behaviour

8) An implication of this message can be discovered in the beautiful message Amal Kiran received from Sri Aurobindo when he was in Bombay. The message reads. "Remember the Mother and, though physically far from Her, try to feel Her with you and act according to what your inner being tells you would be Her Will Then you will be best able to feel Her presence and mine and carry our atmosphere around you as a protection and a zone of quietude and light accompanying you everywhere "

9) Her "looking" also means that She always keeps us in sight To be in Her sight means to be in Her care because it is the Mother looking after Her children To be within Her sight is to be within Her spiritual Motherhood—spiritual

Motherhood that “.. gives all that human Motherhood can give and it contains in itself infinitely more.”

10) Her “looking” is Her help, is Her Grace, is Her protection. Our “behaviour” must respond to Her “looking” by remaining concentrated on Her

11) This message firmly puts us in the perspective of Integral Sadhana.

*

We the Ashramites may have many wants, many likes. Due to various reasons all of these or most of them may not be fulfilled. But really what we “want” is not important. What is important is what we “deserve”. And definitely we “deserve” the realisation of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in our hearts because this “deserving” is the gift from our Divine Parents. They have chosen us. Their choice has made us “deserving”. There is a famous saying: “First deserve and then desire.” In our case it is the reverse. Since they have made us “deserving”, we must desire the divine truth intensely. This is our duty, this is precisely why we are here.

*

It is only because the Sri Aurobindo Ashram does not subscribe to the outmoded notions of confinement by religious limitations that it is not an orthodox Ashram. But perhaps because it is most like the ancient Vedic Ashrams it can be described as more orthodox.

*

It has perhaps become a fashion in the Ashram to say that the Mother has given us freedom. Yes, indeed, She has, but not without the right context—the context is that the true spiritual growth can take place only in Freedom, but not the freedom to do things which would actually block our progress. This is as much true when we indulge in self-deception by a specially coined phrase “After all, this is merely moral” and we do what we want, we behave as we like, and make fools of ourselves by missing the spiritual opportunity offered at every moment of our life in the Ashram. True, that to be moral may not be necessarily spiritual, but definitely becoming immoral, unethical, unvirtuous can hamper spiritual progress because becoming all these things would amount to giving free play to our weaknesses, and on many counts becoming selfish and rude. When Sri Aurobindo said that spirituality is greater than morality, He also added to the effect that He did not give licence to spiritual aspirants to become immoral. He emphasised this while explaining the spiritual law in a sentence reading, “Its law is that you must cast aside all movements that draw you away from the Divine.”

The unilluminated vital being from which all desires grow cannot be given free play by taking help of the phrase "This is only moral". The Mother said, "You can break moral rules only when you observe the divine law." The rejection of desires, altogether, is the demand of the spiritual life.

The concept of morality has to be tuned to our spiritual growth. Any act of ours which negatively affects our spiritual progress is immoral and unethical. Unkindness, rudeness, selfishness tie up the soul and hold up spiritual growth. Integral spirituality stands on the firm foundation of normal human virtues which include the accepted understanding of morality. Each one has to discover spiritual ethics proper to oneself.

Freedom misused in the Ashram would constitute a denial of the yogic consciousness and can become a great hindrance to spiritual growth. Only if our psychic love is leading us can we have freedom from rules conceived by organised society, because in that case our behaviour would always be in the right direction and our conduct be tuned by the highest ideal. Our behaviour then would be proper to our spiritual life.

"Cling to Truth" amounts to embracing of Harmony. Harmony here means that all the parts of the being are turned to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But we cannot be harmonious if we have not acquired normal human virtues and offered them to the Mother. An unvirtuous person cannot acquire Harmony. A harmonious order is a realisation far superior to suppression of some elements of our nature. That is why freedom is given for individual development in the Ashram. Freedom must foster Harmony

On the other hand the Mother carries a person safely forward, no matter what psychological difficulties one may bring to Her. The central condition is that the individual trusts and loves our Divine Parents sincerely. Then morality or anything else is unimportant, for, as aforesaid, the Mother carries ahead the sincere sadhak in all safety, because the sadhak sincerely attempts and aspires to come out of his psychological problems and does not permit their free play under any excuse or self-deception.

*

Lord Rama came to establish moral virtues as a basis on which the later Avatars were to carry forward the divine work. Lord Rama's virtues are the pillars in the subconscious on which are founded the spiritual realisations that followed and will follow.

Lord Rama sought to bring down moral realisations in the earth's subconscious. He fulfilled his mission but he was always a spiritual figure for Rishis, Yogis and Bhaktas who could intuit the truth. Lord Krishna was not immoral Being spiritual He fought the dogmatisation of Lord Rama's morals by the celebrities who in dogmatising moral commitments became the tool of the wrong

forces. Lord Rama had foreseen the misinterpretation of his moral virtues in times to come and so he had forestalled this by his slaying of Bali. If Lord Rama had been in place of Bhishma Pitamaha and Dronacharya, his virtuous urge to save Draupadi from being dishonoured would have brushed aside all other moral commitments. These episodes of the Ramayana and Mahabharata are well-known and need no narration.

Lord Krishna did not recommend or give licence for wholesale breaking of moral rules for all times to come. As a war strategy, in the interest of Truth, he subordinated these rules. It was when he advised Arjuna to rise above moral concepts in the war that the Gita was born; and the true meaning of morality is best ingrained in the Gita if the meaning is not mentally distorted, as is sometimes the case. Because the conventional ideas got mixed up with the moral ideas of the generations of the past the full meaning of morality has not yet been fully understood.

JAGAT KAPADIA

A PLUNGE INTO THE UNKNOWN

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE UNEXPECTED

(13)

THE New Year Message for 1957:

A Power greater than that of Evil can alone win the Victory. It is not a crucified but a glorified body that will save the world

On 2nd January 1957 somebody asked in the Playground class of the Mother for this message to be explained. After explaining in detail under what circumstances the message was written, the Mother concluded:

Because until now evil has been opposed by weakness, by a spiritual force without any power for transformation in the material world, this tremendous effort of goodwill has ended only in deplorable failure and left the world in the same state of misery and corruption and falsehood. It is on the *same* plane as the one where the adverse forces are ruling that one must have a greater power than theirs, a power which can conquer them totally *in their very domain*. To put it otherwise, a spiritual force which would be capable of transforming both the consciousness and the material world. This force is the supramental force. What is necessary is to be receptive to its action on the physical plane, and not to run away into a distant Nirvana leaving the enemy with full power over what one abandons.

It is neither sacrifice nor renunciation nor weakness which can bring the victory. It is only Delight, a delight which is strength, endurance, supreme courage. The delight brought by the supramental force. It is much more difficult than giving everything up and running away, it demands an infinitely greater heroism—but that is the only way to conquer .

Many, along with me, in the Ashram were expecting that the Mother's body would be transformed that very year, and she in her glorified body would save the world. With much enthusiasm and great hope I started the year. I was constantly thinking of the Mother's message—"Give all you have, all you are...", and was constantly searching my heart if I had anything more which I could offer to the Mother. What I had with the Ashram cashier was required for my own expenses. Even from that I was giving offerings for Darshan days.

Then I remembered that a few years earlier a certain sum of money was deposited, as National Savings Certificates, with some post office in Bengal in the name of my mother and her four sons—myself included. Those certificates

were at the stage of maturity They were in the custody of my elder brother. It was quite a substantial sum. An idea came to my mind. Since my name was involved in those certificates, I could morally and legally claim those certificates. Without further deliberation I wrote to the Mother offering that money to her.

And later on I got a response from the Mother. Nolini-da told me that the Mother had accepted the offering. I wrote to my elder brother requesting him to send me those certificates bearing my name. I also gave him to understand that perhaps now the Mother would make me a permanent member of the Ashram. He complied with my request after consulting my mother and my maternal grandfather. I had also a small amount in the savings account at the Santiniketan Post-Office. All this I offered to the Mother. Nothing more was left to me except what I had with the Ashram cashier. Kameshwar-ji took me to the Pondicherry head Post-Office and after undergoing all the formalities the money was received and offered to the Mother.

But nothing happened as I had expected. There was no word from the Mother making me a permanent member of the Ashram. I was in a fix. What to do? Nothing more was left to me which I could fall back upon in the event of a necessity. I could ask no more from my family. If I did they would ask me to come back. I did not revolt this time but was suffering inwardly.

Daily life as well as my work was going on as usual. I knew quite well that the Divine sometimes plays pranks with His 'bhakta' to test his sincerity. I had heard or read many stories since my childhood which corroborate this fact.

There was the story of Krishna stealing the clothes of gopis while they were bathing in Yamuna river. This story puts a moralist to shame and he accuses Krishna of debauchery. To me, however, it is allegorical. All human beings are covered with coats of falsehood. Only those who love the Divine appreciate his pranks. Their coats of falsehood are removed by the Divine either one by one or all at a time according to the quality of their love and 'bhakti'. A sadhak of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga said that if he had to confess his mistakes he would have died. What to speak of ordinary men?

In Santiniketan during the annual fair, among various functions there is an event which is called 'Kabigan'—a debate through poems and songs between two village folk-poets and their associates. Usually the subjects are chosen from mythology. I remember one such 'Kabigan'-event where the debate was between Krishna and Duryodhana. Duryodhana accuses Krishna of many immoral deeds, even of cheating his bhaktas. Krishna answers through a metrical verse:

যে কবে আমার আশ/তাব কবি সর্বনাশ।
তবু নাহি ছাড়ে পাশ/হই তাব দাসের দাস ॥

which means—"He who aspires for me, I deprive him of everything he has. If, even after that, he ceases not to pursue me, I become a slave of his slave!" My

experiences with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are exactly the same which bring tears to my eyes now. After numerous life-experiences I am led to ditto that folk-poet's verse, with a little more to add—it is He who makes me pursue Him in spite of myself! Indeed, I cannot but use Sri Aurobindo's own words when I think of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother:

A God come down and greater by his fall

From this distance of time I can understand everything but at that time I could not and that is why I was suffering within

The Mother's Playground-classes had been a great help to me. I did not understand French, but that did not matter very much. The Mother's very presence, the light and consciousness she was radiating, her loving gestures, her voice, the modulation of her tone, her intonation, the vibration she was emanating, all spoke much more eloquently than mere words. And that is what attracted me the most in her Playground-classes.

An old Ashramite died. There was a dark shadow over the Ashram. That evening the Mother was taking her usual class at the Playground. I have found out the date from the Mother's Collected Works. It was 20 March, 1957.

I was in a depressed mood, tired of life, seeking rest and peace through death. I squatted on the ground placing my head between my knees, eyes closed, while the Mother's voice was ringing in my ears. By that time I could understand a few French words and phrases. And I could feel clearly through her voice her solicitude, her scolding, her persuasion to a depressed sadhak. When the Mother pronounced the word "s'asseoir"—meaning, to sit down, she spoke almost in a whispering voice, reflecting exactly my tired state of mind that time. Now I am quoting from the text to give the readers some taste of what I am saying:

... To sit down, to stop on the way, not to move forward, to go to sleep, to go downhill towards the grave before one's time, cease to live the purpose of life—to sit down!

The minute one stops going forward, one falls back. The moment one is satisfied and no longer aspires, one begins to die. Life is movement, it is effort, it is a march forward, the scaling of a mountain, the climb towards new revelations, towards future realisations. Nothing is more dangerous than wanting to rest. It is in action, in effort, in the march forward that repose must be found, the true repose of complete trust in the divine Grace, of the absence of desires, of victory over egoism.

True repose comes from the widening, the universalisation of the consciousness. Become as vast as the world and you will always be at rest. In the thick of action, in the very midst of the battle, the effort, you will know the repose of infinity and eternity.

This eloquent and spontaneous speech of the Mother came out in the *Bulletin*. The then chief minister of Bengal, Bidhan Chandra Roy, was so much impressed by this speech that he quoted it somewhere.

Another day, when in the Playground class I sat somewhat dejected, my head bent down, while the Mother was speaking, lost in my own thoughts, wondering if my experiences of the year 1956 were mere imaginations of my brain or hallucinations of my eyes—suddenly I was awakened by the Mother's forceful tone and clear voice—"Le monde nouveau est né, est né, est né,—le monde nouveau est né!" That much of French I understood that time. It means—"the new world is born, is born, is born—the new world is born!" The emphatic voice of the Mother reassured me of my own experiences of 1956. Let me now quote from the English version of the Mother's class-report dated 10 July, 1957:

. but what has happened, the really new thing, is that a new world is *born, born, born*. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a *new* world which is *born*. And we are right in the midst of this period of transition where the two are entangled—where the other still persists all-powerful and entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but where the new one is quietly slipping in, still very modest, unnoticed . in the consciousness of most people it is even altogether imperceptible. And yet it is working, growing—until it is strong enough to assert itself visibly...

In the supramental creation there will *no longer be any religions*. The whole life will be the expression, the flowering into forms of the divine Unity manifesting in the world....

But all this is in the future; it is a future .. which has *begun*, but which will take some time to be realised integrally. Meanwhile we are in a very special situation, extremely special, without precedent. We are now witnessing the birth of a new world, it is very young, very weak—not in its essence but in its outer manifestation—not yet recognised, not even felt, denied by the majority. But it is here. It is here, making an effort to grow, absolutely *sure* of the result. But the road to it is a completely new road which has never before been traced out—nobody has gone there, nobody has done that! It is a beginning, a *universal beginning*. So, it is an absolutely unexpected and unpredictable adventure.

There are people who love adventure. It is these I call, and I tell them this: "I invite you to the great adventure."

It is not a question of repeating spiritually what others have done before us, for our adventure begins beyond that. It is a question of a new creation, entirely new, with all the unforeseen events, the risks, the hazards it entails—a real adventure, whose goal is certain victory, but the road to

which is unknown and must be traced out step by step in the unexplored. Something that has never been in this present universe and that will *never* be again in the same way. If that interests you. . . well, let us embark. What will happen to you tomorrow—I have no idea.

One must put aside all that has been foreseen, all that has been devised, all that has been constructed, and then. . . set off walking into the unknown ..

Although I did not know French, the very voice of the Mother, the vibration she emanated, stirred my soul—I felt the clarion call to the new adventure. Later, of course, I read the whole speech in the *Bulletin* and responded silently to the call.

Now, as my Golconde-period, which I can call the golden period of my sadhana, was coming to an end by the end of July, so far as I can remember, let me recount a few experiences in my body while staying there.

I felt that my psychic being and my body were most open to the divine forces. It was my mind and my vital which resisted the most. My body suffered the most. Perhaps because of that the Mother gave me the best experiences in my body. Occult forces gave my body much help. One night while lying on my bed I felt as if somebody was massaging my body. It was very soothing and invigorating. But my physical mind thought—“How funny! nobody is here, who is massaging my body?” Then the massaging stopped.

One day, after returning from the Balcony Darshan and having finished my bath, I was preparing to leave for the Dining-room. All of a sudden I was caught by a fit of hiccup. It was certainly not to be relished like a morning tea-cup! How to go to the Dining-room and sit amongst others when the body was behaving in a most uncivilized manner shorn of all table-etiquette? Then I remembered the Mother and put a suggestion to Mr. Hiccup to leave me before I entered the Dining-room. In order to give Mr. Hiccup some time to behave I took a round-about way by the sea-side. And just as I was about to enter the Dining-room's main gate, Mr. Hiccup took leave of me with an “au revoir”!

Once, perhaps due to some over-exercise of my back, I got a sciatic pain. It was extremely severe. The whole day I lay on my bed without being able to move. In the evening I felt a strong will in me to go to the Playground for the Distribution. With much effort I got up and changed my dress. Then at a snail's pace, all along fighting with pain, I went to the Ashram, offered pranam at the Samadhi, took some rest on the cement bench outside the Reading Room and then headed for the Playground. Distribution was not yet over. I joined the last line. The Mother gave me a toffee. While coming outside the Playground I felt that fifty per cent of the pain was gone. Soon I fully recovered.

At that time I was so engrossed in my sadhana that I could not bear in my body vibrations from people who live an ordinary life. I tried to avoid market-

places too as much as possible. I tried to depend on Ashram departments as far as it was allowed.

One morning, at about 11 a.m. somebody told me that some visitors were waiting for me downstairs at the gate of Golconde. I came down and saw some people unknown to me—a man, his wife and a number of children. After talking for a few minutes I felt ill at ease. They were not putting up at any Ashram guest house. They were tourists. They asked me where they could have their lunch. I took them immediately to a hotel in the town and got rid of them.

On returning I felt out of sorts and feverish. So instead of having lunch, I climbed back to my room, relaxed on the easy-chair and meditated. I felt the Mother's Force and recovered completely. After about an hour I went down to have my lunch.

All of a sudden the charges at Golconde almost doubled. I was perplexed. At that rate it would not be possible to carry on for long with the little amount left with the Ashram cashier. I saw Madhav Pandit who was in charge of accommodation in Ashram houses. After consulting the Mother, I think, he gave me two small rooms in the house named Belle Vue at a much lesser charge than that of Golconde. The rooms were not well-ventilated. But then I had no other option. Here, in this house, some ashramites too were staying.

After some time an idea came to my mind. Whatever money I possessed I had already offered to the Mother. But more money might accrue to me in future because of inheritance rights. I thought that I had offered to the Mother my past, my present but not yet my future so far as money-matter was concerned. I wrote to the Mother offering that too, and prayed to her to make me an ashramite.

That evening Amrita-da approached me at the Playground, took my two hands into his with a great love and affection and told me: "Henceforth, all your money will belong to the Mother. Tomorrow morning I shall take you to Harikant for your 'Prosperity'." At this unexpected turn of events, I thrilled with an inexplicable joy. A great burden seemed to have been removed from my head. Henceforth the Divine Mother will take care of me. What a joyful relief it was not to be anxious about oneself! With tearful gratitude I inwardly bowed down to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

The Mother had declared in her class in 1955 that 1957 was destined to be a year of fulfilment for the world, for the nation as well as for the individual. I found it to be absolutely true at least for myself! I remember that one night I dreamt in Golconde that as I was crossing a rocky hill, out of sheer exhaustion and desperation and desolation I was rubbing my face on a boulder. Even the divine Presence seemed to have given me the slip. That is why it was really the hour of unexpected fulfilment for me after four years of tremendous psychological struggle.

Next morning Amrita-da took me to Harikant and made arrangements for my Prosperity. So far as I can remember, it was 26th July, 1957. Whatever cash

balance was there with the Ashram cashier, I withdrew and offered to the Mother. This was the first time in my life that I experienced the joy of being penniless—a little baby for whom his mother is all. And since then, after forty years, I have the same feeling—the Divine Mother is looking after all the needs of my soul and body. I feel the Mother's embrace in the clothing supplied by Prosperity. I don't accept special clothing offered by family members. I tell them: "Whatever you have to give, give to the Mother. The Mother is looking after my needs."

In one of his poems, Tagore narrates a story. A beggar was returning to his hut with a few handfuls of rice in his begging bowl. On the road he happened to meet the King of kings who was coming in His golden chariot. On seeing the beggar He came down from his chariot, stretched out his palms and begged something from the beggar. The beggar was extremely astonished! Still he could not refuse anybody begging from him. He took only a grain of rice and placed it on the hand of the King. After coming back to his hut and emptying his bowl on a plate he found something shining therein. He took it up and found it to be a grain of pure gold. Then he burst into tears and said, "O King, why didn't I give You all my rice?"

It is so true, so true! He takes only to give back many times the thing that we have given him. Says Sri Aurobindo in his book *Lights on Yoga*.

The Divine gives itself to those who give themselves without reserve and in all parts to the Divine. For them the calm, the light, the power, the bliss, the freedom, the wideness, the heights of Knowledge, the seas of Ananda.

I had the longtime habit of massaging my body with oil before bath. Now, I came to know that only hair-oil is supplied by Prosperity. What to do? No money was left to me. I wrote to the Mother. Soon Amrita-da called me and gave me a chit from the Mother and asked me to go to Dr. Nripendra at the Dispensary who supplied me the needed oil. By giving to the Divine nobody needs to feel helpless.

I asked for two dhotis from Prosperity but was told that before one year no clothing is given according to the rules of Prosperity. Again I wrote to the Mother.

At that time, in the morning, I was working with two other ashramites for building Ravindra's room on the first floor of the western side of the Ashram building, according to the wishes of the Mother. It was a voluntary work. When our own house was built at Santiniketan I watched masons at work. Now I tried my own hand at it. We did it quite successfully. Later, when the concreting of the roof was done, C-group boys and some girls too took part. Carpenter's work and mosaic flooring was done by professionals.

I was working high on a scaffolding when suddenly Amrita-da appeared

looking for me. On seeing Amrita-da I hastily came down and jumped on the floor. Smilingly he remarked—‘Smart!’ Amrita-da did not know that I was a sportsman at Santiniketan. He gave me the chit of the Mother where she had written—“Two dhotis for Abani—urgent.” I myself did not expect it so soon! Now I shall speak of another unexpected incident of the period

I had a severe toothache and saw the Ashram dentist. He asked me to come the next day when an injection had to be given. I did not like to take the injection and wrote to the Mother asking for her opinion. Next day Nolini-da called me and gave me a bottle of a dental medicine made in France, a little of which had been used by the Mother herself. Nolini-da explained to me the process of using it. After using it for three days I was completely cured. Then I took the bottle to Nolini-da and told him—now that I am cured, please return the bottle to the Mother. He took it. Next day he again sent for me and handing over the same bottle to me said: “The Mother says that what she has once given she never takes back.” How true! She has never taken back her Love and Grace in spite of all my failings!

That year, “the year of fulfilment”, I went to the Mother for the first time in four years for my birthday. The Mother received me in her Playground-room where Sri Aurobindo’s photograph is arranged with decorations.

Many unfortunate incidents have happened in my life since my birth or even before my birth which seemed to me to be a curse. After offering the bouquet of flowers and my pranam I looked straight into the Mother’s eyes and prayed silently to remove that curse. The Mother gave me a most charmingly sweet smile, inclined her head to one side indicating her consent. Then she gave me a white oleander flower signifying “quiet mind” and a Bengali translation of her book “Prayers and Meditations”. The original English version she had given me on the occasion of my birthday in 1950. I had the habit of reading this book regularly at night before going to bed at Golconde. After the book and the flower she gave me a handful of toffees in a handkerchief such as had been given by her to everybody on the occasion of the supramental manifestation in 1956.

I knew that the Mother had given a significance to numbers upto the number fourteen which signified transformation. After coming back to my room I counted the number of toffees. They were exactly fourteen in number. But she did not count them while giving, she simply gave a handful.

This number fourteen reminded me that in my first darshan of Sri Aurobindo in August 1949, I offered Rs. 14/- symbolizing the fourteen syllables of the ‘Mantra’ that I received from within me:

ॐ नमः श्रीभगवते श्रीअरविन्दाय

This number fourteen came again and again in my life of sadhana. Of that later on. Now, I am giving here a free English prose rendering of my Bengali

poem written in 1957 entitled "What to Offer at Thy Feet":

People gather around Thee bringing various offerings:

The scholars have brought their erudition; the rich people their riches; workers flock around Thee with their various capacities; big sadhaks have come with their power of askesis acquired in previous births, came poets and artists, singers and dancers with their enviable talents, came body-builders and wrestlers, boxers and sportsmen enhancing the beauty of Thy Playground; came kings and statesmen, and leaders of various hues with their respectful homage

What have I brought at Thy feet, O Sweet Mother? I find nothing except a bagful of stupidities! Let these be then sacrificed staining Thy altar with my blood! I have nothing else to offer Thee except my naked child-self

(To be continued)

ABANI SINHA

CHRISTALIS

by

GEORGETTE COTY

(Continued from the issue of April 1996)

Ruby Road

HE arrived today without prior intimation, there was no sound to alert me as on other occasions. Suddenly he stood before me and without a word we took off like a wind.

“We will sit here a bit,” he spoke at last, “before going further. Was I too fast for you? It did not unsettle you, I hope.”

“No, I am all right now. Let me take my breath, please.”

“So then, we can commence, look at me . . . look into my eyes.” Ah, those eyes, like an ocean of light. I looked at him and waited for his words.

“Much was given you, Halo, and all of that you have stored in your consciousness. That knowledge now is yours. You will not waste it, nor speak of it idly to anyone, for each must seek and receive it for himself. You embody that knowledge in your own self, and its force will activate, toward their own awakening, those with whom you will be in contact. Unbeknown to them, they will receive a touch of the Light that now is yours.

“Be as you were before, never show superiority over others—and no pride, no show of knowledge at all. Be quiet, simple and serve joyfully, you will receive the help for it. Do remember that this is a great re-creating time. The higher force is acting on all the fields of life. The all-awakening Light is descending already in minute yet decisive, all-changing ways

“Our meeting is due to this fact; we are two poles of one polarity and there are others like this, many others. Some live on earth, more in the higher regions, ready and waiting to come down and to manifest what they embody there.

“You have observed some of those activities; the great, powerful Realities and Beings engaged in this work in their desire to transform and to change this world. Indeed, to bring a change to nature and to man himself. And how can this be effected, you may ask. Let me tell you; by the opening and widening of the receptive faculty of man. By making him more subtle, enabling him to receive the force of consciousness coming to him from above.

“This is the force that will bring the change. As I said, this is happening already very gradually, yet noticeably. Are you not happy now? You are always praying for this. Others do also, it is therefore happening. Prayer is a very powerful element, or rightful wishing is,—it is the same thing. It can, and it does,

bring down the Light. It was that, I repeat, which brought me down to you ”

I was not prepared for such a lengthy teaching given me right after his arrival, but I wished that it would never stop. It did, though, because he never gave more than what he thought to be sufficient at one time. Eagerly I drew in his words, lodging them in the depth of my being. I felt the meaning enter me and find a place for itself where it fitted.

Christalis broke the silence and drew my eyes to his. “I have received permission,” he said quietly, “to show you today a model city being made ready for the future life on earth. You had expressed a desire to visit my dwelling place, and you may recall I told you that I live where I work. I shall take you there presently. This is a gift given you by the Mother of Light and a gift from me, for all your prayers for a happy future to the people and the lands. For the trust and devotion you have displayed during all that time I have come to you—and for your unfaltering faith in the Supreme Light. This is how you have earned this gift.

“I have chosen the Ruby Road to enter it,” he continued. “Let us go!”

This was a mystifying statement, I looked at my friend questioningly, but he displayed no sign of wanting to give further comment. I went with him as always, wondering what lay in store.

“We shall enter Auropolis through the Ruby Arch, the best way for you to approach it, I thought.”

I could not have been more perplexed, what name did he say it was? Ruby Arch, what a delightful sound this has!—Woosh, did we travel fast?

“My God, Christalis, is this then.. is this. Ruby Road? But it is real, it is not a name! This road is made of rubies! Heavens, look how they glow? It does, and with living warmth. This road is alive!”

I bent down to feel it. “It is throbbing and warm like a heart .. of love. . ruby love! Is this a symbol, or is it real?” I was ecstatic.

“Real, Halio, everything is real, you know that. We are quite near now, look over there, stop looking at the road.”

It stunned me, what I saw was entirely stunning, magical. I shut my eyes, then opened them again. Maybe it’s a play of my imagination, a *fata morgana*, an apparition from the road’s glow of light? But it was there, growing larger as we came nearer to it. I hung onto Christalis, holding fast to his arm, afraid to be left alone with this mirage.

“Halio, what came over you? We are only nearing the Arch. This is Ruby Arch I told you of before, we haven’t entered the city yet. Here, take my force.”

“Thank you, I am a bit shaky actually ”

“So I notice. Steady now? Shall we rest?”

I shook my head, but no word left my lips.

“Look up now, see what is written over it and tell me, I want to hear it from your lips.”

I took a deep breath with all the strength left in me to face it. Face it I did, but could not shift my gaze from it, nor give voice to what was written there.

“Halo!” he called to me firmly—“Do as I ask you, read it out loud!”

... Start again; with effort I read..

“AU.. AURO .. AUROPOLIS”

“And below it? Inside the Arch in golden letters? Read it!”

I stretched my neck, strained my eyes, they were heavy and would rather be shut, then I managed it finally. I read again from the start.

“AUROPOLIS” another breath . “FOR EARTH”—still staring, I fell to the ground listlessly

A slight drizzle of rain over my face made me open my eyes. “It’s raining. Why am I lying on the ground?”

“It isn’t raining here, Halo, can’t you smell the rose scent? I am sprinkling it on you, nor are you lying on the ground.” This was my sweet friend’s voice, so I was quite content resting where I was

“Come, my dear, drink this, I have just prepared it for you ” He lifted my head and held the cup to my lips “Drink it, you will feel better and just as strong as you should be.”

“Where am I, where is the Arch? I want to read it again.”

“So you are well again? As good as new and strong, I would think. Can you sit up, or shall I assist you? There, I thought you could.”

I looked about me slowly, shifting my head to one side and back again to see what was before me, none of which made sense to me.

“I haven’t been here before, is this another part of heaven?” I did not look at Christalis. It was enough assurance to know he was there near me Yes, he gave me the drink, how sweet and fragrant it was! I must ask him how he made it, the children would love it

How soft is this bed, so silken to the touch. I moved my hand over it. “I think that I should like to lie here a little longer and sleep a little more, if you don’t mind.” I let my head fall back, “How soft is this silken pillow, very nice....”

The familiar tinkling laughter of my friend made me open my eyes, “Dear Christalis, I don’t mean to be impolite lying down in your presence, but you cannot imagine how sleepy I feel—and I never had such a soft bed before ever... you see how my hands glide over it?”

“So glad you enjoy it, but I did not bring you here to sleep, or caress the bed cover. Come, get up I say!” He pressed my hand hard and put his hand over my heart—“Now stand up?”

Strong again, I stood facing him “Where am I? Why I slept I don’t know, but it was a heavenly sleep.”

“You are in my room, which you wanted to see; so come then, if you really wish to see it I brought you here after you had lost consciousness, do you remember that?”

"I do remember the Ruby Road and that glorious Ruby Arch."

"What else?" he prompted me—"On it something was written. Right, concentrate and remember!"

My head was no longer heavy, I breathed normally, so I went back into concentration and stood before it to look for it.

"AUROPOLIS! that was written above it and on the inside of the Arch the words read FOR EARTH in gold.

"Splendid, you remember all of it. Now shall we enter Auropolis together, Halio? Going under the Arch?"

He pressed my forehead between my brows, my sight and consciousness cleared. I felt him lifting me from the ground and taking me to a fairytale house most marvellously built and laid me down on a couch. Although my body rested there, I experienced all the same the enthralling sight that greeted me as we came through the Arch.

The long avenue was lined with most remarkable trees Sparkling trees, heavy with blooms—others with fruits—all fragrant, beautiful. The road we walked upon was made of silver with inlaid jewelled patterns all along

Melodious birdsong came from the trees and those enchanting singers looked like so many exquisitely coloured flowers or rather feathered marvels God had created anew ... They chirped and sang away merrily.

"What was that? Did I hear right?" Someone was calling my name in a melodious voice. "Halion has come, Halion from Earth. . Christalis is bringing Halion."

I was delighted, "Who is it greeting me?" I looked in every direction, but saw no one, except a yellow-gold deer prancing before us. Hop, there came another to join him, this one was pure white. Delicately shaped creatures, looking at us curiously from big blue eyes and together again: "Halion has come, Halion from Earth, la-la-la... may we escort you, Christalis?"

"It was you I heard," I said, "how sweetly you speak! I am so glad to hear you like this. I always knew that animals could speak. Or is it only you two who do?" I asked cautiously.

"Only we? That would be rather strange," they replied "Of course, all animals speak, some better than men do, and speak always joyful things, never tell lies. This is a truthful place."

"How delightful, this makes me so very happy to hear," I said.

"We are also very happy to meet you." Moving their lovely heads up and down, one of them asked: "Dear Christalis, can we go and call the other animals to greet the sweet Halion?"

"No, dears, not just now. All of you can come at another time to a party I have arranged for our guest to meet you all Will you leave us now?"

"All right, all right"—they took one small leap and another—"we will all come!" They were off as good fast-footed messengers should be. I could hear

their voices coming from the distance announcing to the other animals in the forest the news of my arrival and I thought there were eager eyes peeping from behind those bushes

“Here is the city before you, Halio, it is waiting for your visit.” He stopped for a moment wondering, I felt, if he should say more. “Yes, in truth,” he said finally . “waiting to go down to Earth.”

“To earth?” I asked. “That is what was written at the entrance! But what are you saying, Christalis? I do not understand the meaning of it.”

“I am sorry, I could not resist saying it I should have waited a little longer. Anyway, I shall explain it to you presently. See now, where I work... and where my dwelling place is

“My house over there is one of the many models made here. They are designed by the great Architect Designer whom you have met. Do you like the look of them, Halio?”

“Do I like them? They are living marvels, each one of them! And there is a pond, he said it would enhance the utility of light and aesthetics .. and look at the lawn surrounding it!”—I stopped abruptly—“The lawn! What is this? Do my eyes deceive me? Maybe because of the sunlight playing over the water, but it does look blue. It is blue! Ah, how can the grass be blue and not . . . I am being foolish now.”

“You may be a little that, but your eyes tell you the right thing nevertheless But how do you like the gardens around the buildings and the parks? Do not get stuck with the grass alone I have designed some of these gardens myself. Of course, there are others with me too, who are entrusted with this particular creation, beautifying the city, that is. Do not look so amazed, this is not a dream, but sweet reality.

“Oh, yes,” he said, suddenly remembering something—“apropos dreaming. Come, I join you now to your lazy body’s consciousness sleeping in my room, or else it will push me out of bed and house.”

A slight current coursed through me, but I was none the wiser for it. “How did you do that, Christalis? Was I at two places at the same time?”

“Hmm, and why not? As many places and consciousnesses as you like. But not just now, nor will I say more of it, this is not the time to give you that capacity ”

“I see,” I said, not that I understood what he meant—“but now that I am inside your room again, will you show me around, please? I am very interested to see it, you know ”

“Some other time, Halio, if you don’t mind There are other things we should attend to first. Now what is it you want to know? There is a question-mark hovering round your head?”

True, that was true, I’d better put the question now. “Well, I just cannot understand it—you have taken me to so many terrains, Christalis, where high

consciousness rules. Brought me before great presences, yet I have been able to front them with the force you had given me. Why had I such an odd response this time? I just could not hold myself from being overwhelmed before that entrance. It was too strong for my nerves I think”.

“No doubt it was, no doubt at all. This was my experiment, you see, bringing you here where a model city is being created by the wish of the Mother of Light. She desires to bring it and others like this—down to earth, when the Great Descent will take place and Her rule by the side of the Lord will be established there. You do remember those scripts, don’t you?”

I listened intently, this was knowledge of which not a word must be missed. He continued, satisfied that I understood what he had told me:

“Purposely I withheld further force. My wish was to observe and to measure the capacity of the human reception of that future event. Not that of the present day people’s, you understand. That is still being developed to further sensitivity. But the time will come when your present consciousness will be the established norm, which will make the descent possible. At that time the two consciousnesses, as you have just experienced, will be joined. You might say as the Script announces—‘Heaven’s Light Will Wed The Earth.’

“Today’s experiment was a double fulfilment of your wish and mine. A rehearsal for things waiting to be perfected here first—and made ready below to receive it. This then deserves the name of Re-union ”

“Re-union?” I exclaimed—“Even the thought of it brings delight. But it seems so very far off till all the people on earth are able to reach the standard of development needed. This makes me a little sad ”

“It seems that way, that is true, but remember what we have spoken about already. Recall what I had told you and take into account that the descending rate of the Higher Consciousness is paralleled by the development of that of the earth. Here is the key to this supreme science. It knows its own calculations; its application is unfailing. Have faith in that. There is no cause for sadness, but for rejoicing.

“Let us not linger here any longer. I wish to take you a bit further before we have a party in your honour. I promised the sweet animals this treat and you love animals too much to keep them waiting.”

“Yes, I love them, but now... you know... there are not all that many around ” I stopped myself from saying more, remembering that this was a day of joy and promise, not of looking back to old sorrows. This would not be the way to thank my great friend for all he gave me.

“True, dear Halio,” came his reply to my thoughts—“and the promise will be kept. First of all, we will go to the Registry from here and you can sign your name in the Visitors’ Book. You are the first visitor from earth and that is no small honour—and no small achievement for me, either. I correct my statement, for the force of Light that works in me ”

An octagonal building ahead seemed to be where we were going. A remarkable structure it was, made of rose-coloured crystal, much like glass. The strangest thing was that though you could not look into it everything was clearly visible when viewed from its interior, as I soon learned.

The building stood alone in the centre of a spacious square and there were as many roads leading to it as there were sides to the octagon. Each road a different colour with its own gems decorating symbols upon it.

“You see, Halio, that no one can enter any further than here without permission. Certainly not without being seen, no matter from which direction they would come this far—even if they think that no one is there to see them ”

“Is it closed at present? No one seems there to receive us.” I said. “Patience, Halio It is never unattended.” He lifted his finger and a door slid open We entered. Christalis announced his name and mine and asked for the Visitors’ Book

A golden book appeared before us placed upon an octagonal crystal table—a pure white circle of light at its centre, with four and twelve petals round it On it in luminous letters was written.

AUROPOLIS OF OMNIPOLE
by the
LIGHT SUPREME

I looked at Christalis questioningly. He took no notice but pointing toward the book said—“Sign here, Halio.”

The book opened by its own force. An empty page of exquisite paper was before me

Again I looked at him, my palm open in inquiry—A golden pen appeared, he indicated once again, “Sign here ”

I took the pen—lovely to the touch it was—then all at once remembering, called upon my own light and with firm letters wrote:

Halion from Earth
in this time of the Light
guided by Christalis

“Well done, I shall witness it ” He took the pen from my hand and signed his own name in golden letters below mine and I saw that all the letters shone with light.

This was the first time that I had seen it written down and I bent to kiss it. This was my beloved friend’s signature—but he stopped me and taking my arm led me out straight through the square and to a waiting bench.

From this distance I saw what I had not observed before: a pure white circle

of light above the octagon, covering its circumference. It hovered there as if fixed. A great force is in that circle of light, I thought

“It certainly is. Sit here quietly for a few minutes, you will find it is a very comfortable seat.”

“Thank you, Christalis, I do feel a little overcome actually. May I rest a little, please?”

“Why, of course, that is the reason I brought you here, I know what an impact this place has on you. We won’t be going much further today. I’ve read all your questions, just relax. I’ll answer them presently. All right?”

I leaned back luxuriously on this flower-bench, waiting for him to speak. This was a heavenly place to rest.

“You seem to be refreshed enough for me to talk to you. Shall I speak?”

“Please do, Christalis. Need you ask? You know how eager I am to hear the voice of Heaven from your lips.”

“Well, you have seen no one at the Registry, no watchman was there and this surprised you. Yet there is one there at all times—not an ordinary person but a very high-souled one. My instructions were for you not to meet anyone today, but his presence was there all the same. The ones on this terrain are very special beings. They will be coming down to earth together with the Mother of Love and the Lord of Light when the pointers of the Timepiece will reach the Will. Does this satisfy your query?”

“Perfectly, thank you. All your teachings always satisfy me completely.” I waited, for I knew he would give illumination to another thing that was unclear to me.

“Of course I will do that, Halio. You have observed another word on the cover of the Visitors’ Book which has set your mind alert. Still, your own consciousness told you to sign without any question asked and what you wrote was perfect.

“You want to know, no doubt, the meaning of Omnipole, the name unfamiliar to you. An important word that is, very significant, and how happy am I for this day, when I am permitted to bring you before it!

“Give me your hands—how soft they are now. Not as they were when I first came to you. I feel the joy of your heart coming from them to me.

“Halio, Omnipole is the great name given to the new continent, of which Auropolis is the central city. . . and it is designed for earth. Yes, I see the wonderment in your eyes. It is true, entirely true—it will be established on earth!

“You have signed the Register and so have I . . . On that first page our two worlds had their betrothal sealed, the thread of truth has been exchanged.”

There were no more questions in me, nor was there any need for anything more to be added to this. We sat there enfolded by the magical force of inner silence and in that silence knowledge had no need for words. My hands were still resting in his and I for the first time in our relationship put my head on his

shoulder almost involuntarily. He did not resist, but stroked my hair lovingly.

“I called you night-hair when I first met you, remember? But now what will I call you—golden hair? Here, it is the colour of the sun.

“The sun!” He jumped up abruptly, “Why am I lingering? I must go right away! Wait for me here, I shan’t be long.”

“All right, I wait,” I said to him and eased back on the bench, looking at the white circle of light which enfolded the octagon, until I could no longer hold its force. My eyes closed... I fell into a deep sleep.

(To be continued)

THE BOOK OF JOB

A NEW COMMENTARY

(Continued from the issue of April 1996)

Chapter 14

At the end of the last chapter we saw not only that Job's *tāmasic* state of consciousness continued to the chapter we are to consider now but that his passing from one state to another only helped him to transcend the state of the *gunas* governed by the ego. Interestingly, Jukes¹⁹⁴ in his work, *The Names of God*, presents the need of Job to transcend his self to be able to attain the highest spiritual experience. It is a happy coincidence that he should be saying in precise terms almost what we have been trying to see in this commentary. What we have been calling the *sattwic* state he calls the *religious self*; he could have called it the *moral self* as well.

Job, as we, with all his uprightness, had to learn how self can live and please itself, not only in irreligious and worldly life, but even in what looks like, and indeed is real devotedness. Of this religious self he had to be stripped. And he is stripped by "El Shaddai". The judgment of his flesh... brings him to the self-emptying and self-despair, as the Lord . can fill him out of his divine fullness

Passing from one state to another was a part of the process of the self-emptying.

Anderson¹⁹⁵ noting the changing moods of Job sees it from another point of view. He warns that the application of the Western type of logic where one is expected to move forward from one step to another is wrong. In the midst of what appears to be a complaint we see a positive note indicating the measure of his inward progress.

We have also noted at the end of the last chapter that Job not only thought of his own suffering but that he saw himself as a representative of all other men. A Latin American Commentator Gustavo Gutiérrez¹⁹⁶ shows how Job progressively thought of (if we could use the Tagorean phrase) the poorest, the lowliest and the lost, innocent sufferers like himself, in the course of his argument. That also is a part of his evolution since "going out of oneself" as Shelley would call it helps the process of "self-emptying".

Pope¹⁹⁷ says that the whole of Chapter 14 is often considered a separate poem, meaning thereby that it is unconnected with what goes before and after. For all that the commentators say in different ways in different contexts, all the chapters in the work, as noted earlier, are bound each to each by its sublime vision.

Chapter 14 recalls Chapter 7 in more than one way. There as here Job was concerned with other men as well as with himself. Both the chapters deal with human misery though the stress in the present chapter is on the brevity of human life.

In the first twelve verses Job spoke of the brevity of human existence. In the next three verses he rose to a vision of the possibility of man's continuing to live after death. Verses 16 and 17 are sometimes considered to continue the idea of the previous three verses, sometimes to belong to the last section of the chapter which is a relapse to the mood of the earlier verses.

Anderson,¹⁹⁸ who as we saw thinks that the Book of Job defies Western logic, sees verses 13 to 17 as a single unit and believes that the so-called relapse in the last verses is not a real relapse. He sees in the whole speech a greater calmness than in the earlier speeches.

Verses 1 to 6

In the six verses Job lamented the short duration of man's life on earth.

Verse 1.

Job cried out that "man born of woman" lived for a little period; even then his life was full of trouble.

Man born of woman. Scholars note that the expression is not common in the Old Testament. But they differ widely on the implications of the words. *Man born of woman* suggests his weakness, according to some. Some link the first verse with the fourth where Job spoke of "what comes out of something unclean." The word Woman in conjunction with the words just cited suggests to them the ritual uncleanness at the period of child-birth.¹⁹⁹ Hartley²⁰⁰ says,

Since bodily discharges were categorically treated as unclean, the discharges that attended the process of childbirth led to the declaration of the new mother as being unclean.

The applicability of the explanation will be taken up in the discussion of Verse 4. It may be of some interest to Indian readers to note how close the ancient Hebrews and Hindus came together in their beliefs and practices which were, of course, especially in India, fairly independent of their higher spiritual experiences. Patient research would perhaps discover a very large area of similar if not identical ways of thinking and living.

The influence of the sense of ritual uncleanness of the bodily discharges in women noted by Hartley could be observed to this day in the lives of certain sections of people at least in South India. During the three days of the woman's monthly periods, not to speak of the first dozen days after childbirth, she is placed in a kind of quarantine! Modern ways of life are sweeping away such

practices but the fact of their persistence reveals the hold the ancient beliefs have on people's minds.

Other instances of such common beliefs among the two ancient races could be cited, as for example the idea of expiation of sins by means of certain rituals (*prāyaschitta*). Even at a higher level one could see common experiences like theophany, the appearance of God before man (*pratyaksha, sākshatkāra*)

The expression *Man born of woman* has drawn other explanations. It suggests to some the idea of *frailty*, as distinct from weakness. To de Wilde (cited by Clines)²⁰¹ the words mean no more than *a mortal*.

Clines²⁰² also comments on the aphoristic statement that man is "poor in days" (A.V. *of few days*) "but rich in trouble" (A.V. *full of trouble*). He says that it is a reversal of the standard phrase

Full of days, riches and honour (1 Chronicles: 29:28)

Verse 2.

Job described the transience of man's life in two images, that of a flower which is cut down (*which withers* in R.S.V.) and a shadow which does not continue for long.

Hartley²⁰³ explaining the passages brings before us the scene in Palestine (and surrounding areas) which inspired Job to use the imagery.

In Palestine, after the spring rains, flowers bloom in abundance and fields glow from their splendour. But they last only for a moment. They soon fade from hot desert winds. Not only is life brief, even worse, it passes so gradually into nothingness that a human being is hardly aware of the process. It is like a shadow, which grows longer as the daylight wanes, only to disappear at sunset leaving no trace of its existence.

Verse 3.

Job asked God if he would open his eyes upon such an insignificant and miserable creature and bring him into judgment with him. According to the A.V. Job referred to himself (*bringest me into judgment*); R.S.V. and others read *bring him*. The A.V. follows the Hebrew original. Though Job was thinking of all human beings he was thinking of them in the context of his own suffering and therefore the reference to himself is wholly justified.

Verse 4.

Job asked who could bring a clean thing out of what was unclean and asserted that no one could do it.

Some commentators feel that the verse is out of place in the context of Job thinking of the brevity of life. They fail to remember that in scripture the links between verses are not always explicit. In Verse 3 Job questioned God's justice in bringing in a helpless creature whose shadowlike ephemeral existence made

him insignificant. Man was not only insignificant, he was also born of woman as described in Stanza 1. As indicated in the note to that verse, to be born of woman implied all the uncleanness attendant upon childbirth. How could man be clean physically or psychologically having been born of what was unclean? When commentators try to make a distinction between ritual uncleanness and moral impurity they fail to see that the uncleanness could be a symbol of moral impurity.

Commentators who refer to the concept of original sin go too far from the thought-climate of Job since such a concept is totally alien to it. Though Job did grant that he could have sinned, he not only could not see in terms of original sin but could not for a moment believe he had sinned enough to deserve all his suffering. But all such thoughts must be seen in the light of the vision of the whole work which takes us beyond the common notions of purity and impurity, physical or moral. The depths of man which alone can see God are untouched by such things.

Verses 5 and 6.

Job asked God (V. 6) not to bother man till he had finished his day like a hireling, one employed to labour for a limited period, seeing that (V. 5) the days and months of his lifespan were predetermined.

From a lamentation on the brevity of life Job turned to appeal to God to desist from troubling men during their short sojourn on earth.

According to Habel,²⁰⁴ man's lifespan is apparently determined by the calendar of destinies from which Job sought to erase the night of his conception in 3:6. Hartley²⁰⁵ on the other hand refers to the different Books of the Old Testament where God fixes the limits of man's life. In Genesis 6:3 God limits the span to 120 years. In Psalms 90:10 we see seventy years (three score and ten) as the normal span of life. Great variations are allowed. Job himself at the end was allowed to live for double three score and ten years. In each individual case God could fix the days and hours as he chose.

If man was not disturbed during his short period, death itself would appear like sleep after a day of labour for the hireling. Man's limited span of life resembles the limited period of work of a hireling (cf. comment on V. 22).

Verses 7 to 12

The next six verses explain why Job asked God to permit man to live the allotted life in peace. Verse 7 opens with the word "For".

Verses 7 to 9.

If a tree is cut down there is hope for it. It will sprout again and the tender branches will continue to grow. Though the root grows old in the earth and the shoot dies in the ground, the scent of the water will cause it to put forth leaves again and bring forth branches like a plant.

The high poetic quality of the passage is pointed out by Anderson²⁰⁶ especially in the scent of the water reviving the tree. Commentators refer to the familiar Biblical comparison of a righteous man to a tree by the side of a stream that can revive it. Habel²⁰⁷ recalls Bildad's picture of two plants, one that dies and the other that revives, resembling the rootless, godless man and the deep-rooted righteous man respectively (8:12-20). Hakam as cited by Hartley²⁰⁸ rightly notes that Job was actually rejecting Bildad's idea indirectly.

J.G. Wetzstein, cited by Franz Delitzsch and referred to by subsequent Commentators, notes that in Transjordan and around Damascus old big trees like walnuts, pomegranates and even vines that no longer bore fruit were cut down and that the stumps, when watered, put forth new shoots.

Verse 10.

The A.V. reads,

But man dieth and wasteth away, yea, man giveth up his ghost, and where is he?

The opening words appear rather odd, *man dieth and wasteth away*. R.S.V. and other versions read, *dies and is laid low*. There are a number of alternative readings for *wasteth away* *disappears*, *is snatched away*, etc. The Hebrew original seems to warrant the A.V. rendering. Gordis, the Jewish commentator cited by Clines, explains it as a figure of *hysteron-proteron*, the verb being reversed in sense; we are to understand the words as *wasteth away and dieth*. For *wasteth away* other words are substituted, *groweth faint*, etc.

For emphasis Job repeated the idea of dying in another form, *giveth up his ghost*. That naturally led him to ask, *Where is he?*

Verses 11 and 12.

The idea of the last question (where is he?), that is, a man becomes totally extinct without ever a hope of rising again was brought out in the next two verses. The fact needs to be focussed for two reasons. The ancient Jews, unlike the other near-Eastern races, refused to believe in the idea of man's possible resurrection, not to speak of immortality. They regarded death as the end of life. The state of torpor in which they were considered to lie down in Sheol, their nether world, could by no stretch of imagination be regarded as *life* after death (cf. comment on V. 22). The language and imagery employed clearly rule out any kind of belief in after-life. This, among other things, shows that Job is a pre-Christian work, as noted more than once.

(To be continued)

K. B. SITARAMAYYA

Notes

194 Quoted at the end of *The Story of Job* by Jessie Penn-Lewis Indian Edition published by the Evangelical Literature Service, 95-A Vepey High Road, Madras, 1993, as the second of the Extracts from other Writers

195 Anderson, p 169

196 Gustavo Gutiérrez Professor of Theology, Catholic University, Lima, Peru Latin America his work ON JOB *God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, originally written in Spanish translated into English by Matthew O'Connell, published by Orbis Books, New York, shows the relevance of JOB today in the context of the unmerited suffering of Amerindians as seen by the writer

197 Marvin Pope, p 100

198 Anderson, p 169

199 A few commentators refer to Psalms 51 5—

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me

Terrien p 1010, says

No more than the text (cited above) refers as does this line to any ritual impurity involved in the act of conception itself (against the paraphrase of Vulgate, *de emundo conceptum semino*) (Vulgate is the Latin version of the Bible prepared by St Jerome and others)

200 Hartley, p 230

201 Clines, p 324

202 *Ibid*

203 Hartley p 231

204 Habel, p 241

205 Hartley, p 234

206 Anderson p 171

207 Habel, p 241

208 Hartley, p 235

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

82. DESTINED TO MARRY TWO WOMEN

THE hymns and the musical compositions of Sundaram earned him respect and fame. He came to be called Sundaramurthy Nayanar, Sundarar for short

Sundarar travelled to many parts of the Tamil country spreading Saivism, and finally came to Thiruvarur.

Pleased with his work, Lord Siva once appeared to him in a dream and said: “You are mature enough to get married. And so I permit you to marry. You will see your bride soon and you’ll enjoy the worldly pleasures.”

The words of the Lord came as a pleasant surprise to Sundarar. It became more when he saw his bride in the temple.

Paravai was her name. Born in the community of temple dancers, she remained a virgin serving the Lord.

Sundarar and Paravai at first exchanged glances. It was love at first sight. Back home their minds hovered over each other. The next day they exchanged smiles. At night they had sweet dreams. As an interlude Lord Siva appeared in their dreams and said: “That is your life-partner. Your marriage will be performed in a couple of days.”

Sundarar and Paravai became husband and wife. They lived happily, for Lord Siva himself arranged and blessed their wedding.

The conjugal bliss he enjoyed did not deter the hymnist from composing and singing songs in praise of the Lord.

A few years passed. Sundarar expressed to Paravai his desire to go around the Tamil country singing of the glory of Lord Siva. Paravai did not object.

Sundarar went on his mission. After visiting many cities, he reached Thiruvottriyur and gladly entered the temple there.

A young woman as beautiful as his wife attracted Sundarar’s attention. She too looked at him. Sundarar felt that he was falling in love with her. The young woman too stood hypnotised by his physical charm.

“It’s all the play of the Lord,” said Sundarar to himself as he reluctantly moved away from her.

The young woman was Sangili, the only daughter of the richest man in Jnayiru, a village near Thiruvottriyur. One day when her parents broached the topic of her marriage, she swooned. When she regained consciousness, she said, “I am destined to be the wife of an ardent devotee of Lord Siva, I have decided to spend my life at Thiruvottriyur temple stringing flowers for the Lord. And so please drop the idea of finding a bridegroom for me.”

“No! You are very young and your words do not fit your age. It is our duty to find a good man and marry you off,” said her father and speeded up the search.

A suitable young man was found and the marriage was fixed. But the bridegroom committed suicide for reasons known only to him.

“I told you, you know. Only a devotee of Lord Siva can be my husband,” said Sangili.

With the consent of her parents, Sangili joined the Saivite nunnery and began to serve the Lord.

From the time Sangili met Sundarar in the temple, there was some disturbance in her heart. She craved to see him again and again.

Sundarar prayed to the Lord for help. Lord Siva appeared in his dream and said, “There is nothing to worry about. You are destined to live with two wives in this life. It is all because of your karma. In your previous birth you were named Alalasukundaram, and were serving me in my heavenly abode. You fell in love with a couple of my maids-in-waiting named Kamalini and Anindadhari and they too reciprocated your love. Since Heaven is not a place for human love, I cursed all three of you to be born in this human world to enjoy the conjugal bliss that is forbidden in Heaven. Your wife Paravai was Kamalini in her previous birth. Sangili is none but Anindadhari. She is yours. And I’ll arrange this wedding too.”

Doubly delighted Sundarar thanked the Lord profusely.

The Lord then appeared in Sangili’s dream and said: “Sundarar is one among my favourite devotees. He is in love with you. You must accept his love and be his wife.”

“I think I am also in love with him. But he is already married. His wife is young. She is also hale and hearty. I’ll be branded a sinner if I marry a married man,” said Sangili.

“Don’t worry. It is all my play,” said the Lord.

“Well then, Lord! I’ll marry your devotee provided he promises me that he will remain with me.”

“Agreed!” said the Lord and appeared in the dream of Sundarar and told him about the promise that Sangili demanded for her safety.

Sundarar brooded over the promise. He said to himself, “If I promise so, I’ll never be able to meet my beloved wife Paravai. Secondly, I’ll never be able to continue with my mission.” But on second thought, he told the Lord, “I’ll make my promise in your temple. But the moment you see me coming towards you, you please move away from your place and rest awhile under the *maghizham*[†] tree, so that I need not necessarily keep my promise. That will be a great help to me.”

The Lord agreed. Appearing once again in Sangili’s dream, He said: “Sundarar has agreed to your condition. He’ll take you to the temple to promise before my idol. But you take him to the *maghizham* tree instead and force him to promise there.”

* A precious flowering tree—*Mimusops elengi*

On the morning of the next day, Sundarar approached Sangili standing under the *maghizham* tree and asked for her hand.

“I am ready to marry you provided you promise me that you’ll never leave me,” said Sangili.

“Come to the temple. I’ll make my promise just in front of the Lord ”

“It’s enough if you promise me under this tree The Lord is immanent,” said Sangili.

Sundarar was in a fix. He had no way but to promise there and then.

Amused at his own double-game, the invisible Lord under the *maghizham* tree beamed in triumph.

The marriage was celebrated

Days passed.

The thought of Paravai began to torment him. He wanted to go back to Thiruvarur and see his first wife sing and dance in public at the forthcoming festival. He became restless.

One morning he forgot all about the promise he had made to his second wife and set out to see his first wife.

But the moment he crossed the boundary line of Thiruvottriyur, his eyes lost their vision. Such was the power of the promise he had broken.

Sundarar didn’t lose hope. He considered his blindness too as the play of the Lord. He was sure that one day the Lord would show him mercy.

Groping his way and at times helped by kind-hearted people, Sundarar moved singing in praise of the Lord who had played a double-game in his life and thereby had some fun at His devotee’s expense. When he reached Kancheepuram, he begged the Lord’s pardon and regained sight in his left eye And after wandering his way to Thiruvarur he was able to see with both his eyes.

Paravai, who had already heard of her husband’s second marriage, refused to see Sundarar, leave alone admitting him in her residence.

But Lord Siva interfered and brought peace between the couple

83. SAY ‘THIRUVARUR’ AND YOU LOSE YOUR LEGS

Longing to have a darshan of Lord Siva, the divine go-between who had brought back joy to his life, Sundarar entered the temple premises at Thiruvarur

A dozen or so of the Lord’s devotees sat near the temple proper. Heedless, Sundarar went past them.

Viran Mindar, a Saivite saint was also there in the company of devotees. He stopped Sundarar and said: “What a fool are you to take no notice of us? Who do you think you are? The Three-eyed Siva Himself?. No one here dares to enter the temple without paying us respects ”

Sundarar had already heard of Viran Mindar who was always frothing with

anger. Hence he didn't utter a word and tried to slip away from the saint.

But Viran Mindar stopped him and refused to allow him inside the temple to have darshan of the Lord.

Sundarar meditated upon the Divine and sought His help.

The friendly Lord whispered to him: "Don't worry. Viran Mindar is an angry man but there is nothing to fear. Enter the temple through its north entrance and I'll wait for you there."

Viran Mindar was no idiot to be cheated like that. Having sensed that the Lord had appeared before Sundarar, he bawled: "Sundarar! I abhor you for not paying respect to us. O Lord! You are a cheat. I am angry with you. O Thiruvarur! I leave you once and for all, for you are housing impertinents and cheats."

He told his decision to his wife and together they moved out of Thiruvarur to an adjacent village on the bank of a river. Though he was angry with the Lord, he continued to feed all those who uttered the name of Lord Siva.

Many were benefited by Viran Mindar's philanthropic activities. But a few lost their legs for he had developed such a strong hatred towards Thiruvarur and its inhabitants that whoever uttered the name of that place was immediately caught and his legs axed.

The Lord wanted to bring Viran Mindar's fury to an end. One day He went to the abode of Viran Mindar's in the guise of a Saivite mendicant.

Viran Mindar was away and so his wife welcomed the mendicant and offered him a seat.

"Where are you from, Sir?" asked she.

"Thiruvarur," replied the mendicant.

The lady jumped up as if a cobra had bitten her. She said in a flutter: "Don't say so to my husband. You will lose both your legs. That angry man will chop them off with a single blow of his axe."

"But I can't tell a lie for the sake of food. I heard that your husband keeps an axe to the right side of his seat. Please do me the favour of keeping it to his left this time. I'll manage the situation."

The lady obliged.

Viran Mindar returned home. Delighted to see a Saivite mendicant he welcomed him and took him inside. Bidding the mendicant sit, he occupied his own seat.

"Where are you from?" asked Viran Mindar.

The mendicant, in spite of the warning given by the lady, unhesitatingly uttered with pride. "Thiruvarur."

Viran Mindar in a fit of rage jumped up and his hand automatically went to the right side of his seat. Sensing his axe missing, he searched for it and found it to his left. And by the time he raised his axe, the mendicant had already taken to his heels.

With the raised axe, Viran Mindar ran after the mendicant.

The chase was not very long. Soon the mendicant stopped and heaved a sigh. Turning and facing Viran Mindar, he said: "You have already reached Thiruvarur, the place you hated and never wanted to set foot on it again."

Viran Mindar realized his mistake. He scoffed at himself and raised his axe to cut off his own legs.

The mendicant disappeared. So did the axe. Lord Siva appeared in all His glory. Viran Mindar threw himself at the feet of the Lord

Blessing him, Lord Siva made him patch up with Sundarar. The two devotees became friends for life.

(More legends on the way)

P. RAJA

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

A House in Pondicherry, by Lee Langley. Pub. Heinemann, London. 1995. Pp. 276. Price £ 12 99 (Hardback).

“Hundreds of years ago, in New Guinea, the natives sold the birds with the so-brilliant feathers to traders after they had dried them over the fire. But for convenience of storage they cut the feet off the corpses. And one day a respectable Scientist announced that he had concluded from a study of the birds of many colours that they had no legs and flew continuously in the skies, existing only on ambrosia, the food of Paradise,” recounts the author Mrs. Lee Langley to prove that legends can be built on a foundation of misconceptions. And we can never be sure of rightly understanding the past

Part history, part fiction, part mystical mumbo-jumbo, *A House in Pondicherry*, the last one in Lee Langley’s Indian trilogy, the first and the second being *Changes of Address* and *Persistent Rumours* respectively, tries to understand the past of Pondicherry, onetime fishing village and now a cosmopolitan city.

Long ago this hamlet attracted the Greeks, the Romans, the Chinese and then the Dutch, the Danes and later the French and the British. Every foreigner found something of his choice here, and fought for his right to stay as long as he wanted. Bullet-battered houses and blood-stained streets were once the order of the day. Demolition of Hindu temples and construction of churches were helplessly watched by the locals. Monsieur Dupleix was the Governor General of French India and his wife was the Governor General’s Governor General. Ananda Ranga Pillai, the chief Dubash to Monsieur Dupleix, kept a record of events in his multi-volumed diary that inspired and continue to inspire many a fictionist, though we can’t be sure of the authenticity of the *Diary*, as several versions exist. One is reminded of Lee Langley’s anecdote given at the start of this review.

Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry in answer to a Divine Call and found his ‘Cave of Tapasya’ here. It was his presence that put Pondicherry—an unnoticed speck on the map of India—on the tourist map of the world.

Auroville, the city of dawn, conceived by the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for the peoples of the world to unite, figures in this novel as Arcadie with, of course, a dash of Lee Langley’s fertile imagination

Lee Langley’s visits to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, her stay in Auroville and her study of Ananda Ranga Pillai’s “extraordinary diary” that provided her “with a wealth of detail about life in eighteenth century Pondicherry”, have gone into the making of this immensely readable novel. Hence it is no wonder that the real people, Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, Paul Richard, Monsieur Dupleix, Madame Jeanne Dupleix, Napoleon and the Pepys of Pondicherry—Ananda Ranga Pillai—come and go in the novel. But it need not be construed that the

novel is without its fictional characters and lacks a story

We meet an unforgettable woman named Oriane, in *A House in Pondicherry*, who as a girl decided to change the world but finds herself changed when she grew to be an old woman. It is a love story in which Time and the lure of Utopias play their predominant roles. Several passages here explore the ambiguities of loyalty and betrayal with a certain poignancy.

Hotel de France, the house, is an immobile character here like 'Egdon Heath' in Thomas Hardy's novel *The Return of the Native*. "The house on the corner of the rue Laval has hosted philosophers and witnessed diplomatic intrigue. It does not, alas, these days command the clientele it once did. Grand no longer, it retains a certain style, but its future is uncertain. The word 'Hotel' itself could be open to question. However, 'de France' undoubtedly is not. The small library for the use of guests contains volumes by the Goncourts, Victor Hugo, Stendhal, Flaubert. The twentieth century is sparsely represented—indeed represented by only one work, complete in its eight parts. For the owner of the Hotel de France, as for the author of *A la Recherche*, the present is less interesting than the past."

The narrative holds the reader and at times makes him wonder if he is reading poetry or prose or both. Images galore delight our senses and anglicized Tamil words light up our faces. "Not many Englishwomen bothered to learn more than kitchen Tamil," comments a character in the novel.

The book contains illuminating insights into Sri Aurobindo's thought and the novel begins with Sri Aurobindo in a cage, a memory of the political trial in Calcutta.

For those who doubt the divinity of Sri Aurobindo and the spirituality pervading his Ashram in Pondicherry, here is Lee Langley with a counter-attack: "Every Catholic Church a Marian shrine, every altar a crucifixion! Mystical mumbo-jumbo? You can accept a Virgin birth, resurrection after three days, water into wine, the whole son-of-Goodness stuff, and then you balk at the mere suggestion of divinity here. Isn't that a bit like swallowing a camel and straining at a gnat...?"

A real feast to all Pondicherrians, to others it is an introduction to Pondicherry's glorious past and its spiritual present. With *A House in Pondicherry*, Pondicherry can boast of one more jewel in its crown. Thanks to Lee Langley.

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Thirty-second Annual Conference

13 August 1995

SRI AUROBINDO'S COMPASSION

Speech by Sunayana Shukla

THERE IS a small, delicate and violet-coloured flower to which the Mother has given the name: "Sri Aurobindo's Compassion." She has explained this name further. "Innumerable, always present and efficacious in every instance."

A disciple once wrote to Sri Aurobindo to ask why the flower which bore this beautiful name withered away so quickly. Did it mean that his compassion too was short-lived?

"No," answered Sri Aurobindo, "the compassion does not wither with its symbol—flowers are the moment's representations of things that are in themselves eternal."¹

Compassion This is the subject which I have chosen for reflection at this Conference. This word has been the very centre of Buddhist teaching. In the Hindu way of life it has a place of very great importance. But in the Western world it had to wait until the coming of Christ. Before Christianity could spread all over Europe, her people lived under the influence of the Greek and Roman culture. The Greek culture, which is at the source of all Western culture, had a large and complex pantheon of gods and goddesses. But mortals as well as the immortal gods were commanded by the inexorable laws of Fate. What was decided by Fate had to be endured. It was Christ who first spoke of brotherhood, love and compassion. And this message continues to inspire Christians all over the world.

For some reason people associate compassion with weakness. True, it is the opposite of aggressiveness, but people think it is the opposite of strength. Actually, compassion is only another name for love, and love, as we all know, can be a mighty power. It can move men and nations. It is a power whose workings cannot be understood with the mind. To show love is, in a way, to put down the defence that each one of us builds around his ego. To lower these barriers, which we raise in order to protect ourselves, is to stand as if exposed. This is not an easy thing to do.

All the religions of the world speak of this great quality. Indeed, it is the sign of a great soul. The Mother says compassion is a psychic quality.

As Sri Aurobindo was physically in seclusion and in general less accessible than the Mother, some disciples often felt that he was aloof and austere. And yet his voluminous correspondence with them is a sign of his love for all those who had accepted him as their Guru

This correspondence alone takes up 6 volumes in the Centenary Edition of his works. In these letters he often explains the same things over and over again. Not only the quantity but the tone of his letters is to be noticed. His answers are so full of understanding, the tone always so patient.

What shines through these pages of endless correspondence is his deep concern for his disciples. If one sees in one letter his advice to a sadhak regarding his health, we find in another his explanation of a vision, and in a third how he points out the subtle difference between one plane of consciousness and another. For several years he spent the greater part of his day and also night writing to the sadhaks. In a letter to Nirodbaran he says, "From 4 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. afternoon correspondence, Evening correspondence 7.30 to 9 p.m.. . 12 to 2.30 bath, meal, rest, 2.30 to 5 or 6 correspondence."²

How was this possible, day after day, year after year? Again in Nirodbaran's correspondence we find a sentence which he apparently meant jokingly but to us reveals a lot of truth: "The very fact that I am carrying on a correspondence with the sadhaks for eight or nine hours every night should be enough to prove that I am an Avatar."³

Not only in his correspondence but even dealing with matters concerning the running of the Ashram he was always full of kindness and consideration. There have been cases of sadhaks whose behaviour was far from yogic but Sri Aurobindo kept them because of a deeper understanding of their nature. The fact that the Ashram survived so many difficulties without the sadhaks being aware of them is an indication of his love. The sense of absolute security in which the disciples lived was not allowed to be shaken. This itself shows his concern for them.

He had realised so much but the fact that he chose to reveal his knowledge to others, that he helped other souls who had however small an aspiration to grow towards the light, that he assumed full responsibility for their material as well as spiritual being, shows us how great was his compassion. That even after his passing in 1950 he continues to help all those who sincerely call him shows us that his compassion is still there, acting from the subtle-physical world. It is for us now to open ourselves and receive it

References

1 *On Himself* (Cent Ed, Vol 26), p 185

2 *Light and Laughter, Some Talks at Pondicherry* by Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran, p 108

3 *Ibid*, p 115