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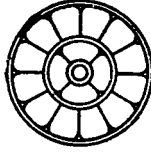
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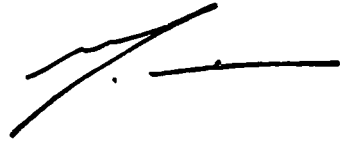


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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All correspondence to be addressed to

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India

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Editor K D SETHNA

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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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WORDS OF THE MOTHER

THE TWO RECALCITRANTS

THERE are two points which resist strongly—all that has to do with politics and all that has to do with money. These are the two points on which it is most difficult to change the human attitude

...But it is quite obvious that if politics is taken in its true spirit, that is, as the organisation of human masses and all the details of government and regulation of the collective life, and relations with other collectivities—that is with other nations, other countries—it must necessarily enter into the supramental transformation, for so long as national life and the relations between nations remain what they are, it is quite impossible to live a supramental life on earth. So it will just have to change; we will have to deal with that too.

As for financial matters, that is finding a means of exchange and production which is simple—"simple", well, which should be simple, simpler than the primitive system of exchange in which people had to give one thing to get another—something which could in principle be world-wide, universal; this is also altogether indispensable for the simplification of life. Now, with human nature, just the very opposite is happening! The situation is such that it has become almost—intolerable. It has become almost impossible to have the least relation with other countries, and that much-vaunted means of exchange which should have been a simplification has become such a complication that we shall soon reach a deadlock—we are very, very close to being unable to do anything, to being tied up in everything. If one wants the smallest thing from another country, one has to follow such complicated and laborious procedures that in the end one will stay in one's own little corner and be satisfied with the potatoes one can grow in one's garden, without hoping to know anything at all about what is going on and happening elsewhere...

It is relatively—very relatively—easier to change economic and social conditions than political and financial ones. There are certain general, global ideas from the economic and social point of view which are accessible to human thought. certain liberations, a certain widening, a certain collective organisation, which do not seem absolutely senseless and unrealisable; but as soon as you touch on the other two questions, which are however of capital importance, especially the political question, it is quite otherwise....For, one might imagine a life which would get rid of all financial complications—although, without playing on words, it would be a veritable impoverishment. In what financial possibilities and processes bring, there is a very considerable wealth of possibilities, for if they were used in the right way and in the true spirit, that would simplify all human relations and undertakings to a very great extent and make possible a complexity of life which would be very difficult under other conditions. But I

don't know why—except that the worst usually precedes the best—instead of taking the way of simplification, men have followed the way of complication to such a point that, in spite of the aeroplanes which carry you from one end of the world to the other in two days, in spite of all the modern inventions which try to make life so “small”, so “close” that we could go round the world not in eighty days now but in a very few days, in spite of all that, the complications of exchange, for instance, are so great that many people can't get away from home—I mean from the country they live in—because they have no means of going to another one and if they ask for the money they need to live in another country they are told, “Is it very important for you to go? You could perhaps wait a little, because it is very difficult for us at the moment....” . . . That means we are becoming more and more the prisoners of the place where we are born, while all the scientific trends are towards such a great proximity between countries that we could very easily belong to the universe or, at any rate, to the whole world....

One is so jammed between prohibitions, impossibilities, interdictions, rules, the complications of every second, that one feels stifled and really gets the admirable idea that if everything were demolished perhaps it would be better afterwards!... The two opposites are facing each other with such intensity that one can expect something like an explosion. . .

(Collected Works of the Mother, Centenary Edition, Volume 9, pp. 166-69.)

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

It gratifies me indeed that you have given so fine a response to my poetry at even the first reading.

Poetry of the sort I write—seeking to be in tune with the Aurobindonian Muse—is not always easy to enjoy immediately: one has to live with it for a while, listen to it intently with the inner ear, brood on it with a hushed mind, before it yields fully both its meaning and its vision. One must do these things in reading it because I have done them in writing it. Not that it has not flowed through, spontaneously and rapidly—some of it has come with a rapturous rush while some came slowly, bit by ecstatic bit, but even when there was a rush I have had to do what I may call aesthetic Yoga in order to get it, for there are various types of spontaneity or, rather, various levels of spontaneity and the levels that give birth to mystical poetry are not easy of access—especially mystical poetry that is not content to mentalise the inner or higher light. To mentalise is not to lessen the poetic quality—it is not the same as intellectualising; it is only to give the substance a particular atmosphere. There can be a great glory of wings in the mental air; however, though the pure poetic quality may be extreme, the spiritual quality is not equal to what is caught direct from the atmosphere where the spiritual reality has its natural home. To draw straight from this ether one has to practise a discipline of “aesthetic trance”.

The “aesthetic trance” does not make one a Yogi in the full sense of the word: what it does is to turn the face of the artist in a man towards the Yogic realms by a sort of intense and sustained sympathetic imagination. It does not enable so much the poet to acquire a spiritual halo as the poem to get drenched concretely in

The light that never was on sea or land.

(27 3.1945)

*

From what you write I feel that you have a receptivity not only to the poetic afflatus but also to the mystical breath. Your enjoyment of my poems is so intense because you respond to the state of soul that is in each of them and not just to their aesthetic posture.

It would indeed be a pity to take mystical poems in no other way than aesthetically, though it would be also a pity to take them mystically without getting the aesthetic delight of them. Most readers fail to combine the two ways. In thus failing, they fail as well to get the most out of either, since in art—as we have often been told—the matter and the manner are indissolubly one and to

miss the aesthetic *rasa*—the “beauty-taste”—is also to miss certain subtle shades of mysticism which cannot be expressed except through certain nuances of aesthesis. It is possible perhaps to give mystical “ideas” in plain language, but the shades I speak of are not merely “ideas”: they are states of soul—intuitions, experiences, realisations—and they cannot be expressed without aesthetic modes: that is, modes creating vision, emotion and rhythm. So, if the vision, the emotion, the rhythm do not go home to one, the matter too, as living stuff, remains outside one’s consciousness. Similarly, to be dense to mystical nuances is to be at the same time dense to many aesthetic shades of soul-poetry. Consider these two lines of mine, which are some of my best according to Sri Aurobindo:

Flickering no longer with the cry of clay,
The distance-haunted fire of mystic mind...

The whole mystic-*cum*-aesthetic effect here depends on a few special points. Perhaps the most telling is the present participle “Flickering” rather than any possible equivalent like “Quivering” or “Wavering” being used and made to stand at the very start of the first line. A most vivid note is struck, almost making us hear the disturbing effect which “the cry of clay” might have had. The anticipation and preparation of the hard double *c* are perfectly achieved and the crackling sound which a fire would make is introduced at an impressive length before it is immediately counteracted by “no longer”. This living suggestion would be absent if the line commenced with these two words:

No longer flickering with the cry of clay.

Even more would the suggestive life go out on our transferring the present participle to the line’s end, and beginning the phrase with the last three words:

With the cry of clay no longer flickering.

Thus not only the original words but their original order too cannot bear to be touched. Without them we would fail to see, feel and hear the mystic phenomenon to the full extent in terms of poetic beauty. Conversely, nothing short of the deep sense of that phenomenon would call forth the precise form of expressive aesthesis. Here the second line is of prime importance. For it is the “distance-haunted” character of the mystic mind—the inner consciousness’s straining ever beyond the apparent and the immediate—that tends to free it from disturbance by the bodily life’s claims and clamours.

In the creative field of art with which I am dealing, there is one important thing to remember: every level of consciousness has its own pitch to confer on the aesthetic faculty. And if the soul is not awake, the reader will not be able to

have aesthetic appreciation at the soul's pitch. The art will be perceived with just a mental-vital sensitivity instead of a spiritual or "soulful" one. I am sure a man who has lived with poetry of all kinds and is alert to various types of vision, emotion and rhythm will get a pretty keen perception of beauty from the two lines I have quoted without his having an awakened mystical sensitivity. All the same I am sure too that, since the lines are spiritual or "soulful" to an extreme degree, the sense of beauty will be much keener if the soul acts directly rather than from behind the veil and confers on the aesthetic elements the pitch necessary to make them yield their full value to our consciousness. Their full value consists in their being an intense poetic embodiment of the mystical intuition, experience or realisation present in the lines. Only when the aesthetic faculty works at the soul-pitch will the elements I have exhibited in some detail burn within our perception as such an embodiment. Till then they will attain for us diverse degrees of heat, so to speak—heat enough to make us recognise high poetic quality—but the sheer incandescence will not take place. And without that incandescence we shall never know how high exactly this quality is.

I wonder if I have made myself understood, and I wonder if I have seemed to digress unnecessarily if not boringly from the job of answering the questions you had asked me.

You want to know if being an "unclogged medium" of inspiration does away with the necessity of the intellect's supplying any materials and tools for inspiration to work upon and work with. Well, often one thinks of writing a poem on this or that subject that has held one's attention or stirred one's feeling and then proceeds to explore intellectually the depths of its implications as well as its associations round about until the actual rush of inspiration comes and picks up the prepared material and fills it out with shining surprises and sweeps into triumphant harmony all that one has laboured at. At other times, inspiration comes on a sudden, without one's consciously thinking of writing a poem and then various bits, lying in one's mind, of thought and imagery and reminiscence and velleity are attracted to the creative process and used through a sort of swift thinking that beats and burns instead of moving barely, slowly and laboriously. In both the cases there is a supplying of materials by the intellect—but it is not the same as the work one puts in when one is not a clear medium: there is no pained pausing in the midst of the creative process, there is no anxious fumbling for the right suggestion and the right word while the poem is being composed. Nor is always a supplying of materials, such as I have described, indispensable to the clear or unclogged medium: occasionally, everything seems to drop from the blue or emerge from the subliminal either in a form which the habitual intellect can grasp or in a form that is occult, cryptic, "surrealistic".

As for the tools, no exact technical knowledge is required if one is swiftly "spontaneous". What one requires is a general sense of poetic form. I almost believe that this sense is something innate in us and that, even if we knew

absolutely nothing about the form of poetry, inspiration could rush through in metrical rhythm. Metrical rhythm, in its origin, is the natural body of expression when that expression is at a certain intensity, an intensity of the heart of things, the central fount of things. That is why the mantras of the Rġveda were supposed to be not the Divine Spirit clothed in a form invented by human prosodists but that Spirit clothed in a form native to it and intrinsically connected with its act of manifestation. No doubt, prosody is there in all verse and we do count syllables and dispose stresses or measure quantities and we can metricise a piece of inspiration that has come without the correct metre. The essential fact still is that metrical rhythm is part and parcel of the direct word from our intuitive depths, the depths that are in close touch with the creative process giving birth to the cosmos: the cosmos is a play of diversity on a basis of uniformity, a sort of metrical base of being upon which various modulations take shape, introducing a significant individuality which saves the dance of being from monotony without destroying the foundational pattern. Where the modulation and the base are both intensely active, there results a phenomenon which is the most revelatory of the creative force behind—and what is metrical rhythm except the base and the modulation reaching their acmes of intensity? In the domain of speech, therefore, metrical rhythm is the nearest to the creative centre of being—and the innermost utterance of that centre is naturally cast in it.

If we were ideal mediums, poetry would pour through in perfect metrical rhythm, even though we knew no jot about iamb and trochee and anapaest and what not! Of course, metrical rhythm is not of only one fixed type: a number of types are possible and some are adapted to one language, some to another. The amount of modulation varies, the foundational fact varies. But the essence of metrical rhythm is the same—and this essence is discovered by man not invented by him: it belongs to the beyond-human, it belongs to the very core of cosmic creativity. That is the reason why not only the Vedic Rġshis but all ancient peoples used to regard poetry as the expression of the Gods. Such a belief, however, did not debar them from making a science of prosody: in fact, it was just because a Godlike character was felt in poetry that a certain difficulty too was felt in receiving the message of the deific regions and the need arose for helping out the message when it got hindered: the better one knows prosody the better one can help “the music of the spheres” to get through if that music is likely to be interfered with by one’s clogged condition. Since one is more liable to be clogged than clear, it is advisable to have sharp technical tools at hand. But they only aid the Master Craftsman that is Inspiration to deal more easily with our minds: they prove our own disability and not the Master Craftsman’s lack of power to use his fiery fingers more skilfully than our tools. (6.5.1945)

Thanks for your letter which is so warm and revealing—revealing because it is the deep heart speaking and warm because the revelation came from that heart straight, untouched by the circumspect mind. Not that the mind has no role to play in matters of the depths. Sometimes what hails from them is interfered with by the dramatising vital being so that the psychic form does not emerge in all its truth. Then the mind, if it has been well trained, gets the authentic sense of that form and cuts away the excrescences. Occasionally, even the emergent from the depths arrives a little nebulous, the supernatural feeling surges up slightly unfocused, as it were, and the trained mind discerns the hidden outlines and releases the secret shape. We can see what role the R̥gveda allots to the mind. It speaks of the luminous word arising at the same time from the *satyam ritam brihat*—“the True, the Right, the Vast”—which is above and from the *hr̥daya samudra*—the “heart-ocean”—which is the profundity within, and then passing through the silent mind of the seer to be rid of all ambiguity and be disclosed in the original contours so as to become a golden chariot for the Gods to ride forth into the common world of men.

What you say about our relationship is perfectly true. From the start there has been an inner intimacy which no distance can diminish. For we have met in the aura of a Presence which is not affected by space and time, an aura which is to either of us no goal laboriously to be reached but as natural as the very air we breathe. We are born Aurobindonians and on top of that there is a special soul-rhythm in common: our pursuit of the Eternal Beauty. The Divine comes to people in various aspects—glorious Wisdom, supreme Power, master Skill, transcendent Loveliness. I feel that both of us have been caught up in an ineffable enchantment. No doubt, the other aspects are also there, and one or another of them comes close on the heels of that enchantment: master Skill, for instance, is very much of a goddess in your nature. But the main magnet for both of us appears to be what St. Augustine hailed as the Beauty of ancient days that is ever new, with its summoning up from our depths the flow of wonder, the surge of love. Perhaps what I have called “glorious Wisdom” is in my being the nearest attendant to the forefront deity of Loveliness transcendent. And this you may have felt as your subtle “guide”, a special grace from Sri Aurobindo. The dream-vision you have recounted seems to me a very concrete contact between us on the subtle-physical plane, the one immediately behind our world. Some of our physical characteristics tend to continue there. My slight “limping” is a sure sign of our meeting on that plane. And to meet there is to have a very keen sense of reality and if our inmost selves carry on their friendship on this plane, it is no wonder that there is always so vivid an interchange of mind and heart. In the context of your dream-vision you have spoken of Krishna guiding you. Of course there can be no comparison between that incarnate Lord and tiny and puny Amal, a poor pallid mortal. But do you know that the flower the Mother chose as representing me happens to carry in her vision the significance: “Krishna’s

Light in the Mind”?

To be more precise, there was once a scheme set for me by the Mother to paint flower-pictures for the rooms of the sadhaks, suggesting the spiritual forces specially at work on them. The couple of rooms given to me in what was called the Guest House, which I occupied for nine and a half years, were those which Sri Aurobindo had occupied for over six years before he moved first to the “Library House” and then to the quarters he stayed in till the end of his life. Before I came to them, Purani had lived in them for a time. During my stay the flower representing them was, according to the Mother, what is botanically labelled “*Thunbergia kirkii*”, a small lavender-blue salverform flower with a cream-yellow throat. The Mother’s felicitous gloss on its meaning (“Krishna’s Light in the Mind”) was. “A charming way of being intelligent.” The epithet “charming” is apt in view of the winsome personality traditionally attributed to Krishna. Sri Aurobindo has characterised Krishna as the Avatar who came from the plane of Divine Ananda and manifested through the Overmind, the top cosmic consciousness just next to the Supermind, the transcendent arch-creator. That is to say he was the Divinity of Bliss, who gave the world a manifold vision—the vision typical of the Gita in which Sri Aurobindo has discerned several interwoven strands—a Yoga of Works (Karma), a Yoga of Knowledge (Jnana) a Yoga of Devotion (Bhakti) and a final hint of something that would include all of them by going beyond them to an abandoning of all set dharmas (life-rules) and surrendering oneself to the Supreme Beloved who is also the Supreme Teacher and the Supreme Leader. (24.1 1991)

*

You have asked me what my meditation was between 10 and 10.30 a.m. on February 21. A general account would be: “It was all joy.” But it was not just a state of being deeply happy during those thirty minutes. It was a happiness shot through and through with the Mother’s Presence. Rather, it was her Presence that made up the happiness. And that is why the happiness was so special. For, her Presence was at once most intimately near and most alluringly far. It seemed to reach depth after depth within me and simultaneously drew me on and on into mysterious distances. An all-giving love tended to envelop and permeate my whole being, while something in me was called out incalculably afar to meet, as it were, the still unmanifested truth of my being—a divinity which was as yet a wondrous dream. But strangely somewhere within the dreamer the dreamer was himself the dream. And the Divine Presence, when posed in front of me, seemed to wear my own face in a fusion with the face of the Mother or the face of Sri Aurobindo or else with an etherealised combination of their faces. (28 2 1995)

*

The point you have raised is not really concerned with a living issue but rather a verbally technical one. You say: “We meet again and again with these words of Sri Aurobindo: ‘Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you because she is indeed always present.’ Now, why did Sri Aurobindo choose to use ‘as if’ instead of saying: ‘with the Mother felt as looking at you’? There must be some significance in it.”

The answer is very simple. Sri Aurobindo is employing the grammatical form classed as “the subjunctive mood”, the mood of a verb used especially to denote what is imagined or wished or possible. Here the “imagined” is in function—though afterwards the “imagined” is said to be a reflection of the real. No opposition is intended between imagination and reality. We sadhaks do not always have the inner eye to see the Mother in a concrete though subtle form everywhere: that is why we are not told: “Always behave with the Mother felt as looking at you.”

The Mother has told us that when she comes into contact with a follower of Sri Aurobindo and her she does two things. One—she builds a bridge between his outer self and his inmost being. Two—she makes an emanation of herself to go with the follower at all times. This emanation answers all his needs and acts as his guardian angel. Only in moments of extreme crisis it harks back to headquarters, so to speak, and consults the central Presence. Often we ourselves get into touch with this Presence. That is when we most intensely call her to our aid or desire to have her decision for us. Thus, when I was in Bombay in 1939 she wrote to me on April 24: “Just received your letter of 21st, it came to me directly (without the written words) three days ago, probably when you were writing it, and my silent answer was categorical: ‘remain there until the necessity of being here will become so imperative that all else will completely lose all value for you.’ My answer now is exactly the same. I want only to assure you that we are not abandoning you and that you will always have our help and protection.”

(3.3.1995)

*

Before trying to interpret your vision, let me set your letter forth as briefly as possible: “A desert-like place. While running in it for some time I saw floods of river-water coming towards me. With increasing fear I ran in another direction. To my surprise, this time I saw in front of me floods of sea-water coming. With great fear I began to run in a new direction. On my way I saw a sturdy white horse. I sat on it and started riding it. After some time I saw a hut from which light was emerging, making the surroundings full of light. When I saw this light a torchlike light emerged immediately from my forehead. I rode up to the hut and got down from the horse and went into the hut. There I saw a Divine Mother sitting in the lotus-pose. She was full of light. I offered my pranam to her and she blessed me and advised me to study medicine. After more than twelve years I

came to Pondicherry and had darshan of the Ashram's Mother. She had an aura of light surrounding her head. I came to the conclusion that our Mother was the same Mother who had appeared in my dream. Will you please explain my dream?"

The river-floods and the sea-floods seem to symbolise difficulties from the "vital" plane, the unspiritual "desires" sweeping over it. But the vital plane has also features that can be of help to spirituality. Such is the "sturdy white horse" that meets you while you are running away from the floods. Here is a representation of the purified vital force. Your mounting it proves that you are not a helpless being but have a will-power which can bring about a change in your life. In the dream the resultant change draws you near that part of your being which has come to be impoverished and unprominent, a hut, but which is really the secret source of guidance. That is why light is streaming out from it. In response to this sudden call or pull from a hidden and neglected depth in you, your mind catches fire, as it were, and you discover an illumination in the conscious part of you: a torchlight emerges from your forehead. Urged by it, led by it you reach your soul's "cave", as the Upanishads would designate your inmost and there in what has seemed an obscure place you come upon the Divine Mother, formed of light and the source of all radiance. She is waiting for you and at once accepts you with her gesture of blessing.

Thus long before you came to the Ashram, you had been chosen for the spiritual life. And the reality of the choice was confirmed when the Ashram Mother whom you met twelve years later gave you a signal of the old light by manifesting to you "the aura surrounding her head".

Your other dream brings in the horse too. Evidently you live very much in your vital nature, but even in this domain where there are the greatest number of occasions for deviation from spirituality you have a Saving Grace present always.

So I see no cause for you to despair. Light can always come up. Keep appealing to the Divine Mother and she will give you the boon of her blessing. And he who has that boon must carry ever a smile on his lips. (13 3.1995)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

“PAÑCHAKANYĀM SMARENĪTYAM”

6. “EVER REMEMBER THE FIVE MAIDENS”

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

THE relation between man and woman is not a thing without any alternatives or variations. It has taken different forms in different ages. On the one hand the customs have changed due to the change in external conditions, and as a result of simultaneous change in the course of the mind a change in the ideal has also come about. One should remember that not only the change of time but also the change of space brings a change in customs and ideals. Therefore it seems to be unjust to measure the value of customs and ideals of a certain age with the yardstick of customs and ideals of another space and time. Though many conclude that in the evolution of the customs and ideals of humanity there is always a progressive development, it is not so easy to establish the case with reason. To decide whether the expression that the customs and ideals of the ancients and of the past are inferior to those of the moderns and of the present is anything more than a notional dictum, needs a lot of judgement. Whatever it is, we are not going to make this issue our topic of discussion. We only want to say that the system existing in each space and time is appropriate for the condition and culture of that particular space and time. Human beings follow the dharma of their time and space. It is a dangerous mistake to try to understand the dharma of another time and space in the light of the dharma of a given time and space.

In the modern age the relation between man and woman which has become a sort of prevailing custom and ideal everywhere is that one man and one woman shall remain mutually sincere in their conjugal life. Of course out of the prevailing ideal a new one is trying to raise its head. This ideal is unwilling to accept the glory of marriage. It wants an independent, self-willed and free union between man and woman. But the ideal is still mostly confined to the mental world. The need of circumstances could not bring it down into the field of life, within the social system. Therefore we don't want to say anything in particular about it. The ideal of the present which has social sanction behind it is “monogamy”. The word is foreign. There is no exact equivalent of it in an Indian language. Therefore it is natural to suspect that not only the word but also the idea behind it has come from abroad. That the marriage or conjugal relation of a man or a woman can exist with only one person (at a time) is the system prescribed by Europe and the Christian religion. As European influence extended into our country, this ideal also occupied our mind. Not only the inner attitude but also the external conditions—the economic policy along with the norms of duty—came to make of this ideal a social system.

Prior to this present system we had “polygamy”, the dreaded word which

makes Europe and Christianity shudder and we too have started to shudder under the influence of the newly acquired ideal prevalent in our country. Of course this polygamy was permissible for man only; for woman the rule was a single marriage. Polygamy was the custom of our country—from when? It is not possible to answer with any precision. Before the English-influence, as we go back more and more to the past, at least up to the ages of the Mahabharata and Ramayana, we notice its extensive prevalence. Not only in India, but in the whole of the East this custom was in vogue¹ in some form or other. With whatever strong disdain we moderns look upon polygamy, our forefathers never considered it in the same light. And it is also not a fact that the social order and ethics deteriorated due to this. Nor were the greatness and nobility of man and woman crippled in that social system. The greatness of the great, from Yājñyavalkya to Shivaji—whether he is a man of knowledge or a man of action—did not get tarnished. Even Raja Rammohan, the initiator of the modern age, was himself polygamous. And such instances are not rare where a woman performed her duties as required and became worthy to be ever remembered even while being one of a number of wives.

Now the point is, whether there was another age with a different custom prior even to this polygamic age. There was, it seems. And we cannot say for sure that woman was not given the right to polygamy in one way or another in that age. We must not get stunned by the statement. We must look into it without prejudice, with eyes open, remaining calm and impartial. The varied diversity of truth does not always depend on the standard of good and evil of our modern age. In the primitive society, which we term uncivilised, there is no dearth of this custom even today.² In Tibet all the brothers together marry a single wife. The word *de-vara* in our country only means second husband. The custom of *nyoga* also was prevalent in this very country of ours. Whatever it is, we just want to say only this much: in that most ancient of ages, whether or not there was any sanction to polygamy for woman, there was at least a freer relation between man and woman. Man and woman united more freely and not through the stringent and carefully prepared familiar system of marriage. Woman rather had more freedom than man. Man did not have the sole authority in society. On the contrary woman used to dominate. In Burma abroad and in Kerala within India, even now we find some instances of this system. Equal freedom for man and woman is the trend of the modern age. Patriarchy dominated the Middle

¹ In China and Japan polygamy was not prevalent in the sense that one was married there to a single wife. But one could keep more than one unmarried wife which had the sanction of custom and the shastra. Though the Europeans term these unmarried wives concubines, they had equal rights and status as the married ones and their sons were also legal heirs. Save for the ceremonial marriage there was no other distinction between these two types of wives.

² Many scientists have nowadays begun to admit the fact that the primitive society is not necessarily uncivilised, that the primitives are the fallen residual fractions of the various civilised and educated societies belonging to a hoary past.

Ages. And matriarchy dominated the most ancient of ages. This is how, it seems, society has undergone a triple transformation with regard to the relation between man and woman.

In fact, from the point of view of principle, we find the examples of the three modes of relation that may exist between Purusha and Prakṛiti in these three epochs. First, when Purusha and Prakṛiti face each other standing on the same level. That is why in the present epoch man and woman are waking up with a separate being and personality of their own and are willing to unite. Second, when Prakṛiti is subjugated to Purusha. That is why in the Middle Ages we see that woman is subservient to man under all circumstances. The fulfilment of woman’s womanhood was in giving herself to man. The mantra of this very age was *na nārī svātantryamarhati* (woman should never be independent). And in this very age, the ideals of *satī* and single-minded devotion to one’s husband came into being. Third, when Purusha is subjugated to Prakṛiti. This was the principle underlying the relation between man and woman in the most ancient of ages. Shiva under the feet of his goddess-consort portrays that age. Woman at that time probably was not *satī* but was *śakti*.

Sīta and Savitṛī are the ideals of the Middle Ages. This very ideal got so deeply implanted in our social life that even in modern times, while trying to follow a more novel ideal, we wanted this ideal also to be kept unimpaired within the more novel one. The glory of this ideal has been sung in all our cultures, customs and systems. It has been built up as an unshakable notion, an eternal truth as it were, in our mind and heart. Besides, we have forgotten the ideal prior to it. We cannot bring it back even with our imagination. The ideal of *satī* has come to exercise its sole authority since the ages of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Yet some reminiscence of that most ancient of ages still remained even in this epic age. And it seems to me that the “five maidens” are the instances of that very reminiscence. In these five maidens we get a hint or a shade of the truth that woman is not merely *satī* but predominantly and fundamentally she is *śakti*. Even the epic age had to labour a lot in trying to judge and prove her greatness not as *śakti* but as *satī*. We moderns also, instead of looking upon the five maidens as maidens, have tried with some manipulation to remember them as *satī*. We cannot easily admit that there was or could be any other standard of woman’s greatness beside chastity.

A strange thing is noticeable in the lives of the five maidens. Their adultery with gods is related. Their unchastity is supported and sanctified by the instructions and blessings of the gods. Ahalyā lost her chastity *devaraja kutuhalāt* (due to the curiosity of Indra, the king of the gods). Kuntī too gave herself up to the six gods, namely, Surya, Indra, Vāyu, etc. The five husbands of Draupadī are the companions of Lord Krishna and emanations of five gods. Tārā and Mandodarī gave themselves up to their husbands’ brothers, even though the brothers were enemies of their husbands, according to the wishes and sanction of

Lord Rama. Whatever these five maidens may be from the standpoint of single-minded devotion to their husbands, it seems to me that a sublimation of human force took place through them into divine force. Their souls did neither accept the human ideal (of that time or thereafter) as unique, nor admit the *dharma-adharma* of human ethics as the absolute provision of life. Their beings were glorified with a greater and higher capacity. Matrimonial sincerity or adultery became irrelevant in that glory.

In fact, from a certain point of view, the most ancient of ages was the age when humans were in a juvenile state. They were not exclusively confined to their humanity. The vision and experience, intuition and imagination of a human was not regulated only by humanity or physical dimensions (compare with Nietzsche's "Human, all too human"). There used to exist a free interchange between a human and the invisible higher beings and forces in creation. At that time earth and heaven had not got separated. Earthly humans used to go and roam about in heaven. Gods used to visit the earth, unite and mix with humans. Gods and humans were mutual helpers and companions. A human male could dare desire even a heavenly nymph. A human female could satisfy even a god. We see a shadow of this most ancient of ages in ancient Greece as portrayed by Homer. The heroes of Homer are either born of a god mating with a woman, or a man mating with a goddess.

In a mantra from the Rīgveda (10:85) dealing with matrimony, Suryā, daughter of sun-god Surya, accepts all the gods as husbands one after another. Probably this is symbolic of the principle of marriage between humans also of that time. Woman will take resort to man not for chastity but for the touch and manifestation of the gods, to have offspring born under divine influence. Probably there was always an effort within us like a subterranean flow to keep alive the idea that there could be a divine *śakti-dharma* like this for woman besides chastity and single-minded devotion to her husband. We hear about many affairs of adultery in the practice of Tantra, but is the cryptic ceremony of accepting the *śakti* and adoring the *prakṛiti* in that practice not a pointer to this very principle? Well, we no longer approve of this ideal as sociable. In modern times in our day-to-day life we have turned out to be all too human. All our systems have been based on the human mental and ethical considerations.

Our shastras speak of four ages, namely, Satya, Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali. From this consideration, four ideals have emerged in those four ages with regard to the social relation between man and woman. It seems to me that it is sincerity relating to the body that has been held in magnified esteem in Kaliyuga. In Dvāpara it was sincerity of the vital being, in Tretā it was sincerity of the mental being, and in Satyayuga it was sincerity of the soul's truth. In the other yugas, the fundamental principle, the primary basis, of conjugal relation was a sort of single-minded devotion of a person to another. But in Satyayuga this relation never became the ultimate in the form of union between two individuals. Then,

the tie between person and person did not become firm and exclusive. At least externally it was quite free and expansive. Then, a person used to follow the law of one's own being, one's own path of truth and establish a freer and wider relation with another. Recently, are we not turning round again and gradually moving towards some such aim? Whatever it is, if the ideal of the ancients does not conform to ours, we may not accept it, but none of us has the right to reduce it according to our standard.

SOME NOTES BY “THE EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

RECORDED BY NIRODBARAN

SOME months ago I had a very sweet dream-vision. It was in the afternoon. Sitting on my cot and leaning against the wooden mosquito-curtain support I was reading a favourite book of mine, the Bhagavat, in Bengali, the life of Sri Krishna. After a while, I felt very sleepy which is rather an unusual occurrence when I read such books. Suddenly I saw the Mother standing near the foot of the bed dressed in an exquisite golden Benarasi sari. As I looked at her she beckoned to me with her right hand. I responded; I saw my physical body left behind. As soon as I was within her reach, she caught hold of my hair and, lifting me up, just as a cat does her kitten, dragged me towards Sri Aurobindo who was sitting nearby and reading a book. She told him, “This girl is all the time weeping for you.” Saying this she left. I cast a furtive glance at him and saw him absorbed in reading. The whole room was bathed in peace. I felt like living eternally in that peace and never going back to the world. Then my eyes opened with that memorable experience still alive.

*

On my last birthday I had a strange vision with open eyes. Suddenly I saw Nolini-da, Champaklal and Mama (my uncle, Dilip Kumar Roy) sitting in that order in a horse-carriage going somewhere as if for an evening ride. They looked just as they did when they were alive. When I asked Sri Aurobindo inwardly its meaning, he simply said, “They are with me and go about from time to time to see the condition of the world, how it is going on ”

*

A third experience happened very recently

After a certain incident I was very badly shaken. I had a disagreement with an Ashram lady who had been helping me for some years by providing me with some material necessities of life. Disagreement led to argument to hot words and, after an unpleasant scene, I refused all further assistance from her. Though I am grateful to her for all her help, I have no regrets in stopping our arrangement. For now I rely on the Lord, as I have done before in times of dire need, for providing me even with small necessities. My prayer was answered when suddenly I saw Sri Krishna with his flute, just as he is portrayed in some pictures, standing behind Sri Aurobindo with his right hand resting on Sri Aurobindo's shoulder. He was all resplendent. Sri Aurobindo said to me, “Be quiet. Don't get agitated. I shall set everything right. Depend on me entirely.”

"I know that and I am sure of it. My previous sense of a helpless being has left me now. Only at times when my foot-trouble increases and gives me pain, I become restless."

"That pain will go. There is nothing seriously wrong with the foot. The pain is due to your flat-foot and excessive pressure on it. But it will be cured. You know that I have cured your chronic stomach-trouble which was much more serious. For if it had continued it could have turned into cancer. This trouble also I can cure. But if I cure it now, something else will crop up. The hostile forces will become more active. Everything has its time and one must learn to bear. Be patient."

"But at times I want to leave my body, and pray to be taken away so that I may live forever in peace."

"You will live in peace, I assure you, and I bless you that you will live in the Divine Peace which you have felt at times. The Divine Peace is something which is beyond any human comprehension and I promise that you will have it."

I am now eagerly but patiently waiting for that supreme Peace and doing my sadhana as best I can

TREASURED WORDS

WHAT are these words that flow to my heart,
 As if from an ancient harp singing,
 Catching echoes from distant winds,
 A mystery to its loneliness bringing?
 A hope for the True is kindled within
 And sets each thought-seed burning
 To melt the dross layers which hide
 Speech's uttermost yearning.
 To hold weaved sounds in a golden cup
 And see their liquid colours glowing,
 With one sip to feel within
 The stream of their pure source flowing!
 For what are words but a sacred giving,
 A secret within a form concealed?
 And when the heart's rose-bloom opens
 Petal by petal, are wonders revealed!

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of May 1995)

SRI AUROBINDO came out of jail with profound spiritual experiences and he was also a completely changed person. During his absence the outside situation had also radically changed. The *Bande Mataram* had come to an end. Tilak had been sentenced to six years' imprisonment and banished to Burma. The Government had repressed the Nationalists.

Sri Aurobindo stayed with his maternal uncle Krishna Kumar Mitra's family after he came out of jail. Despite the great spiritual changes that had taken place in him, he continued to be intensely human and considerate. It appears his aunt who had been unwell had been advised to bathe in the Ganges. She wanted somebody to accompany her to the river. At times, the old lady would go up to Sri Aurobindo who might be writing and ask him, "Auro, please come along with me, I am going for my bath in the Ganges" He would readily comply. Basanti Chakravarty, his cousin, describes "how at times her mother would put on his sandals and go for her constitutional on the terrace. Visitors would arrive and Sri Aurobindo would get up and search for his sandals. Then he would go to his aunt, smile and ask her shyly, 'Little aunty, have you put on my sandals? There are visitors who have come to see me.' "

Among the millions who rejoiced at the release of Sri Aurobindo from prison was Sister Nivedita, the fearless indefatigable sympathiser of Sri Aurobindo. She had her school decorated as for a festival, writes her biographer Lizelle Raymond in her book *The Dedicated*:

"She (Nivedita) found him (Sri Aurobindo) completely transformed. His piercing eyes seemed to devour the tight-drawn skin and bones of his face. He possessed an irresistible power, derived from a spiritual revelation that had come to him in prison. During the entire ordeal he had seen before him nothing but Lord Krishna. . . He was, as Nivedita understood him, the successor to the Spiritual Master of the past, offering the source of his inspiration for all to drink from in the yogic solitude. Since his imprisonment at Alipore, Aurobindo Ghose was no longer a fighter but a Yogi "

After Sri Aurobindo came out of jail, he delivered a number of speeches in Calcutta and other places in Bengal. These speeches, which have since been compiled in book-form, will find a permanent place in the history of Indian national literature. They were not only the political speeches of an ardent patriot, but were the utterances of a seer, a god-man whose prophetic words came to be fully realised in course of time as we all know. Naturally, to the alien administrators of the Government of India, who had not even remotely entertained any intention of relinquishing their hold on India, Sri Aurobindo's words of hope, faith, courage, work, sacrifice, God's will etc. were unavailing

mystic jargon of a fanatic which only excite men's minds and lead them to excesses. True, such speeches embarrassed the Government a good deal, both in England and India, as evidenced by the exchange of correspondence which has since come to light; yet it was some cold comfort to them that Sri Aurobindo spoke at all. A silent Sri Aurobindo might be even more dangerous! If he kept talking, there was always a chance of his making a slip, and the watch-dogs of the Government would find a few words or phrases which they might tag on to him as seditious and send him back to jail or deport him for a stretch at Mandalay. In fact, the Government of India was not at all happy at the acquittal of Sri Aurobindo and toyed with the idea of appealing to the High Court. Some of its henchmen egged it on to do so. Finally, the instinct of preserving its respect prevailed and the Government gave up the idea of taking its complaint to the High Court. The less inhibited Anglo-Indian papers like the *Statesman* raised a hue and cry over the acquittal and went so far as to question the wisdom of the trial judge and obliquely commented on the judicial performance. Had an Indian paper given itself a fraction of this kind of indulgence, it would have been hauled up to face a charge of contempt of court.

“On 30 May 1909 Sri Aurobindo delivered the historic Uttarpara speech. It was Amarendranath Chatterjee who went to Calcutta from Uttarpara to fetch Sri Aurobindo to speak to the Dharma Rakshini Sabha. He knew Sri Aurobindo through the secret society organisation and because of his previous initiation by him, Amar went to the *Sanjivani* office to fetch Sri Aurobindo. He found him absolutely quiet, as if in meditation. So he did not speak long with him. They went by train to Uttarpara. Many of the audience also went by the same train. They arrived at Uttarpara at three o'clock. The meeting was to be held at five.”²

The Uttarpara speech is openly a description of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual experiences while in jail. His speech recounts:

“When I was asked to speak to you at the annual meeting of your Sabha, it was my intention to say a few words about the subject chosen for today, the subject of the Hindu religion. I do not know now whether I shall fulfil that intention, for as I sat here, there came into my mind a word that I have to speak to you, a word that I have to speak to the whole of the Indian Nation. It was spoken first to myself in jail and I have come out of jail to speak it to my people.

“It was more than a year ago that I came here last. When I came I was not alone; one of the mightiest prophets of Nationalism sat by my side. It was he who then came out of the seclusion to which God had sent him, so that in the silence and solitude of his cell he might hear the word he had to say. It was he that you came in your hundreds to welcome. Now he is far away, separated from us by thousands of miles. Others whom I was accustomed to find working beside me are absent. The storm that swept over the country has scattered them far and wide. It is I this time who have spent one year in seclusion, and now that I have come out I find all changed. One who always sat by my side and was associated in my

work is a prisoner in Burma; another is in the north rotting in detention. I looked round when I came out. I looked round for those to whom I had been accustomed to look for counsel and inspiration. I did not find them. There was more than that. When I went to jail the whole country was alive with the cry of *Bande Mataram*, alive with the hope of a nation, the hope of millions of men who had newly risen out of degradation. When I came out of jail I listened for that cry, but there was instead a silence. A hush had fallen on the country and men seemed bewildered; for instead of God's bright heaven full of the vision of the future that had been before us, there seemed to be overhead a leaden sky from which human thunders and lightnings rained. No man seemed to know which way to move, and from all sides came the question, 'What shall we do next? What is there that we can do?' I too did not know which way to move, I too did not know what was next to be done. But one thing I knew, that as it was the Almighty Power of God which had raised that cry, that hope, so it was the same Power which had sent down that silence. He who was in the shouting and the movement was also in the pause and the hush. He has sent it upon us, so that the nation might draw back for a moment and look into itself and know His will. I have not been disheartened by that silence, because I had been made familiar with silence in my prison and because I knew it was in the pause and the hush that I had myself learned this lesson through the long year of my detention. When Bepin Chandra Pal came out of jail, he came with a message, and it was an inspired message. I remember the speech he made here. It was a speech not so much political as religious in its bearing and intention. He spoke of his realisation in jail, of God within us all, of the Lord within the nation, and in his subsequent speeches also he spoke of a greater than ordinary force in the movement and a greater than ordinary purpose before it. Now I also meet you again, I also come out of jail, and again it is you of Uttarpara who are the first to welcome me, not at a political meeting but at a meeting of a society for the protection of our religion. That message which Bepin Chandra Pal received in Buxar jail, God gave to me in Alipore. That knowledge He gave to me day after day during my twelve months of imprisonment and it is that which He has commanded me to speak to you now that I have come out.

"I knew I would come out. The year of detention was meant only for a year of seclusion and of training. How could anyone hold me in jail longer than was necessary for God's purpose? He had given me a word to speak and a work to do, and until that word was spoken I knew that no human power could hush me; until that work was done no human power could stop God's instrument, however weak that instrument might be or however small. Now that I have come out, even in these few minutes, a word has been suggested to me which I had no wish to speak. The thing I had in my mind He has thrown from it and what I speak is under an impulse and a compulsion."³

Sri Aurobindo further narrated what during his Alipore's jail period of

seclusion Lord Krishna had made him realise:

“... He showed me his wonders and made me realise the utter truth of the Hindu religion. I had had many doubts before. I was brought up in England amongst foreign ideas and an atmosphere entirely foreign. About many things in Hinduism I had once been inclined to believe that they were imaginations, that there was much of dream in it, much that was delusion and Maya. But now day after day I realised in the mind, I realised in the heart, I realised in the body the truths of the Hindu religion, they became living experience to me and things were opened to me which no material science could explain. When I first approached Him, it was not entirely in the spirit of the Bhakta, it was not entirely in the spirit of the Jnani. I came to Him long ago in Baroda some years before the Swadeshi began and I was drawn into the public field.

“When I approached God at that time, I hardly had a living faith in Him. The agnostic was in me, the atheist was in me, the sceptic was in me and I was not absolutely sure that there was a God at all. I did not feel His presence. Yet something drew me to the truth of the Vedas, the truth of the Gita, the truth of the Hindu religion. I felt there must be a mighty truth somewhere in this Yoga, a mighty truth in this religion based on the Vedanta. So when I turned to the Yoga and resolved to practise it and find out if my idea was right, I did it in this spirit and with this prayer to Him. ‘If Thou art, then Thou knowest my heart. Thou knowest that I do not ask for Mukti. I do not ask for anything which others ask for. I ask only for strength to uplift this nation, I ask only to be allowed to live and work for this people whom I love and to whom I pray that I may devote my life.’ I strove long for the realisation of Yoga and at last to some extent I had it, but in what I most desired I was not satisfied. Then in the seclusion of the jail, of the solitary cell I asked for it again. I said, ‘Give me Thy Adesh. I do not know what work to do or how to do it. Give me a message.’ In the communion of Yoga two messages came. The first message said, ‘I have given you work and it is to help to uplift this nation. Before long the time will come when you will have to go out of jail; for it is not my will that this time either you should be convicted or that you should pass the time, as others have to do, in suffering for their country. I have called you to work, and that is the Adesh for which you have asked. I give you the Adesh to go forth and do my work.’ The second message came and it said, ‘Something has been shown to you in this year of seclusion, something about which you had your doubts and it is the truth of the Hindu religion. It is this religion that I am raising up before the world, it is this that I have perfected and developed through the Rishis, saints and Avatars, and now it is going forth to do my work among the nations. I am raising up this nation to send forth my word This is the Sanatan Dharma, this is the eternal religion which you did not really know before, but which I have now revealed to you. The agnostic and the sceptic in you have been answered, for I have given you proofs within and without you, physical and subjective, which have satisfied you. When you go

forth, speak to your nation always this word, that it is for the Sanatan Dharma that they arise, it is for the world and not for themselves that they arise, I am giving them freedom for the service of the world. When therefore it is said that India shall rise, it is the Sanatan Dharma that shall rise. When it is said that India shall be great, it is the Sanatan Dharma that shall be great. When it is said that India shall expand and extend itself over the world, it is for the Dharma and by the Dharma that India exists. To magnify the religion means to magnify the country. I have shown you that I am everywhere and in all men and in all things, that I am in this movement and I am not only working in those who are striving for the country but I am working also in those who oppose them and stand in their path. I am working in everybody and whatever men may think or do they can do nothing but help in my purpose. They also are doing my work, they are not my enemies but my instruments. In all your actions you are moving forward without knowing which way you move. You mean to do one thing and you do another. You aim at a result and your efforts subserve one that is different or contrary. It is Shakti that has gone forth and entered into the people. Since long ago I have been preparing this uprising and now the time has come and it is I who will lead it to its fulfilment.'

“This then is what I have to say to you. The name of your society is ‘Society for the Protection of Religion’. Well, the protection of the religion, the protection and upraising before the world of the Hindu religion, that is the work before us. But what is the Hindu religion? What is this religion which we call Sanatan, eternal? It is the Hindu religion only because the Hindu nation has kept it, because in this Peninsula it grew up in the seclusion of the sea and the Himalayas, because in this sacred and ancient land it was given as a charge to the Aryan race to preserve through the ages. But it is not circumscribed by the confines of a single country, it does not belong peculiarly and for ever to a bounded part of the world. That which we call Hindu religion is really the eternal religion, because it is the universal religion which embraces all others. If a religion is not universal, it cannot be eternal. A narrow religion, a sectarian religion, an exclusive religion can live only for a limited time and a limited purpose. This is the one religion that can triumph over materialism by including and anticipating the discoveries of science and the speculations of philosophy. It is the one religion which impresses on mankind the closeness of God to us and embraces in its compass all the possible means by which man can approach God. It is the one religion which insists every moment on the truth which all religions acknowledge, that He is in all men and all things and that in Him we move and have our being. It is the one religion which enables us not only to understand and believe this truth but to realise it with every part of our being. It is the one religion which shows the world what the world is, that it is the Lila of Vasudeva. It is the one religion which shows us how we can best play our part in that Lila, its subtlest laws and its noblest rules. It is the one religion which does not separate

life in any smallest detail from religion, which knows what immortality is and has utterly removed from us the reality of death.

“This is the word that has been put into my mouth to speak to you today. What I intended to speak has been put away from me, and beyond what is given to me I have nothing to say. It is only the word that is put into me that I can speak to you. That word is now finished. I spoke once before with this force in me and I said then that this movement is not a political movement and that nationalism is not politics but a religion, a creed, a faith. I say it again today, but I put it in another way. I say no longer that nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith, I say that it is the Sanatan Dharma which for us is nationalism. This Hindu nation was born with the Sanatan Dharma, with it it moves and with it it grows. When the Sanatan Dharma declines, then the nation declines, and if the Sanatan Dharma were capable of perishing, with the Sanatan Dharma it would perish. The Sanatan Dharma, that is nationalism. This is the message that I have to speak to you.”⁴

((To be continued))

NILIMA DAS

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MUSINGS ON PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

(Continued from the issue of May 1995)

4. THE MEETING (4)

Part Eleven

What Should Be

WHAT to be and how to be—these are questions that perpetually torment good people. They seek guidance in *shastra* and the ‘Holy Book’, in the commandments of the elders and if all these fail they act according to what is dictated by their reason. But the results of these actions are at best mixed and sometimes just the reverse of what should or should not have been done. The cause is not far to seek. As the Mother has pointed out, the universe is recreated at each moment, new elements are added to it and dead ones are discarded. The truth of yesterday degenerates into the falsehood of today. There is no straight law which one can follow without any fear of tripping or being unjust. More often than not one betrays one’s soul while following a supposed ideal code of conduct. Life is a perpetual Catch 22 situation where the well-intentioned often land themselves in the morass of mental dogma.

Life is a classroom and each moment is an examination. Our acts, howsoever insignificant they may seem, either uplift us or drag us down. But generally the good people of life are incapable of bearing a constant tension and of making a perpetual effort. The doers of *good deeds* get tired much too easily. Like good bureaucrats they would work honestly for some time and would then want to be considered for retirement benefits from the pension funds of the Lord. But the Lord might have in mind an entirely new and different career for them requiring increasingly greater endeavour. Inaction of any type—physical, intellectual, moral, or spiritual—is not acceptable to our Creator. That God made the creation in one week and then rested on Sunday seems to be a myth. For neither the sun nor the moon ever rest nor do the oceans, the stars, the plants or the hearts of all living beings.

This hope for upliftment of consciousness by past efforts is a fallacy, a mirage. Consciousness is a slippery pole and one cannot have a static toe-hold on it. One has to constantly struggle upward, otherwise one would land at the bottom. Witness how the soul-fervour of millions of crusaders for religion or dogma led them to commit the meanest and cruellest atrocities in the name of their ideals. Supported by a *fatwa* or Papal dictate many good people committed heinous crimes without pausing to ask their mind or heart where was the divinity or sanctity in looting, killing and even raping the innocents whose only crime was

to belong to another faith. This sort of aberration takes place due to a mental inertia, when masses of people give others the right to think for them, instead of charting a just course in the light of their own reason and conscience.

This is the inertia of consciousness against which the adept on the upward path has to guard. On March 23, 1914 the Mother wrote in her diary,

As I see it, the ideal state is that in which, constantly conscious with Thy Consciousness, one knows at every moment, spontaneously, without any reflection being necessary, exactly what should be done to best express Thy Law

This is the ideal and in truth the only way of being sure of not tripping on the fissured roads of life, on that narrow mountain-path leading to the *summit*. This is the thing needed, to make us always worthy of our Lord. But before one can reach this state, a thousand lives of upward orientation are needed. Nobody can escape the evolutionary spiral. The Mother further wrote,

That state I know, for I have experienced it at certain moments, but very often the “how” is veiled by a mist of ignorance and one must call in reflection which is not always a good counsellor—let alone all that one does at every instant without having any time for reflection, on the spur of the moment.

Most people blunder through life, acting anyhow. The motive behind their action is sometimes not known even to them, for the impulse to action originates from their subconscious. And the subconscious is a residue of thousands of lives. Apart from this terrible burden of past lives, there are the powerful collective suggestions which make us do things totally out of keeping with our true being or soul. Later, Kaikaiyee-like, we may lament and suffer from remorse. But by that time the damage would have been done and sometimes centuries might be needed to undo what nether forces made us do in one moment. The Mother writes about these actions done without reflection,

How far does it conform with or oppose Thy Law? That depends upon the state of the subconscious, or what is active in it at that time. Once the deed is done, if it has any importance, if one can look at it, analyse it, understand it, it serves as a lesson, enables one to become aware of one’s motive of action and hence of something in the subconscious which still governs the being and has to be mastered.

We have to be ready to look dispassionately at ourselves and at our actions and this weighing up of our motives, this effort to understand the hidden levers

that prompted our actions, if practised sincerely over a long time will show us all that simmers within our subconscious and if we are sincere we then begin our labour of cleaning it of the accumulated cobwebs of countless lives. Though arduous, it is not an impossible task. The Mother's next words reveal a truth of supreme importance,

Every action on earth is bound to have a good and a bad side. Even the actions which best express the most divine law of Love carry in them something of the disorder and darkness inherent in the world as it is today.

This is a sobering thought that even the action of an Avatar, originating from *the most divine law of Love*, cannot be free of the environmental disorder and darkness. This is the reason why the Divine has not or cannot use his Absolute Potencies here in the manifestation. And this is the reason why there has always been a dark side of life which has suppressed or dimmed and sometimes even overwhelmed the descending light. So pervasive is this sense of futility that life seems to be a vale of tears. To this surface view of life the Mother has this to say,

Some people, those who are called pessimists, perceive almost exclusively the dark side of everything. The optimists, on the other hand, see only the side of beauty and harmony. And if it is foolish and ignorant to be an unwitting optimist, is it not making a happy conquest to become a willing optimist? In the eyes of pessimists, whatever one does will always be bad, ignorant or egoistic; how could one satisfy them? It is an impossible task.

There is a tremendous force of enlightenment behind the two terms *unwitting optimist* and *willing optimist*. An unwitting optimism springs from an unenlightened state but to become a willing optimist requires a formidable act of faith. One sees and understands fully the gravity of the dark forces and desperate events which cast long shadows on our planet, yet by an act of supreme faith in the Lord and his Power and Goodness one becomes an optimist in spite of the worst that the Furies or Fates can do. A voluntary optimism requires a luminous trust in that Omnipotent Grace which rules our lives, even when the outer circumstances make it hard to see a silver lining.

How to act in this bewildering world where the *seeming* right may be a travesty of truth and the *seeming* wrong the requisite truth? The Mother says,

There is only one recourse; to unite as perfectly as possible with the highest and purest light that one can conceive, to identify one's consciousness as completely as possible with the absolute Consciousness, to strive to receive all inspirations from that Consciousness alone so as to foster as best

one can its manifestation upon earth, and, trusting in its power, to regard all events with serenity.

Since everything is necessarily mixed in the present manifestation, the wisest thing is to do one's best, striving towards an ever higher light and to resign oneself to the fact that absolute perfection is for the moment unrealizable.

This is the crux of the problem of life and progress. For the time being, one has to understand and accept that even our best efforts will bring only partial results and great endeavours will achieve only fragmented success. This will save us from much pain and heart-break. Quietly to go on doing our best, in spite of the rebuffs of the Evil Ones, and not to chafe or be impatient with the snail's pace of achievement, was the Mother's way. She would put it into practice in Pondicherry for six decades with a truly divine patience. Inwardly she prepared herself with this total acceptance of the world and its given circumstances yet with the resolve,

And yet how ardently must we always aspire for that inaccessible perfection!...

Part Twelve

On the path of sadhana all disturbance is a sure sign of some lack in our being and is also an impediment on the path of perfection that the sadhak of Integral Yoga pursues. Even in our sincere aspirations different shades of mixtures seep in invariably.

These mixtures vitiate and impede the flow and fulfilment of the aspiration. It exasperates and depresses the sadhak whose constant refrain of self-reproach is that he is not being fully faithful to his ideals, that he is betraying his Lord by satisfying his small desires, the desires whose very existence is a betrayal. He would like to perform Herculean feats of sadhana and only then would his vital being feel satisfied with itself. But this desire for a quicker march towards the Highest can be detrimental to the progress aimed at. Nobody can run up the snowy slopes of Everest and reach the top in one go. There are prolonged periods of training and preparation needed, there is a necessity for acclimatization and for support parties and requisite paraphernalia. All seasoned mountaineers know this and do not grudge the long years of training. Isn't the goal of spiritual Union more difficult than climbing dozens of Everests one after another?

The ideal inner condition or rather the true attitude is for the sadhak to remain unperturbed in seeming defeat and unexultant in seeming victory. Each

spiritual event is only a *seeming*, appearances in this field of yoga can be deceptive. A defeat may act as the needed springboard, or as a necessary help in deflating the ego, and might thus be a prelude to a victory, while a victory, such as a vision or a sudden exalted state of consciousness, may spur the ego or induce complacency, or bring back a great *tamas* in the being, due to the inability of our limited vital capacity. Thus we can be sure that the only sure sign of progress is a complete lack of agitation in the being of the sadhak, a settled and unshakable peace and silence.

On March 24, 1914, the Mother wrote in her diary,

The result of all my reflections of yesterday is the finding that the only disturbance I experience comes from my fear of not having been or of not being perfectly identified with Thy law. And this disturbance comes precisely from the fact that the identification is not complete; for if it were, I could not ask myself whether it is so and, on the other hand, as I know from experience, all disturbance would become impossible for me.

But in face of an error or blunder, the true thought to have is not to say to oneself, "I should have done better, I should have done this instead of that", but rather "I was not sufficiently identified with the eternal Consciousness, I must strive to realise better this definitive and integral union."

And this is the attitude in which lies true progress. The Mother once said that when we act we must ask ourselves at each instant what is the wish of the Divine in that matter. When a problem crops up and a certain course of action has to be chosen out of the possible many, we have just to ask ourselves what the Mother would like us to do and then keeping this criterion in sight we can act with peace in our heart. If due to our vital and mental agitations we made a mistake and did not understand the Divine's Will, still we have acted in good faith and we should quietly lay both our success and failure at her feet, fully at peace with ourselves, for our motives were selfless and we did the best we could. The Mother has given an unfailing Mantra of action. She has said, "Don't try to please yourself and don't try to please others, try to please only the Divine." If we would divinize our life, then this one touchstone is sure, not only to throw light upon the impurities which plague our action, but also to purify them. If we can keep this fact in the front of our consciousness, we cannot stray too far.

This lack of disturbance coupled with steadiness and control of thought are the means by which the Mother achieves an identification with the object of thought. She further writes,

Yesterday afternoon, during those long hours of silent contemplation, I understood at last what is meant by true identification with the object of

one's thought. I touched this realisation, as it were, not by achieving a mental state but simply through steadiness and control of thought. I understood that I would need long, very long hours of contemplation to be able to perfect this realisation. This is one of the things I expect from this journey to India, if indeed Thou dost consider it useful for Thy service, Lord.

My progress is slow, very slow, but I hope that in compensation it may be lasting and free from all fluctuation.

The Mother's thoughts turn again and again towards India and what she hopes to achieve there. And how surprising it is that she uses the words *Thy integral manifestation* as her mission. One wonders yet again how the Twin Avatars arrived at the same goal though geographically so far apart. She writes,

Grant that I may accomplish my mission, that I may help in Thy integral manifestation.

The ship sails on towards India and the Gods must have been waiting with bated breath for this *meeting* which would herald a *New Creation*.

Part Thirteen

God-touch

There are some strategies that can help us in our aim of realising the Divine. Apart from the needed long-drawn out Tapasya, the millennial effort, there is something else that can activate the Divine Grace on our behalf. That something is the company of realised souls. If we can station ourselves by the side of the roads frequented by true yogis, we will, if we are sincere in our aspiration, reap rich rewards.

There is a lovely story in the *Ramayana*, which tells of the tribal maiden Shabari who aspired to have Sri Rama's darshan. She was low-born and dared not approach the nearby Ashram, where many rishis led a life of extreme Tapasya. Inexorably drawn to them, the young girl used to hide in the bushes and watch the rishis and their activities. The rishis used to go, very early in the morning, to a nearby pond for bathing. The footpath leading to the pond was overgrown with *kusha* grass, a weed with sharp blades which must have lacerated the feet of these rishis who never paid any attention to physical pain or discomfort. One day the tender-hearted girl uprooted the weeds and smoothed and cleaned the path. Next morning when the rishis felt the soft soil underneath their feet, they awoke to the fact that some unknown person had been serving

them. They cried out, "Who has cleaned the path of the weeds? Who is thus stealing the fruits of our sadhana? Come out." And then, at their explicit command, Shabari had to come out. The rest of the story is too well-known to be told here. The point we have to note is that by this proximity and loving service Shabari gained a part of the merit which had accrued to the rishis by their austerities and Tapasya.

The other well-known story is that of Bhola, the faithful servant of Shankaracharya. Bhola was an illiterate man. One day, to break the pride of his great disciple Padmapad, Shankaracharya ordered Bhola to analyse one of the most difficult *sutras* of grammar. At the command of his Guru, Bhola broke out in inspired poetry. His *shlokas* are to this day accepted as the greatest on the subject.

These two stories vividly illustrate that by attaching ourselves to the Great, by walking in their footsteps, our own limitations may be annulled. Of course, to be effective, this attachment has to be sincere and without expectations. On March 25, 1914 the Mother wrote in her diary,

Silent and unseen as always, but all-powerful, Thy action has made itself felt and, in these souls that seemed to be so closed, a perception of Thy divine light is awake. I knew well that none could invoke Thy presence in vain and if in the sincerity of our hearts we commune with Thee through no matter what organism, body or human collectivity, this organism in spite of its ignorance finds its unconsciousness wholly transformed. But when in one or several elements there is the conscious transformation, when the flame that smolders under the ashes leaps out suddenly illumining all the being, then with joy we salute Thy sovereign action, testify once more to Thy invincible puissance and can hope that a new possibility of true happiness has been added to the others in mankind.

The Mother wrote this when she was on board the ship that was bringing her to Pondicherry. Her fellow-travellers were a group of people more or less unconscious, yet they had a special place in the Mother's heart who, as we have seen, invoked the Lord several times on their behalf. There was a marvellous response from the Lord. The *unconsciousness* of her fellow-travellers was *wholly transformed*. Since the invocation was made by the divine Mother, therefore there was an inevitable descent of Grace and a *new possibility of true happiness has been added to the others in mankind*.

Throughout her life the Mother would carry on constantly and scrupulously this role of a Mediatrix between the earth and its beings and the Supreme Lord. That full advantage of this Grace was not taken is another matter. That day on behalf of the travellers on the ship, to whom had been granted *a new possibility of true happiness* the Mother thanked the Lord,

O Lord, an ardent thanksgiving mounts from me towards Thee expressing the gratitude of this sorrowing humanity which Thou illuminest, transformest and glorifiest and givest to it the peace of Knowledge.

To Her, who attempted the unimaginable and achieved the impossible, we, on our knees, bow in eternal gratitude.

(To be continued)

SHYAM KUMARI

AMONG THE NOT SO GREAT

I WRITE this about some old Ashramites—interesting people, who I feel should not be lost, buried in the past. I write of them for they are, or were, so garbed in their ordinariness that their coming, going and even their short sojourn here went unheralded, unnoticed and unsung. Maybe I use words too high-sounding, but I would that you let that pass. They did not achieve anything great (in the usual sense of the word)—for no poetry, prose or philosophy spewed forth from their innards. They created no piece of art nor did they even put up a block of masonry. But they achieved this—when you by chance thought of them a bubble of joy rose from your stomach, tingled its way up like a soda-induced burp. What more can one ask of another but this moment of joy? This is reason enough for me to bring them back from the past.

These that I mention here were quite closely associated with me, and I think it would interest many who have not had the good chance to rub shoulders with them, nor even see them, probably. This is a homely “Who-is-who”

I start with Manibhai. He is no more. He hailed from Old East Africa. He was a Postmaster there, well respected for his work and as a person. He happened to read some literature on Sri Aurobindo and the Ashram and decided to come over—way back in 1929. He visited this place and then pulled out his African roots and set them here in 1930. He ventured out for a short duration, but came back around 1945. That’s when I first set my eyes on him. Before he arrived here, he was, it seems, very fastidious as far as his dress was concerned. When I saw him he was anything but fastidious (in dress)—rather its negation.

He was a big, powerfully built man, slow of speech and action, but sure of both. The first look at him was not very reassuring. Big, dark, bushy eye-brows with deep-set eyes, further deepened by high cheek-bones and a sharp nose—nothing to relieve the feeling of foreboding—not until he smiled. His face creased up and his eyes shone and lit up the face. This was the outer man. He was in charge of the Smithy. The Smithy was where now stands the Post Office delivery section. A man of iron, he worked on the same metal. Let’s now take a peep inside—maybe you could find some gold!

I go back a few years before I met Manibhai and recount at random a few anecdotes of his life. I have been told them by others who knew him. They all agreed upon this—that his sincerity was unquestionable as was his simplicity complete. These two complemented each other to make a tremendous worker but they often complicated matters. I just recount, you may draw your conclusions. In charge of the Smithy—as mentioned before—he adhered strictly to one rule, “No chit from the Mother—No work”—as good a practice as any. One day the Bakery Room lock was jammed, and it had to be opened to start the work early to have the bread ready. So Manibhai was called. He came, saw and shook his head negatively, “No chit, so no work.” The Mother could be seen only

later—so? Manibhai was as obstinate as the lock. What to do? Someone took up courage, and did need quite a bit of it to rub Manibhai the wrong way, and broke open the lock. Manibhai was very displeased, to say the least. But the Mother later said it was alright, so that appeased him.

Once even Pavitra-da was at the receiving end. He wanted to get some work done—and he did not bring the Mother's chit. "No" was the answer, until the Mother wrote that henceforth he could do Pavitra-da's work when he asked for it.

There was once a servant-strike at Padmasini-amma's, some trouble was brewing (Electric Dept. where maids now wait, seeking domestic work). The Mother told Manibhai to go there and shout. He did just that, and the strikers ran away. It seems sound could break walls, so why not a strike!

In those days the Bakery made loaves of bread of bigger dimensions—maybe a foot long, about 12cm-15cm broad and 8cm high tapering towards both ends and rounded up. It cut up to about 36 slices. Well, Manibhai would have one of these loaves for dinner! No extra milk or vegetable. Ravindraji offered extra milk, but Manibhai would have none of it. He softened the bread in water and gulped it down. It seems someone told of this phenomenon to Sri Aurobindo and he jokingly remarked, "Oh, humanly impossible!". When Manibhai heard of it, he in his simplicity and limited knowledge of English missed the "joke" part of it and thought to himself, "I am not human." He stopped eating the full loaf. This was again reported to Sri Aurobindo. The Lord was moved and sent someone to explain to Manibhai that the remark was all a joke, and he should revert to his old diet.

1945—Manibhai came back, changes were taking place—Harpagon got started—so no old Smithy. He was now transported to Ambabikshu Garden. At that time it was considered a far-off place, a rural area, on the outskirts of Pondy. He had a pet monkey which searched for lice in your hair if you put your head in front of it. Once two bullocks were locked in a fight, Manibhai pulled them apart and was rewarded with a broken arm. He then shifted to Cazanove and finally to the third garden of Le Faucheur.

Le Faucheur consists of three gardens. Two are close to the main road. The third is quite a way in, reached in those days by a very sandy pathway, bordered with cacti. (Now the road is tarred.) Once, as a group of us were going there ploughing our way on cycles through the sand, Dhanavanti landed in the cacti. Manibhai applied some age-old medicinal powder kept in an open earthen saucer. She survived the treatment without complications. A trained doctor would have been mortified.

The third garden was actually a large field—a lonely place. Casuarina trees filled most of it. A portion consisted of rice paddies. A number of coconut trees bordered two sides. The Ariankuppam river and its back waters formed its eastern border. A very picturesque place it was and still is. Near the entrance

was the local crematorium. Snakes including some cobras co-existed with Manibhai. The other citizens of the place were half a dozen dogs: Brownie, Mousy, Kakudi, etc. His and the dogs' abode was a small mud-walled hut - 3m x 4m. At the centre the thatched roof stood at maybe 2.5m. You had to bend double to enter. A charpoy (rope-cot) was the main and only piece of furniture. Pots and pans and a primitive stove occupied one corner. The other corners were filled with a few clothes, hurricane lanterns (1 or 2), 2-3 lathis of various sizes, a coconut knife etc. An old lady's cycle had also to fit in. The few clothes were the simplest the Ashram supplied—dhotis, shirts and gamchas. He himself sometimes fashioned and stitched an extra shirt out of a gamcha. He just folded it in half, cut a hole for his head to go through and stitched up the sides (by hand) leaving a gap on either side to let his arms through. He remodelled a three-cell torch into a six-cell one by bandaging up a long tin to the original barrel. The switch was a piece of GI wire. He hung it when in use on one of his shoulders much like a sub-machine gun. His duties were only at night as a watchman. You can well imagine the apparition—a big dark man, lathi in one hand, the torch hung on the other, draped in all those nondescript clothes. 3-4 dogs trailing him completed the picture. This is how we met him when we went to help him out after a paddy harvest or any such time when extra personnel were required as night-watchmen or when we just chose not to waste a beautiful moonlit night at home in bed. He received us with a warm "Hello, Captain Mona". (Mona used to be quite a night-watchman in his younger days and led us on these night forays.) We entered his hut and he would offer us everything: tea, some blankets (given to him by some kind-hearted friend) and some pillows. The last were gunny bags stuffed with coconut fibre and sawdust. If guests were more than the pillows, he would gently say, "Kakudi, Mousy, please give your pillows to the guests." And our canine hosts would get up and go lie under the khatia. We accepted such hospitality with as much *sang froid* as each could muster. Personally I had no problems.

Norman Jr. and I were frequent visitors to Le Faucheur. Manibhai would offer tea in a chipped old cup, along with his brand of 'Rothi'. Rothi was a thick chappati-like affair made of dough which itself was Dining Room bread resoaked (a reverse process). If Norman refused the Rothi he would say "O, don't be so British, come on, have one."

The lantern had a chimney like a jigsaw puzzle of a dozen pieces stuck with cement. I asked him why he couldn't get a new one. He smiled and asked me: "Can you say the new one will not break?" I just returned his smile, having no guarantee card for a chimney.

The man was of such a brand, that when he said, "Batti, nothing can happen without the Mother's permission, not a leaf can fall without Her permission," one could well believe that he was convinced of it, whatever one's own belief.

One day I heard that he had fallen and broken his thigh bone. He was taken

to Madras to have it set right and get a steel pin put in. The setting was not well done. He was in great pain and came back home, back to Le Faucheur, smiling. (By now he had a larger room with brick walls and a tin roof.) He could not walk, but was advised to do so. He set up a waist high parallel bars-like apparatus with casuarina poles to learn to walk. All his efforts failed. The pain increased. He used to drag himself on his seat, legs stretched out in front. He was confined to his hut. For his evacuation, he had a small pit dug in a corner of the room, did the job on some paper sheets, to be thrown out later. The paper sheets were of note-book size, so I supplied him with old newspaper—*The Hindu*. He appreciated my help and remarked, “Batti, I get all the World-news and better packets afterwards.” The papers were of course a month or so out-dated. Some time later, he suddenly left trying. The decline was rapid, and soon on 12th January 1967 he passed away without a ripple. We were 4 or 5 at his funeral.

What say you? Was he a great man or at least a man worth knowing, worth remembering? He left nothing behind—no book, no disciple, just fond memories in a handful of people.

(To be continued)

PRABHAKAR (BATTI)

THE RESURGENCE OF INDIAN CULTURE IN THE LIGHT OF SRI AUROBINDO*

THERE is the call of the rishis of yore to the Divine in man:

“O Immortal, thou art born in mortals in the law of the Truth, of Immortality, of Beauty. Born of the Truth, grow by the Truth—a King, a Godhead, the Truth, the Vast.”

Obviously, this is not the Truth that we understand or speak of. It is much more profound, and yet very simple. It is the truth of our being, united with the Truth of Existence.

Recovering the secret of the Veda by his own spiritual experience, and hewing the path for us not only to find this truth within us, but to manifest it in its integrality in our daily life, Sri Aurobindo gives this call again, leading us on the perfect path of the Integral Yoga with the details of the journey fully charted out in his two most major works, the philosophical manifesto, *The Life Divine* and the epic revelation of over 23,000 lines, *Savitri*. We read in this poem:

All is too little that the world can give:
Its power and knowledge are the gifts of Time
And cannot fill the spirit's sacred thirst ...

In an abysmal lapse of all things built
Transcending every perishable support
And joining at last its mighty origin,
The separate self must melt or be reborn
Into a truth beyond the mind's appeal ...

In absolute silence sleeps an absolute Power
Awaking, it can wake the trance-bound soul...

It can fashion in the clay God's perfect shape... .

Here to fulfil himself was God's desire ..

Sri Aurobindo asserts in unmistakable terms that the aim of spirituality is not other-worldly. To merge into the Brahman, leaving the world as it is, deeming it an illusion, is an escape. But to unite with the Brahman in order to bring the highest light into mind, life and body and transform these instruments

* Talk given at the Consulate-General of India in New York on 19th September 1994

of the Spirit to fulfil God's purpose is a greater challenge and a more difficult task. As Sri Aurobindo says, 'This world is the battlefield for heroic souls, / Where escape brings not the victory and the crown.'

This is the central message of Indian culture. Let us see first what we mean by culture and what Indian culture, in particular, has to offer to the world.

Culture has been variously defined by different people at different times in the world's history. However, in its basic sense, it means the cultivation of man's consciousness, expressed through artistic creativity, social and political thought and organisation, religious belief and practice.

Looking at the history of the world, we observe that as Man grows in his consciousness, he gains a greater mastery over himself and his environment, and to the extent that he masters his lower animal instincts and refines his nature and life by deeper and nobler aspects of the Spirit, we see the beginnings of a highly cultured and civilised humanity.

The whole aim of the greater culture is to elevate the consciousness of Man and to help him to exceed himself by knowledge and his reason, by the law of good and unity, by the law of beauty and harmony, by some high law of his spirit, and thus bring him out of his egoistic, material and unspiritual existence. According to Sri Aurobindo, if a civilisation has not any of these aims, it can hardly at all be said to have a culture and certainly in no sense a great and noble culture.

As Sri Aurobindo points out, the principle, the essential character of Indian culture is extraordinarily high, ambitious and noble—the highest that the human spirit can conceive of. For, it considers life to be an opportunity given to Man for the highest development of the Spirit. Indian culture holds that not only can Man become conscious of the Eternal, the infinite Reality, the Supreme, the Brahman, but he can live in the power of this knowledge, become divine in knowledge, in will, in action, and can dwell in the bliss of his highest existence.

In other words, spiritual knowledge and experience have always been the ultimate objective of Indian culture to which the soul of the people has been directed by the Veda and the Upanishads and other spiritual literature of India.

It is commonly believed in India that when an individual embarks on the path of Yoga, he has to renounce the world and the secular life. Well, true spirituality is not to renounce life for some other-worldly gain, but to make life perfect for the divine manifestation here, upon this very earth. If we study the ancient Indian tradition, we find that the aim of the ancient Rishi was not only to know God, but to know the world and life too. According to Sri Aurobindo, the Infinite has to be reached along with development in the finite.

It is true that Indian culture made a distinction between the knowledge of the world and things as a preparatory lower knowledge and the knowledge of Self and God as the higher knowledge since the spiritual life was considered to be a greater way of existence towards which Man must ultimately grow. But it did

not create a gulf between the two, nor did it reject the world and life and its material basis, and the value of its knowledge.

It has been universally acknowledged that India has attempted, achieved and created with a unique sense of completeness and perfection in every field of life's activities. Each department of life, each line of activity, each subject of knowledge had its science. However, the highest crowning note of all knowledge—even the atomic theory of the Vaisheshikas—was spiritual knowledge and liberation from the ego and its ignorance.

In Sri Aurobindo's view, true happiness in this world is the right terrestrial aim of man, but true happiness lies in the finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A culture is to be valued to the extent to which it has discovered the right key of this harmony and organised its life accordingly. A civilisation must be judged by the manner in which all its principles, ideas, forms, and ways of living work towards bringing out that harmony.

Sri Aurobindo is therefore equally concerned about the growth and greatness of the race on earth, and duly examines the pragmatic, non-ascetic and dynamic value of Indian culture and its power to meet the challenge of a progressive life on earth. In his priceless thesis, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, he emphatically points out that no anti-vital culture can survive. There must be a strong vital impulse, a force of development or some inspiration for the terrestrial endeavour of man. Otherwise it would perish in the arduous struggle of modern life.

Sri Aurobindo offers us therefore a unique synthesis of cultures of the East and the West in his emphasis on the equal development of Spirit and Matter in the life of Man. However, he does not want us to forget that the central conception of Indian culture is that of the Eternal, the Spirit here encased in Matter. As Sri Aurobindo asserts, "It is India's 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 shortcomings, to this highest ideal that has made her people a nation apart in the human world."

Most often spirituality is equated with religion, but there is a considerable difference between the two. The highest spirituality demands a freedom for its growth far above the rigidity of the religious form and dogma, image-worship and rituals. These may be necessary supports for man before he builds the temple of God within, but not the ultimate means for his highest development.

Besides, spirituality is much wider than any particular religion and includes in its scope the great aims of human life. All life is Yoga, says Sri Aurobindo.

However, we must remember that there is a great difference between the spiritual and the material and mental view of existence. The spiritual aim would be to reveal the greater things concealed in man and Nature rather than express

the imagination of ordinary human life and Nature. The spiritual aim of politics, society, science, economy and other activities of life will be to create conditions within which man can freely seek for and grow into his real self and divinity. This can help to make a collective advance towards the light, peace, unity and harmony

Sri Aurobindo loved and worshipped India. He had seen the transitional stage of Indian society, when a sort of orthodox conservatism was trying to emerge. It was out of touch with the great facts of life and forces of progress and void of vision of the future. He was very much concerned about what India would do with her independence.

After igniting in the minds of his countrymen an indomitable will for complete independence by his fiery speeches, irrefutable articles and, above all, by his inspiring example of selfless service and integrity of character, he left the political field to consecrate his life to the resurgence of Indian culture in its true spirit.

He wanted India to be great, noble, pure and worthy of her big mission in the world. He refused to let her sink to the sordid and vulgar level of blind self-interests and ignorant prejudices, as the Mother said.

He was aware of the influence of the western culture on India. He was aware of the crisis India and the world were bound to face. He accepted the value of Science and Technology for the many advantages and opportunities they offered for human development, but he warned us against a blind imitation of the culture of Europe and America, lest the perfection of machinery should not allow the soul to remember that it is not itself a machine, and consequently make life loveless and trivial. He equally warned us against a blind rejection of all that comes from the west, saying "such an attitude would be intellectually absurd, physically impossible and above all, unspiritual. True spirituality rejects no new light, no added means or materials of our human self-development "

He advised us equally to look dispassionately into our cultural ideas, social forms, understanding of religion and see where they have lost their true spirit or real significance, and whether they are in accordance with the facts of life and the Time-spirit. In other words, while remaining true to the spirit of our culture, we must know how to be plastic to the call of a more luminous future and reshape its forms.

Today, we hear a lot about the rise of Hinduism. What is Hinduism? We fight for it as if it were a dogmatic creed. In Sri Aurobindo's view, it was a mighty, eternal—*sanātana*—and universal truth given as a charge to the Aryan race to preserve through the ages. It is the Hindu religion only because the Hindu nation has kept it. But it is universal religion which embraces all others. We forget that if a religion is not universal, it cannot be eternal.

Now, who is an Aryan? It is one who combines in himself the qualities of a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. It is one who thirsts for and knows the

Truth. It is one who fights for the Truth with courage, chivalry, honour and nobility. It is one who brings the riches, develops and uses all that he has with industry, skill, generosity and beneficence for the development of all that is true, good and noble. It is one who serves the Truth with humility in a loving service of the Divine. This is an Aryan.

Sri Aurobindo reminds us that India recognised the authority of spiritual experience and knowledge but she recognised still more the need of variety of spiritual experience and knowledge. An alert readiness to acknowledge new light, capable of enlarging the old tradition has always been characteristic of the religious mind of India. The atheist and the agnostic were free from persecution in India. Buddhism and Jainism were allowed to exist freely. Judaism and Christianity were admitted equally. It admitted light from all quarters, while conserving its own. An assimilation of the truth of other religions, including the Islamic teaching, could freely take place and be practised in India.

As Sri Aurobindo says, "This is the one religion that can triumph over materialism by including and anticipating the discoveries of science and the speculations of philosophy. It is the one religion which impresses on mankind the closeness of God to us and embraces in its compass all the possible means by which man can approach God... It is that wider Hinduism, which is not a dogma.... For, its real, most authoritative scripture is in the heart, in which the Eternal has its dwelling. And it is in our inner spiritual experiences that we shall find the proof and source of the world's scriptures, the law of knowledge, love and conduct...."

It is this spirit of Hinduism and Indian culture which commands reverence everywhere and is the greatest spiritual force of the world and the hope of the spiritual resurrection of humanity.

Sri Aurobindo sees India as a conscious formation of the divine Shakti who preserves the Knowledge that preserves the world. The ancient rishis always invoked the true Self, the Spirit within us, the knower of the Truth and it is from the sacred soil of India that their call went forth.

"Seers of truth are you; sharpen the shining spears with which you cut the way to that which is Immortal; knowers of the secret planes, form them, the steps by which the gods attained to Immortality."

It was by the spiritual light that India possessed the world. The sacred literature of the Vedas and the Upanishads influenced the mystics all over the world. In America, Emerson found in them an answer to questions perplexing mankind. Thoreau who influenced Gandhiji found his inspiration in the Vedas whose light, he said, illumined him. The famous American historian Will Durant and many European scholars have discovered the influence of Indian philosophy on Greek philosophers, including Plato.

As sister Nivedita said: "India is the Alter of God on which His undying fire burns to keep aflame people's upward aspirations. It is the sacred and unifying force of the place that shapes a people into a nation, a distinct group, intended to fulfil a purpose of God "

The Mother, collaborator of Sri Aurobindo in his spiritual work, who adopted India as her spiritual country, says that in the whole creation the earth has a place of distinction as an evolutionary planet with a psychic entity at its centre. On the earth, India is a country with a distinct mission to lead humanity to peace, harmony and a new world order on the basis of the Truth of Existence. She says that India is the country where the psychic law can and must prevail and the time has come for that. Besides, it is the only possible salvation for the country, whose consciousness has unfortunately been warped by the influence and domination of a foreign nation, but which, in spite of everything, possesses a unique spiritual heritage. India must wake up to her true heritage instead of imitating the West in her blind ambition to become a materialistic power and consequently become neglectful of her soul.

We know that in India there is a continuous—almost unbroken—spiritual quest and a heritage. The spiritually inspired epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata still continue to win the heart of India as it was recently proved during their television serials on Sunday mornings. During the hour of this show, the roads were deserted, empty, still. The houses were clean with incense burning and lamps lit. The doors were open for all who wished to share this joy as of a living presence of God. Where else can you behold this reverence?

Yet, at the same time, we find on the other hand, corruption and crime on the increase. Maybe, the night is darkest before the Dawn. The Mother said hopefully: "India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of modern mankind. India will be the land of its resurrection"—the resurrection to a higher and truer life.

The holocaust in Uganda, in Africa, in Bosnia, in Russia, violence in Kashmir, the incredible crimes in the most highly developed nations—no matter where we throw a glance, remind us that we have not yet solved the problem of war and peace with the end of the Second World War and the signing of the charter of the United Nations.

There is a beautiful aphorism of Sri Aurobindo in which he succinctly explains the situation: "Wherefore God hammers so fiercely at the world, tramples it like dough, casts it so often into the blood-bath and the red hell-heat of the furnace? Because humanity in the mass is still a hard, vile ore which will not otherwise be smelted and shaped".

The motto of UNESCO, one of the specialised agencies of the United Nations, reads: "Wars are created in the minds of men, and it is in the minds of men, therefore, that the defences of peace must be constructed." This is indeed a good effort with a sincerity of purpose, but as Sri Aurobindo would say:— This is

a constitutional ignorance in the sense that we are ignorant of “the true constitution of our being and take mind, life and body for our true principle of living. We are ignorant of that occult presence which determines what we are. We take our surface being for our whole existence. We are ignorant of our large, complex being—our inconscient, subconscious, intraconscient, circumconscient and superconscient parts of being.” Sri Aurobindo evidently goes much deeper. He fully analyses this problem in *The Life Divine* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

As the supreme psychologist the world has ever known or will ever know, he tackles it at its roots. And being conscious of the divine destiny towards which Man is constantly compelled to move by progressive forces of evolutionary Nature, he gives us his insight:

At present, mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development, while in others, it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way

Sri Aurobindo explains to us in extraordinary detail that it is not by the machinery of laws or even by the education of mind that man can change. Man is a complex being, with his roots in the inconscient physical matter, living a life besieged by turbulent vital desires, passions and ambitions and a mind, however rational, enlightened and spiritualised, but still egocentric and divisive by its very nature and principle and therefore imperfect and limited in its power to change life.

It is only if he rises to the next stage of evolution of Consciousness and brings the light, power and bliss of the Supramental or Truth-consciousness in body, life and mind that he can be universalised and transformed. This is a unifying consciousness where neither ignorance nor error can exist. It has the vision of the whole in its totality of time and space and the knowledge of its parts in their unique individuality and their relation to each other in the context of the whole. This is the key to the riddle of this world, perplexed and paralysed by self-centred urges and ambitions, resulting in chaos, pain and suffering.

We have gone through many revolutions, social, economic, political—revolutions even in education, science and technology, not to speak of cultural revolution. But the spiritual revolution awaits its hour. Let us not linger too long. For, this is the hour of God as the Mother reminded us long ago, when she gave this call: “Men, nations, continents! The choice is imperative: Truth or the Abyss.”

We already see that humanity, bewildered and struggling to come out of the chaos, has arrived at an acute state of tension and restlessness when it must either break through its resistance to change or perish. It is given a chance to

transcend the egocentric consciousness and evolve into superhumanity or fall back into the abyss of ignorance and destroy itself as in Atlantis.

The fragmentation of Man we see today is the result of a one-sided development of his being, which is responsible for the crisis in every field of life, creating chaos everywhere. It is important therefore to know the complete psychology of Man and the process of evolution if we wish to give him an education for the development of his full potentialities in accordance with his divine destiny and the purpose of existence in the full knowledge of the divine intention and will behind it. This alone, Sri Aurobindo affirms, can give us a key to change the conditions of our life and the circumstances under which we live.

A perfect world, he reminds us, cannot be created by men who are themselves imperfect, nor can we change the conditions in which we live without changing our egocentric and divisive mental consciousness to the Truth-consciousness or Supramental Consciousness, as Sri Aurobindo calls it.

The realisation of this consciousness is an inevitable necessity of Nature, the irresistible Divine Will and intention in the world. We are called to participate in this great adventure and collaborate with this aim of Nature.

Tracing the evolution of consciousness from Matter to Man, Sri Aurobindo asserts that there is no reason why this progressive evolution should halt at such an imperfect creation as Man, who cannot solve the problems created by himself, resulting in utter chaos, in spite of his highest mental development, superb scientific discoveries and unprecedented technological achievements. This possibility was seen by the ancient rishis. We have an inspiring hymn in the Upanishads, with an invocation:

*Hiraṇmayena pātrena satyasyāpihitam mukham
Tat tvam pusannapavṛnu satyadharmāya dṛṣṭaye*

“The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid; that do thou remove, O Fosterer (the Sun of the divine illumination who enlarges and opens our being into a luminous and infinite consciousness), for the law of Truth, for sight.”

On the basis of his own realisation of the Supramental or Truth-consciousness, the ascent towards it is described by Sri Aurobindo in all the minute details of the path in his magnificent epic, *Savitri*. In *The Life Divine*, too, Sri Aurobindo puts before us in a most enlightening way the Divine Plan and the purpose of existence as vouchsafed to him and experienced by him.

We feel convinced that the evolution of a superconscious Spirit out of inconscient Nature is the key-word of the earth's riddle. Evolution of consciousness must continue till it manifests the supreme Truth-consciousness with its omniscient knowledge, unerring will, invincible power, pure deathless love, unalloyed beauty, harmony and invariable self-existent bliss. Sri Aurobindo has

given us the perfect path of the Integral Yoga which helps us to find the guru and the guide within so that each of us can follow the law of our nature in the light of the truth of our being and transform it into the being of God within.

We hear the same Rġgvedic call again: "Become high-uplifted, O Strength, pierce all veils, manifest in us the things of the Godhead". The fire-seeds of aspiration for this highest aim were sown by the rishis in the soil of India. The soul of India is conscious of this Truth and keeps the flame of human aspiration for a divine life on earth ever burning.

Sri Aurobindo finds the Rġgvedic Age to be the Age of Intuition when the highest truth of existence was intuitively perceived by the rishis and revealed in the riks of the Veda. It is possible that after an intensity of search, a certain period of fatigue and relaxation had set in, during which the old truths were partially lost. It was difficult to recover them since the language in which the hymns were couched was deliberately ambiguous. And the Veda became a mass of myth and ritual.

Sri Aurobindo rediscovers the secret of the Veda by shedding on the Vedic terms and symbolisms a light which is quite different from that of Sayana. He gives his interpretation with the help of his own spiritual experiences and realisations. As we read him we find a constant image of the journey of the soul on the path of Truth. As it advances and ascends on the path, new vistas of light, power and bliss open before us. With Sri Aurobindo we realise that the Rig Veda is a book of the Work of works—the inner and outer sacrifices—a hymn of the soul's battle and victory as it ascends to higher and higher planes of consciousness and discovers the riches—the treasures of the Divine Light, Power and Bliss—inaccessible to the animal man or those in the grip of their lower nature.

Sri Aurobindo says: "Man, in the Indian idea, is a divinity and an eternal existence; an inextinguishable spark of the supreme Fire... a spirit veiled in the works of energy, moving to self-discovery, capable of Godhead. The natural half-animal creature that for a while he seems to be is not his whole being, nor his true being." This half-conscious and inconscient basis must be discovered and mastered; the lower nature must be refined and transformed; the body, life and mind must be fully developed, but only to be integrated as the instruments of the Spirit.

To be shut up for ever in his ego is not his ultimate perfection; he can become a universal soul, one with the supreme Unity, one with others, one with all beings. This is the high sense and power concealed in his humanity that he can aspire to this perfection and transcendence. This is the aim therefore proposed to him by Indian culture.

Sri Aurobindo asserts that to be ourselves is our aim. But we are only partly ourselves. The Divinity within Man still remains veiled, of which we must first become conscious. To be integrally aware of all the truth of one's being is to have

the integral force of one's being. This is the essence of spiritual knowledge and power of consciousness without which we remain ignorant and imperfect in being and in action

The spiritual perfection which opens before Man is the crown of a long, patient, millennial outflowing of the spirit in life and nature through many rebirths. All that is demanded of us is not something far-off and distant. It is an evolution of our own innate and latent power of consciousness, which can bring about a life of unity, mutuality and harmony from a deeper and wider truth of our being by a self-revelation of the fullness of the godhead seated within. To become conscious of his inner divinity and to exceed himself is the greatness of which he is capable. He is a living laboratory where the Divine Craftsman can work out a divine transmutation with his collaboration.

The work of the renaissance in India therefore must be to make this spirit, the higher view of life, the sense of deeper potentiality once more a creative, perhaps a dominant power in the world.

Do we have the will and sincerity to take this leap into the future? For, after all, as Sri Aurobindo clearly puts before us the choice, "It is the will in the being that gives to circumstances their value.... If the will in a race or civilisation is towards death, if it clings to the lassitude to decay and laissez-faire.. if it insists blindly upon the propensities that lead to destruction... nothing, not even abundant strength and resources and intelligence .. and constantly offered opportunities will save it from an inevitable disintegration or collapse. But if there comes to it a great faith in itself and a robust will to live and achieve, if it is open to things that shall come, willing to seize on the future and what it offers and strong enough to compel it... it can draw from adversity and defeat a force of invincible victory and rise from apparent helplessness and decay as a mighty flame of resurgence to the light of a more splendid life. This is what Indian civilisation must now arise to do as it has always done in the eternal strength of its spirit."

As the Mother says, it is the Hour of God when all is pressing towards change and reconstitution. One has an exceptional privilege of participating in the creation of this New World, this beautiful world of Delight, waiting at our gate for our call to come down upon earth and manifest all the glory and splendour of God.

KAILAS JHAVERY

A PLUNGE INTO THE UNKNOWN

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE UNEXPECTED

(5)

THE Ashram life here has two currents—outer and inner. Only those who can keep contact with the inner current are aware of the constant Divine Presence here. They can know many things that others cannot.

Those who have true sincerity do not need outer rituals. Within a few minutes or even a few seconds they can have an inner contact with the Divine and the needed guidance. The Mother herself said so. My own experience is also the same. Often the inner happening precedes the outer happening. I am giving a personal example:

In 1954 on 20th February at night something happened and I felt that I was facing death. My psychic being was very active at that time. I was completely fearless, got an inspiration from within, got up from my bed, switched on the table-lamp and wrote a poem in Bengali entitled “Face to Face with Death”. Given below is an adaptation in English in simple prose:

“While standing face to face with death, with my last call to Thee, Mother Divine, I shall say that even if I get lost on this bank of the river of death, I shall continue to proceed on the other.

“Let the new Age appear on the earth, let Thy divine Work be accomplished. I consider only That to be my fortune, what does it matter if my body is reduced to ashes?

“I shall swim across the river of death with consummate ease, for I know definitely within me that Thou art there on the other side too ”

The inspiration was so strong that I took only a few minutes to write the three stanzas of the poem. Then the inspiration stopped. I too stopped my pen and went back to my bed.

I was much surprised when in the morning, the Mother during her Darshan of 21st February distributed a message entitled by her—“The Fear of Death and the Four Methods of Conquering it.” It corroborated my own experience at night. Out of the four methods one was faith in the Divine which I adopted spontaneously

On returning to my room I got fresh inspiration and added the fourth stanza to complete the poem:

“And yet, I shall not desire death with some selfish interest. If it comes with the Divine’s Will behind it, may I welcome it without fear ”

I have had many such experiences. I have always noticed that the various messages distributed by the Mother on various occasions, including the New

Year messages, had for me a great significance and I was always benefited by them.

While thinking about New Year messages of the Mother, I just chanced upon a talk by her (Ref. *Mother India*, April 24, 1956, pp. 2-3) of which I had taken notes in my diary. While speaking about the significance of dates the Mother says:

“The way of framing a calendar is a convention. If the convention is made general, as there is an attempt now to do, it can become a very powerful formation. But in order to become significant for many, many must first accept it. I mean by a formation an image infused with a force that makes it something living, an image which can be used as a symbol. There are people who may form images and use them as symbols, but all is done only for themselves, as in the case of dream-symbols. These are purely subjective and valid in so far as these people are personally concerned.

“But if your calendar is adopted by almost the whole of mankind, then the symbol is capable of acting upon a very wide field. You can act upon the major population through this formation.... The thing itself has no value. Its value depends upon the use you make of it....”

I shall start with the New Year message of 1949 when I came to the Ashram for the first time to have Sri Aurobindo's darshan. The message of that year was:

“Lord, on the eve of the New Year I asked Thee what I must say. Thou hast made me see two opposite possibilities and given me the command to keep silent.”

What were the “opposite possibilities” need not be conjectured by us. We had better leave them between Sri Aurobindo and the Mother themselves.

For me personally, however, it was a choice of my path. The choice of my psychic being was final and irrevocable. My outer being, however, was not fully prepared at that time to take the plunge immediately.

However, after the new discovery our impulse was to publicize our new discovery. My elder brother arranged with the ‘Pathamandir’ at Calcutta to open a book-stall at Santiniketan during the annual fair which occurred in the third week of December for four days. We made our stall quite attractive with messages of Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Incense sticks were burning inside and created a holy atmosphere. Many people, both inmates of Santiniketan and outsiders were coming in—if not to purchase, at least to have a look at things. A very big scholar from Calcutta, who came to Santiniketan on the occasion as a chief guest, also entered our stall. He remarked that Sri Aurobindo's books were difficult to understand. He picked up a copy of *Dibyajiban*, a Bengali translation of *The Life Divine*, opened at random a page and challenged us to explain a sentence therein. We humbly refused to take up his challenge! However, the sale was quite good among the not so educated people and the same *Dibyajiban* was purchased by a student of Santiniketan! Some

Kalabhavan students came and enquired if the book *The National Value of Art* by Sri Aurobindo was available. They said: “ ‘Mastermoshai’ (Nandalal Bose) has asked us to read the book.” But the book was out of print at that time. On the whole, our stall was quite successful.

But one incident occurred at that time for which I still repent. As it was a fair, so many types of people—rich and poor, educated and uneducated—came to our stall. One day a poor village girl was looking at the photographs of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and the Ashram. Apart from the books, photographs also were being sold. She chose a photograph of the Mother taken long ago, perhaps in Paris. Naturally, the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s latest photographs were not available at that time. She asked the price. I still remember clearly that it was priced at eight annas. The girl said: “I have only a four-anna coin with me; can’t I get the photograph?” I replied: “How can that be?” There were many other customers I had to attend to at that time. I did not notice when the girl was gone. After some time I remembered her. I thought—“She is a poor village girl; perhaps her parents had given her that coin to enjoy herself in the fair, and there are so many attractive things to buy in a fair—various playthings, attractive coloured pictures, mouth-watering eatables etc., etc. and out of all that she chose to buy the photograph of the Mother about whom she had no idea at all! Who gave her the inspiration? It must be her psychic being.”

I felt a wrench within. Why didn’t I pay the extra price out of my own pocket? I wanted to mend my mistake. I requested one of my companions to look after the stall and myself went round the fair looking for that girl—but no, it was too late, in the big crowd she was lost forever! “A stitch in time saves nine”—thus goes the proverb. The opportunity of taking a correct step in time if lost may not present itself again. It was a great lesson of my life.

Another incident in another bookstall has also left a deep impression on my mind. There was an exhibition within the precincts of the Medical College at Calcutta. The Pathamandir opened a bookstall there and requested me to serve as one of the volunteers. I complied with the wish.

Here too, along with the big doctors ordinary people came to see the exhibition. So far as I can recollect, it was in 1952. Our Dr. Sanyal had already left Calcutta and settled in the Ashram at Pondicherry. He was a very famous surgeon, and many eyebrows were raised among the doctors at his leaving his medical profession at Calcutta. Many doctors asked us about him. Those who spend much on luxuries of life commented that the price of the books were very high. Those who were scholars commented that Sri Aurobindo’s books were very difficult to understand. One young doctor, however, said that he knew nothing about Sri Aurobindo and requested us to select a few books for him which we did, and he was happy.

One evening a quite ordinary-looking man, evidently very poor, came to our stall. He took up one Bengali book named *Matribani*—it was a small one

containing some words of the Mother in translation—went through a few pages and then asked for the price of the book. I still clearly remember that the book was priced at twelve annas. He thought for a moment, untied a knot in a corner of his dhoti, poured down all the coins tied therein and started counting. Wonder of wonders! it came to exactly twelve annas! He gave all that, nothing more remained with him, held the book, his prized possession, close to his chest and slowly moved away.

These are the lessons of life I can never forget. These two incidents brought me closer to the Mother and I remain ever grateful to that poor girl and this poor man for giving me great lessons of life.

6

Don't speak. Act.
Don't announce. Realise

This was the new year message of the year 1950. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have always enlightened mankind through personal example rather than mere words. It seems that Sri Aurobindo had already taken the decision of leaving his body and this was one of the "two extreme possibilities" mentioned in the new year message of 1949. Without speaking he acted, without announcing he realised what he wanted.

Fortunately for me I had the last two darshans of Sri Aurobindo of which I have already written in *Mother India*. I have written therein some of my experiences of the period. Now I am going to write about some more.

I had been watching every activity, every movement of the Mother, as far as it was possible for me to do so as a visitor. Her daily activity started with the Balcony Darshan. Then at about 9 a.m. she gave blessings to everybody with flowers. That time was utilized also by departmental heads of the Ashram to consult her on many matters. Otherwise she spoke very little.

I had been watching her various modes of blessing people. It was fascinating to me. She always blessed Kapali Sastry by placing and pressing both of her palms on the two sides of his head, near his temples, and concentrated for some time with her eyes closed. To Dilip Roy and Anilbaran her right hand would be placed on the centre of their heads, as they bowed down. To some others at the back of their heads. With Nolinida, after putting flowers into his hands, she often discussed something or other. Amal Kiran always took the Mother's right hand into his own hands and bowing down a little touched his forehead on the back of her hand while concentrating for a very brief while. The Mother too concentrated.

With some, particularly with some grown-up girls, she exchanged a silent

message through flowers and looks. A girl's face looked as if she would start weeping. The Mother placed her own palm on hers and shook it a little. The girl was consoled. The Mother was sweetness itself when she blessed the children. I do not remember exactly whether it was in 1950 or 1952 or 1953, when Surendranath Jauhar's little son (Kāke) was so little that Tara had to lift him up so that the Mother could pin a rose on his shirt. The Mother looked the very picture of softness and sweetness.

When all was over she would give Champaklal, her helper, a smiling glance along with some flowers and then walk quickly up the staircase. What was the cause of her hurry? Perhaps she was eager to meet Sri Aurobindo, her Lord—I thought.

At about 12.30 p.m. there was the 'Garden Darshan'. The Mother would come down with Kamala-ben by the staircase near the garage with some trays of 'Solicitude' flowers and a few other flowers. A small gathering waited in the garden. One by one they would come before her, keeping some distance in between. The Mother would throw towards each a flower and he or she would catch it. Some failed to catch and then would pick it up from the ground. I too joined this small group. Amiyo Ganguly and Arun Ganguly would come in the end. The Mother would give only to them a triangular violet-coloured flower—of course by throwing. This ritual would go on daily. I was curious to know the name of that particular flower and afterwards came to know that it was 'Divine Presence'.

I longed to have the flower. One day I tried to play a trick with her. When she had been giving the 'Solicitude' flower I did not go as usual. I waited in a corner. In the end when she was picking up that particular flower I suddenly appeared before her. On seeing me the Mother quietly placed the flower back in the tray and threw to me a 'Solicitude' flower. I got a message from within—"Whom do you want to cheat—the Divine?"

After that incident, one day I missed the catch which I had never done before. And yet the flower did not fall on the ground, it was sticking into a fold of my cuff. I got another message from within—"You may fail the Divine but the Divine will never fail you." In fact, after that day almost half a century has passed and the Divine has never failed me. Otherwise I would not have lived so long.

On Lakshmi-puja day in 1950 she came to the Playground in a gold and green salwar-kameez. And that day she was looking more dazzlingly beautiful than ever. Lakshmi-puja day in Bengal always had a special charm for me with its full-moon night. As a matter of fact, the whole autumnal season has a special charm when the golden sun passes his magic wand over the refreshingly green meadows of Bengal. The Mother's costume reminded me of my sunny and greeny and dreamy autumnal days in Bengal. Spiritually speaking, the sun is the symbol of Truth and the green colour the symbol of Life. When the Sun of Truth touches

and transforms our life, our life becomes the life divine.

At about 9 a.m. the Mother was to give the Mahakali blessings from the Meditation Hall. After breakfast I went back to my room and addressed a letter to that Mahakali aspect of the Mother. I prayed to her to free me from all impurities of nature even if that meant for me terrible sufferings. Sri Aurobindo was still in his body, and I believe this letter was brought to his notice also. During her blessings the Mother gave to each one a packet of dried petals of red and double Pomegranate flowers (The Divine's Love). Sri Aurobindo writes in his book, *The Mother*, about Mahakali:

“The impulses that are swift and straight and frank, the movements that are unreserved and absolute, the aspiration that mounts in flame are the motion of Mahakali. Her spirit is tameless, her vision and will are high and far-reaching like the flight of an eagle, her feet are rapid on the upward way and her hands are outstretched to strike and to succour. For she too is the Mother and her love is as intense as her wrath and she has a deep and passionate kindness.”

The rest of my experiences of that year in the Ashram have been described in my article in *Mother India* (May 1994).

Unlike Mahalakshmi and Mahakali, the Maheshwari aspect of the Mother visits me rarely. But with Mahasaraswati I have a daily contact. I have a passionate love for perfection in my work.

I first came to know about these four Powers of the Mother from my father in 1941, long before I came to Pondicherry. But he too at that time did not know that She who incarnated those four Powers and much more was the Mother of the Ashram. My father was immersed in *The Mother* and *The Life Divine*. We were on a summer sojourn on the hill station of Kurseong. One day, in the evening, as I was walking alone, I left the cart road, went a little down-hill, chose a secluded spot and sat down meditating with eyes open. All was calm and quiet, the haziness of the eventide made everything mysterious—the hills and mountains all around, the valley below, the sky above, the tall trees, the humble huts, the pretty cottages—all was pervaded by a mysterious Presence which could be felt but could not be described. If my own existence was true, that Presence was as true—if not more.

Late in the evening when I returned home, I asked my father: “Why do some people limit God in formlessness? Can't He manifest Himself through forms? Of course He is not limited by forms, at the same time He is not limited by formlessness either.” My father supported my point of view and told me for the first time what he had read in Sri Aurobindo's book *The Mother*—“the four aspects of the Mother”.

My faith and endeavour in discovering God-in-form was first rewarded in 1949 and since then ever and anon. What I saw in Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was unimaginable before.

In this connection I remember two more of my experiences in 1947 in

Darjeeling Although I could not see the world's highest summit, Mount Everest, I was fortunate to have quite a number of views of the glorious Kanchanjanga during sunrise. I was transported to a realm of pure gold and silver, and with the Himalaya's heaven-pointing peaks my aspiration for the highest Truth and purest Spirit rose higher and higher. Mountain peaks are a symbol of human aspiration as the sun is the symbol of Truth and Grace. The very first few words of Sri Aurobindo's book *The Mother*, speaks of this aspiration and Grace. Aspiration calls, Grace answers.

We returned from Darjeeling to Siliguri by a taxi. The taxi-driver was a Gorkha hill-man—a very efficient driver. Our motor-car was coming down at a great speed simply by the force of gravitation and how easily our driver was negotiating the dangerous U-turn bends! I wondered at his efficiency. And at the same time I was experiencing within me a tremendous delight of descent! Perhaps my soul felt the same kind of delight when it took its first plunge towards the earth. Or else, ask the waterfalls and the mountain-streams, they too will reply in the same language when they rush towards the ocean with a mad joy overcoming a thousand hurdles on their course. There is a delight in ascent, there is a delight in descent too! Otherwise why do Buddhas and Shankaras after attaining salvation run down towards mortal beings? Sri Aurobindo's poem 'Ascent' is complemented with 'Descent'. His Yoga has these two aspects. The mountain-peak says—"One without a second", the ocean says—"All these, indeed, are the Brahman."

I have heard that the Mother liked the mountains but Sri Aurobindo liked the ocean. Quite possible. Are they not the two faces of the same Divine Avatar?

(To be continued)

ABANI SINHA

UNTIMELY DEATHS

IN the present world the constant chaos, fast life, multifaceted disharmonies and collisions cause continuous countless untimely deaths. These may be due to natural calamities or traffic fatalities or industrial casualties, lethal accidents at home, wars, murders, manslaughters, suicides or fatal diseases

The people who otherwise would have lived reasonably long lives are abruptly cut off. Such untimely deaths can only be taken lightly by giving philosophical explanations or interpreting them from theoretical standpoints. “His soul decided to leave his body, that was his destiny, a matter of the soul’s choice, a karmic compulsion, an experience that was a ‘must’ for the soul”—so on and so forth.

This is all true enough but there is much more to it. Such untimely deaths let loose disruptive forces on earth and further tighten death’s grip over it. One can almost say that death is being allowed to masquerade as the soul’s choice or as a karmic compulsion.

In the process of world-change and the ultimate ending of death on earth untimely deaths have to stop first.

The Integral Yoga has to extend its power of conquest over death to the whole world and work out solutions. The Integral Yoga can do this because it is filled with the Avatar-consciousness of Sri Aurobindo. The soul’s choice and the karmic compulsions are but rules of the game which the ultimate supremacy that we know as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother can change. We must, with our love, devotion and aspiration persuade them to so act through the Integral Yoga, that they work out an end of all untimely deaths. Our plea should be that they so focus their light on earth that earth gets cured of the chronic disease of untimely deaths which it has suffered from time immemorial.

Will Sri Aurobindo and the Mother accept our persuasion?

Perhaps Sri Aurobindo would say, “What is all this persuasion business?” Perhaps He would further say to the effect that if each individual sincerely attempting the Supramental Yoga simply and completely becomes Divine Light, Harmony and Love, the radiating effect will be more powerful than any persuasions. He may also conclude that nothing in the creative process is “untimely”. That untimeliness is largely a factor of our ignorance.

Well, what He would say or not say is anybody’s guess!

JAGAT KAPADIA

CHRISTALIS

by

GEORGETTE COTY

(Continued from the issue of May 1995)

PART II

Visit to Story-Land

I WAS patching, altering the children's clothes from worn larger ones into smaller sizes—wasting nothing. Even bits of leftovers were useful for mending. I loved this evening occupation, it gave my mind a chance to reflect and to dream away.

Christopher was at the other end of the room, drawing pictures to decorate the children's rooms. He was quite talented and good at it. He would choose his own subjects, to bring cheer to everyone, he said.

He was particularly good at landscapes, flowers and fairies playing in the fields. He coloured them with crayons, but he was happiest with a paint brush, when we could lay hands on some paint. Here was a budding artist. But not only that, he was just as good with words. He would gather the smaller children round him to tell them stories of the world of fairies, some of whom sang beautifully, others played on flutes and violins. He told them how much they loved small children in particular Bigger ones too, if they believed in them, and also animals. When all were asleep, they gathered round and played the most delightful games with them. But when the moon was full, they loved to dance a lot in the moonshine and told the berries to grow faster, because the children would love to eat them.

There was no end to his imagination, his store of tales was never empty and the older ones loved to listen to his enchanting stories just as much.

Where did he get this knowledge I wondered, and when I asked him about it he said,—“I don't really know, Mummy, it just comes from inside me.”

Did he have someone to teach him, as Christalis had taught me things? I must ask him about this—or is it that his father teaches him things?

It was quite dark now, I turned up the lamp, when I felt the breeze brushing past my cheeks. My hair was blown about, I brushed it from my eyes, but no sooner did I do this than it wafted across again ‘This is strange,’ I thought, ‘everything is closed, the windows and the door and there was no draft here a minute ago’—I looked at the lamp, the flame did not flicker.

‘Maybe... Maybe that he comes?’ “Not yet,” said a whispering voice, hardly audible. “But he has sent me to tell you that he will be here soon and you should get ready to receive him.”

“Why, thank you, but who are you? I cannot see you, as I see Christalis. It was you then playing with my hair, was it? And without letting me see your face?”

“You cannot see me just yet, but I am said to be very beautiful. I convey some messages at times, when I am asked; I am Air, that is my name!”

“Are you really, but how did you. . .?” I stopped my questions since I felt no movement any more nor his presence. Did he waft away as unnoticed as he had come? I was getting quite used to these happenings and also speaking with an inner voice, which was just a tremor, but had no outer sound.

“Dear,” I called out to Christopher, “I think that it is time for us to go and rest. Come, let’s go to bed. Is your work finished?” He needed no prompting, “Mummy, I was about to suggest the same thing, I am half asleep already. Will you tuck me in and give me a goodnight kiss?”

“Well, well, I may do just that, if you will give me a goodnight hug.” My dear boy, he was off to dream-land in no time.

‘I was advised to get ready, good God, by Air! Hmm, there’s no end to these marvels. Quick, put the work aside, get cleared up and put out the lamp. Get ready, still your thoughts and be...’ I must have dozed off sitting down, when the voice of Christalis roused me.

“I find you ready then? That is good. You did receive my message, didn’t you? Come now, I will show you the place from where Christopher receives his stories. You have wondered about that and I want no questions left unanswered in you. Each step leads to the next, everything is important for learning, nothing is too small for it. Come now, let’s go.”

Taking his hand, I found myself floating upward without looking below. This time I did not see the great expanses of brilliances as before. These fields of colours were very pale, soft, soothing to the eye. All at once we were standing before a clearing where we stopped.

A large tree with wide spreading branches dominated the scene. There was a hut not far from it: humble yet gracious, made of long, symmetrically plaited fragrant grass. Flowers of all colours were everywhere, in fact the air was full of fragrances.

An old man, his golden-white hair falling to his shoulders, emerged from the hut. He came toward us; his gait was youthful, rhythmical. Although I saw him as old, his eyes and rosy cheeks were as youthful-looking as was his figure – that of a young boy’s. His countenance commanded reverence.

We waited till he reached nearer to where we stood and with a motion of his hand indicated that we might approach. We bowed down to him in salutation and Christalis presented him with a beautiful flower, which I had not observed him holding before.

Smiling, his blue eyes sparkling, he received it. He sat down below the tree, upon what I thought to be a seat made of flowers, and he motioned us to do the

same. Christalis nodded toward me, as if to say who I was, but his eyes told him that he knew.

A musical sound rang out from an instrument, which must have been a signal, because children from all sides began to arrive. They greeted him respectfully with palms joined, others bowed down, then quietly sat around him. They too sat upon little flowerpuffs, but the flowers remained unharmed, intact. Children of all ages were everywhere .. the flowery clearing was full of them. Eager faces, looking at him with expectation—Christopher among them. Seeing him there seemed perfectly natural to me, nor did he look at me, or at Christalis.

Seated before them was the old man, or was he young? I could hardly tell. He looked more like a sage, and yet also young. My whole attention was fixed on him. I sat there watching the scene, enthralled.

I heard a melodious voice inside me;... “To tell a tale, a tale of beauty, a tale of love and of wisdom to a child...” and the voice was his and the children heard it, same as I did. No more words were uttered; here was an entry into a field of pictures, colours, images and scenes, all alive and moving; a cinematic delight of stories, telling unforgettable tales.

The meadow was lit up by a thousand shining eyes, enchanted faces and celestial smiles—a field of children experiencing tales told to them that were true. They sat there transported into a world of pure joy, enriched in their very souls.

The musical chime was heard again to signal the end of the session. The teller of tales rose and with him the children—the place was empty once again.

*

The Builder Architect

Each day was a wonder day. When I contemplated what I had experienced during the night, life was filled with joy. Did Christopher remember his experiences too? He looked content, sweet-tempered whenever it was time for him to get up. Sometimes he would say, “I had such a lovely dream, but can’t quite remember now what it was, how silly!” I never dared to probe further. I knew that his time was his own.

But here was the old problem: when my duties had closed in upon me, gone were the enchantments of the other spheres. Once again I was ordinary me; sometimes tired, at other times cranky, impatient with things going wrong. All this struggle, the back-breaking work, to be at a hundred and one places at the same time. The roof threatened to fall, the pipes were leaking, when we could hardly waste a drop of water. The search for new pipes, getting the men to come to help us, when they themselves had laboured ceaselessly in many places. Some of the children fell sick, there were little accidents—food had to be found for

each day—God above, there was no end to it!

‘It’s all right for me to go off on my moonlight trips,’ I grumbled, ‘but who will clothe the children, feed them, find remedies for their problems? These needs are without end...’ Then just when my mood was getting the better of me, one of the little ones walked in, holding up a little finger: “Lillian, look, I cut it, it hurts.” Eyes full of tears, she came up to me. Like lightning, I rushed to clean and bandage the tiny finger, brushing her tears away, hugging her to me. I was all mother now, soothing my little one’s hurt away.

‘The children must be cared for in the best possible way, I must find solutions to our problems faster, even if I rack my brains and work myself to the bone.’

“That is not the way,”—came his voice—“have you forgotten what I promised? Really, I am ashamed of you.”

“Wait, Christalis, please wait! I am very sorry, really I am. It’s just that my mind gets worked up when I am tired and it goes off like a complain-it-all machine.”

“Control it then, this is your work!” No more words followed, I knew that the contact was discontinued as for now.

Not for all that long, as I learned better later on. He had picked it up, just where he had left off, when he came again some days later. Nothing was ever cut from his consciousness. This was a remarkable thing I observed. ‘When will I ever remember this, and learn to keep my temper and my mind quiet? It’s not all that easy. Try as I might, I would forget it again and off would go the think-machine.’

“With patience and perseverance, you will get into the habit,” came his answer—“but keep catching your mind’s mischievous habits from going their own way. Command them to be still. You are its master, not it yours.”

In the wake of his speech, his full appearance followed. He stood before me in his own light and I, forgetting my folly and shame, could only fly toward him with a sweet abundance that engulfed my world.

“Dear Halio, the one whom I call by this name is your inner being. It is this person, to whom I come and it is this soul-person, who receives me, which is the real you. This being is superior in its nature and capacity to your body’s mind. It is also above your vital nature, with all its uncontrolled passions, moods and wants. Those in fact are never satisfied. You cannot gratify them ever. Like a wild wind, they race off toward some of their whims, soon abandoning them for others, and for yet others endlessly.

“It is true, what you just thought; they are hard to catch, harder still to control. But with right training it is possible.

“Do not be disheartened, I am here to help you. You and I are engaged in this task together. You trust me, don’t you, and believe in what I teach you also?”

“Yes, Christalis. A thousand times yes, with all my heart and soul I have no reservations at all and I understand now that, without complete trust, believing is lame—and this is how I feel about you; I trust you utterly in all things. How could I help it with all the riches you have given me? In fact I feel that I was a sleep-walker before you came to me, how then can I ever show my gratitude otherwise than thus?”

“This is excellent. If you have learnt this, then our progress will be rapid, I am very pleased. Now come, let us not delay, there is much for you to observe at the learners’ classes. There are many of them, you know. Learning is essential, the future will be based upon right knowledge in every sphere.”

“Lovely, I so enjoyed those wonderful stories and...,” he broke in—“True, they are enchanting, but they are in truth foundations of learning with very profound aims and meaning. Never forget that. In God’s economy everything has its perfectly applied worth; a grain of sand, a single syllable is a portion of the totality.” A little pause... a gentle smile... he continued.

“Today, we observe another class”—and as always, whenever he spoke of any action, his words had already manifested the reality.

Instantly, we came to be before a spacious Hall. It had no wall, no roof to it, yet it was a Hall. Behind it at a distance the sea rolled majestically. Truly a heavenly blue and its shore was sparkling white sand glittering with light. Sea and sand, a play of luminosity. Was it from the sun’s rays playing upon it, or was it its own light?—I could not tell.

Right away we were at the entrance of the Hall. No door was here, yet I felt that we were in front of something like one, waiting to be asked to enter. Christalis pressed my hand lightly and now I saw a graceful arch, a curtain of flowers hung over it, which spoke:

“Enter, the Master is waiting for you”—with that the flowers made way, the curtain was no more—we were inside the Hall. Christalis spoke inside me: “This is the Hall of the Architect and of Designs.”

We approached further. The Hall was empty and I wondered why there were neither structures nor forms of any kind anywhere, nor was there anyone at all.

I heard Christalis say—“Sir, receive our greeting and reverence. You know by whose permission we come”—and above his words brilliant lights played, then vanished, when his speech ended.

“Welcome Christalis, welcome Halo, I am glad you have come.” I heard the musical voice, but saw not who uttered them.

“Let her see me, you have my permission.” I felt the touch of Christalis, pressing me lightly between my brows and upon this touch a scene opened before me, unsurpassed by any dream, vision or imagination. Transfixed—I stared ahead of me.

He, who spoke to us, sat enthroned on a white marble platform and when he

rose to receive us I saw that he was exceedingly tall and of incomparable beauty. His garment was of gossamer fabric flapping gently in the breeze, like wings. A truly majestic figure.

Intoxicated by this sight I swayed from side to side, hardly able to hold my body stable. His eyes were so luminously blue that I found great difficulty in looking at him. He must have noticed my predicament, for I could see a very thin ray entering me from his eyes.

Was I imagining this, was this real? In this marvellous world of another reality, everything was possible. All at once I was charged with life-energy, so it must have been real.

To my amazement I saw that the Hall was not empty at all, but peopled not only with children but also with young people of all ages—if age had any measure here at all. Before each, small models of all kinds of geometrical forms, exquisitely designed structures, were laid out.

At one wave of this godlike figure's hand, a screen appeared and what he was doing was seen on it. First he drew a variety of structures: temples, buildings small and large, domes, halls and public squares, all of which were architectural marvels and all the drawings were three-dimensional.

Full of these designs, the screen rose into the air, where it remained suspended, observable.

Another screen appeared below it and selecting one design after the other from those he had first drawn, he swiftly drew up a perfectly detailed architectural plan and layout for each. Complete with the right measures and weights for the material to be used for their constructions, carefully marked at each section.

Some moments were given to observe the drawings of the designs, the plan for their constructions in all its details, before this screen was also sent up, stationed below the first to be observed. Another wave of his hand, an elevated platform appeared upon which small models of other structures were displayed: marvellous in beauty, symmetry and shape, each made of different shades of coloured transparencies.

The sunlight played upon them coloured-light effects and whilst these models appeared to be transparent, one could not look into their interiors. Each of them was a unique composition, it stood as such on its own.

Once again time was given to observe these, after which a most remarkable thing followed. This great Master Builder brought forward each structure, and forthwith proceeded to take it apart: portion by portion, down to its very foundation, and placed every part before him in a row. There came to sight a great variety of unique geometrical shapes of all kinds—constituents of the buildings he had drawn at first.

All attention was on this procedure, as he began to select the objects one by one, holding them up to everyone to see, then further selecting their comple-

mentary portions fitted them back into one perfect composite whole, reconstructing them again to their original forms.

The silence of the learners was broken by the Master Builder's voice.

"At our next meeting we will study the materials used for each component, keeping in mind the utility of the architecture. and apply the suitable symmetries for its functions. Next, we pay careful attention to the effects of light and temperature in the interior, as well as on the exterior. They must receive and absorb the correct amount of natural light reflected upon them by the sun or from the waters nearby, if they are so placed. If they are not, a small lake is to be created, or a fountain can enhance this utility.

"Maximum benefit must be obtained from the direction of the winds and lights, as well as from reducing their excess where it may be found. Finally, the moonlight's reflection is to be observed, for aesthetic effect.

"I wish to commend these factors to your consideration. Contemplate them with due attention and present me with your resolutions. We shall study them together carefully—after which you may observe my own propositions.

"Do not feel shy, nor inadequate to the task. In our world of superior consciousness, nothing is negligible nor considered unworthy, or too small. You must remember that all things evolve from the smallest atom toward perfection. And all created things—universes—begin in the mind of the Divine, as was our universe first conceived there, and came into being from that point. Therefore, I advise you always to call forth your inner light, which is consciousness. Then link it next to your minds' vibrations, which will be activated by it—and you will have the required, best, hoped-for result.

"The Grace is yours," he said, lifting his hand in greeting, and those assembled before him replied with one voice: "By the Grace we are."

He was gone and so were the learners there a minute before. The Hall was empty, but playfully the moon shone upon it displays of light, and in the distance waves murmured musical tones.

I trembled with delight, and had Christalis not pulled me from being rooted to where I sat, how could I have stirred from there?

We were way down in our descent, when I began to feel the earth's force pull me toward where my body lay sleeping. Our sweet Earth Mother closed me in.

I heard inside me Christalis's voice softly—"Rest a little, then get up, it is that time of the day. I will come later on."

(To be continued)

THE BOOK OF JOB

A NEW COMMENTARY

(Continued from the issue of December 1994)

Verses 7-12.

Verses 4-6, as we have noted, have been considered spurious by certain commentators for intruding between verses 3 and 7. But the whole passage from verses 7 to 12 is rejected by a number of commentators. Among the different reasons for doing so are the use of the second person singular (thee) in a speech in which Job was addressing them collectively, the use of the Jewish name *Yahweh* for the Lord who is referred to throughout the discussion as *EL* etc. (Job and his friends were Arabs, not Jews), Job appearing to repeat the idea which actually belonged to his friends in V. 12,

With the ancient is wisdom and so on.

Gordis, and Clines¹³⁶ following him, take the speech as Job's satirical quotation of what he believed to be the friends' idea.

It is possible to read the verses as Job's attempt to prove that wisdom as pointed out by Zophar was not so mysterious as he pretended but known even to animals. Actually the animals could declare along with God's wisdom and power a total absence of any moral pattern in his ways.

Verses 7-8.

As against one of the objections to the speech mentioned above, Anderson¹³⁷ states about the two verses being addressed to an individual,—

There is a change at this point from plural to singular, as if Job has now fastened his attention on one of his friends.

Bildad, we know (8:10-12), had referred to objects of Nature from which one could learn. Zophar, on the other hand, was speaking as though wisdom was something mysterious. True wisdom as Zophar showed but did not realise is above the human intellect and is possessed only by God. We are now concerned with what Job was speaking to the different friends. Job could be addressing either Bildad or Zophar with the second person singular. Pope¹³⁸ underlines one aspect and comments:

The irony with which Job began is resumed. The profound wisdom the friends have been giving out is common to the lowest of creatures

Hebel¹³⁹ quotes Von Rad as maintaining that Job was appealing to the accepted tradition according to which the wise were instructed in the primeval order revealed through creation. He adds that it is more likely that Job was countering Zophar's position by saying that even dumb creatures would confirm his position which was so patently obvious. Job *knew* what he was experiencing.

(Job's position has been that God was powerful but there was no moral order or principle in his governance)

Verses 9, 10.

Job asked the friends whether there was anyone who did not know that in beasts and fowls and fishes the hand of God could be seen controlling them.

It was in His hand that the soul of everything and the breath of all mankind existed.

In verse 9 the original word for the Lord is the Jewish name *Yahweh*¹⁴⁰ which has made the Commentators question the authenticity of the verse. Clines¹⁴¹ accounts for the use of the name by saying that in the Bible "The hand of Yahweh" is a fixed phrase occurring over thirty times. "The hand of *EL*" or "*Eloah*" or "*Elohim*" is rare. Job's friends themselves never used the phrase but Job could "cite it as a quotation", says Clines.

Anderson¹⁴² reminds us that Job used the name in 1:21 for the Lord in the original Hebrew:

Naked came I out of my mother's womb: and naked shall I return thither;
the Lord gave and *the Lord* hath taken away: blessed be the name of *the Lord*.

Anderson's comment¹⁴³ is very instructive when we see most commentators making an unnecessary separation of "the poetic discussion" from the "the prose prologue":

It is always pointed out that verse 9 is the only place in the poetry (= poetic discussion) where the name "Yahweh" is used for God. For this reason its authenticity is doubted by many. Its removal in the interests of a theory that the word distinguishes a prose original from poetic additions is a circle of reasoning. Viewed in a different light its rarity makes it so conspicuous. At this key point Job is still insisting on what he said at first, where the sacred name was used.

The last statement of Anderson's is rather misleading. In the earlier speech we see Job in his state of mental balance which he was maintaining with a powerful will, what we have called the *sāttwic* State. At this stage though he was no longer in the *tāmasic* state, though he has greater command over himself than when he

raised the cry of lamentation after losing his balance, still he was far from knowing fully what God was doing. His consciousness of his not deserving the suffering conflicted with his hope that God would ultimately vindicate him.

Habel¹⁴⁴ brings out the significance of the expression “the hand of the Lord” in verse 9 (the idea is repeated in V. 10: “in whose hand”) very powerfully though other commentators have suggested the meaning:

The “hand” of God is a major symbol for the threatening and oppressive power of Job’s Maker (6:6,10;3:7,8,13,21;19:21). The audience knows that it was the Satan who challenged God to stretch forth his “hand” to test Job (1:11:2:5), but that final affliction occurred because God delivered him into the Satan’s “hand” (2:6). Because God’s “hand” controls the “Soul/life-force” (nepes) and the “spirit/breath” (rūah) of all creatures, including human beings, their fate is ultimately in his hand and he must take the responsibility of what happens to them.

On the Hebrew terms for soul/spirit Clines¹⁴⁵ comments that both terms could be used for both animals and human beings. On the imprecise use of such terms in Hebrew vide the concluding part of the commentary in *Mother India*, September, 1994, p. 640.

Verse 11.

Job asked his friends if the ear did not discriminate between the different words it heard and if the tongue did not find out what was palatable and what was not. Job implied as Habel¹⁴⁶ indicates that Job’s discerning taste had already rejected the counsel of his friends as nauseous food; one could add “meaningless words” (rejected by the discriminating ear).

Verse 12.

As an example of what his understanding rejected he referred to Bildad’s earnest appeal to him (8:8)

For inquire, I pray thee, of the former age and prepare thyself to the search of thy fathers.

If Job was quoting the friends it was here in particular and not in the whole passage from verses 7 to 12. In the comment on 5:1-7 (*Mother India*, June, 1994, p. 403) a reference was made to the possibility of abrupt transitions. The absence of “You declared” creates such an abrupt transition here.

Verses 13 to 25.

Job’s “hymn” to the Power of God

Hartley¹⁴⁷ considers the “hymn” to be genuine praise of God. He contends

that wisdom (hokmā), might (gabûrā), counsel (ēsā) and understanding (tebûna) are four aspects of wisdom. God possesses them all, especially wisdom to plan action and the might to carry it out. The hymnic lines

testify primarily to God's power over all earthly leaders and nations with the inference that all his mighty deeds are accomplished in wisdom and that there is no earthly ruler or nation strong enough or wise enough to resist his purpose.

Anderson¹⁴⁸ too sees an element of praise in the hymn:

While most of the examples (of God's activities) illustrate God's demolition of the achievements of men, the key-thought seems to be that the "deceived and the deceiver are his". (V. 16) In case this might suggest that God is whimsical, or a blind force, Job insists that God's might is coupled with *wisdom, counsel and understanding*. There is an intelligent purpose. The acts are deliberate, even if man can barely see their meaning or moral justification.

Certainly, Job was fully aware of God's wisdom. But in the discussion with his friends what was uppermost in his mind was his innocent suffering for which he saw no justification. He was compelled by the state of his mind to see an arbitrariness in all that God did.

Clines¹⁴⁹ is right when he says that Job's cannot be a "hymn" of *praise*. It cannot be a mere acknowledgement of God's power either. With a rare insight he shows that Job's object was to show *his* wisdom in his understanding of God as an eccentric deity equally inapprehensible. Half-ironic and half-serious Job showed that God did not play fair. Job began by ridiculing the wisdom of the friends. In the "hymn" as Clines sees it Job displays his own.

Terrien,¹⁵⁰ showing how Job could not submit without a protest to such an iron rule of God, draws our notice to the austere grandeur in this completely theocentric philosophy of existence.

Terrien considers the whole passage (Vs. 14-25) as a prelude to the aggressive thrust of the lines which follow (in Chapter 13)

Verses 14 and 15.

The two verses show God's disruption of social and cosmic order. Using the word "Behold" on which we have commented earlier, Job directed his friends' attention to the extraordinary phenomenon of God's breaking down things so completely they could not be built again. Habel¹⁵¹ points out that Job was thinking of the overthrow of human creations like cities, societies and nations as he was to exemplify later.

God could imprison, close a man in darkness, without any possibility of his release again. What he could do to men he does to the cosmos as well. God creates a drought by holding back waters. He also causes floods (sends them, the waters, out) to overturn the earth.

Verse 16.

Job repeats the word of V. 13 (Hartley¹⁵² rightly calls the first half of the verse a refrain)—

With him is strength and wisdom:

He adds,

the deceiver and the deceived are his

to show God's complete sway over all. The refrain reminds one of Antony's refrain in his funeral oration in *Julius Caesar*:

And Brutus is an honourable man.

The irony is too obvious to emphasise. Clines¹⁵³ notes that in V. 13 where Job speaks of God's qualities he says,

With him is wisdom and strength

Here the terms are reversed, strength coming before wisdom. The focus here, says Clines, is on God's power or ability to dismantle normal institutions.

Pope¹⁵⁴ points out that the word *hākām* in Hebrew means shrewd, crafty as well as wise. Clines¹⁵⁵ explains the word for *understanding*—*hoshih*—(as Job understands it!):

God's skill in wreaking chaos in human affairs.

Verses 17 to 25.

Anderson¹⁵⁶ notes,

With the exception of verse 22. which sounds like a phase of original creation, the rest of the poem deals at length with the pageant of human history. The parade of counsellors, judges, kings, priests, the mighty, those who are trusted, elders, princes, the strong, chiefs, is a series of disasters. No specific historical events need be sought, for the examples could be quite numerous.

Anderson and Habel¹⁵⁷ state that there is nothing to suggest here is a punishment of the wicked for their sins.

Verses 17 to 21.

The verses bring out the different ways in which God brings disaster to man in different positions

Verse 17.

God leads counsellors away from their position "spoiled". "Spoiled" means in the context "prevented from their full exercise of power". "Counsellors", here could not mean merely persons counselling or advising but, as Clines¹⁵⁸ says, court officials like Ahitophel, Counsellor of David. Counsellors could be spoiled by falling prey to another or being led away as captives (by the enemies), according to Clines.

Judges are supposed to be sober, God could deprive them of their wits

Verse 18.

The Authorised Version reads,

He looseth the bond of kings, and
girdeth their loins with a girdle.

The Revised standard version substitutes "waistcloth" for "their loins" in the AV. Modern commentators use words like "belt" for "bond", and "rope", "waistband" etc. for "girdle". The general meaning of the passage is obvious. Kings are deprived of their kingship and are brought low, are humiliated.

Verse 19.

The Revised standard version and the translations by the commentators differ entirely from the AV.

The AV reads,

He leadeth princes away spoiled and weakeneth the strength of the mighty.

The other versions read "Priests" in the place of princes.

In the second part of the verse RV agrees with the AV but the modern translators widely vary in their versions. For, "mighty" Clines¹⁵⁹ has "long established", Hartley¹⁶⁰ has "temple functionaries", Habel,¹⁶¹ "temple officials"; Pope¹⁶² suggests "nobles" as the right rendering of "the well-established"

Verse 20.

God removes, takes away, speech from those who are trusty (reliable), takes

away the understanding of the aged (translated “elders” by RV and the commentators).

Habel¹⁶³ comments,

Job challenged his friends by arguing that a discerning ear is more capable of interpreting reality than the wisdom of the aged. Now he maintains that God maliciously deprived the trusted elders of their capacity to discern truth...

Perhaps, in the earlier context Job was contesting Bildad’s idea of the wisdom of the past, the tradition, rather than speaking of those alive now, aged or otherwise. Job’s word in verse 11, where he is quoting Bildad, is “ancient”.

With the ancient is wisdom.

Verse 21.

The AV reads:

He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth strength of the mighty.

The RV agrees largely with the AV, it only substitutes “strong” for “mighty” at the end of the verse

The commentators read “the noble”, “the great” etc , for the “princes”. The AV repeats “the princes” in both V. 19 and V. 22 as noted above.

In V. 19 all the other versions than AV read “the *priests*”.

Verse 22

In the verse which appears to deviate from what Job has been saying—Anderson in the comment quoted above on verses 17-25 says the verse sounds like a phase of original creation—Job pointed out that God discovered deep things out of darkness and that he brought out to light the shadow of death

Matter-of-fact minds that expect even a scripture to be “logical” in an obvious manner omit the verse as being alien to Job’s present concerns. Pope¹⁶⁴ remarks,

This verse obviously is misplaced... Those who would retain it take it to refer to the conspiracies which God suddenly unmask. It seems clear that the verse refers to God’s control of darkness and the nether world and perhaps alludes to some cosmic myth.

Anderson, whose remark we have referred to in the parenthesis in the note

on the verse, also seems to imply that it refers to a phase of God's creation not connected with the immediate subject. Hartley¹⁶⁵ sees in the verse another "hymnic refrain" asserting that nothing is hidden from God, not even in the deepest darkness.

Clines¹⁶⁶ is not sure if the verse is "original". If it is, it may refer to God's disclosing men's secrets that for safety's sake are best kept hidden "in deep shade". Such secrets could belong only to the counsellors and elders of the earlier verses. But soon he says that perhaps God reveals not other men's secrets but his own shadiness, the dark purpose of God. The explanation would fit into Job's mood, he says.

Habel¹⁶⁷ comes closest to what Job meant. Explaining "depths of darkness" as the nether world, "Sheol", the world of darkness and death, Habel says that God releases the underworld darkness on earth to obfuscate the leaders and make them grope for ever in the gloom. The idea is taken up in Verse 25, the concluding verse of the chapter.

Verses 23 to 25.

In the last three verses of the chapter Job turns from individual leaders to nations.

God increases the number of nations, enlarges the existing ones, only to destroy them.

How nations are destroyed is explained in the next verse: "he takes away the heart of the chief of the earth". The people, without the chief, are compelled to wander in a wilderness where there is no way.

The last verse describes the people wandering in the wilderness without a chief and groping in total darkness. God makes them stagger like drunken men.

Job's satire is intensified by the irony of his employing the hymnic form for the opposite purpose of condemning God. Little did Job know that in the very act of his condemnation of God he was groping unconsciously towards him. The succeeding chapters make it obvious.

(To be continued)

K. B. SITARAMAYYA

Notes

136 Clines, p 292

137 Anderson, p 161

138 Pope, p 88

139 Habel, p 219

140 'Moses is entrusted with the knowledge of God's personal name "Yahweh" and its special explanation (Exodus 3 13-14)' Rev Fr A R Ceresco, *Surrender to God in the Old Testament*, Indian Journal of Spirituality, June 1994

The passage in Exodus tells us how God asked Moses to bring the Israelites out of Egypt Moses asked God by what name he has to refer to him to the Israelites God says, I AM WHAT I AM He asks Moses to tell the Israelites that I AM sent for them

(Cf Coleridge's def of IMAGINATION The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM)

141 Clines, p 244

142 Anderson, p 162

143 *Ibid*

144 Habel, p 219

145 Clines, p 295

146 Habel, pp 219-220

147 Hartley, p 213

148 Anderson, p 162

149 Clines, p 296

150 Terrien, p 1001

151 Habel, p 220

152 Hartley, p 213

153 Clines, p 299

154 Pope

155 Clines, p 299

156 Anderson, p 163

157 Anderson and Habel

158 Clines, p 300

159 *Ibid*

160 Hartley, p 212

161 Habel

162 Pope, p 90

163 Habel, p 221

164 Pope, p 91

165 Hartley, p 215

166 Clines, pp 301-302

167 Habel, p 222

ESSAYS ON THE MAHĀBHĀRATA (XIII)

(Continued from the issue of May 1995)

(v) SAMVARTA

THERE IS probably only one sage in the Mahābhārata who could be compared with Durvāsā, and that is Samvarta, the younger brother of the well-known Brhaspati. Vyāsa himself tells his story to Yudhishthira, at the beginning of the Āśvamedhika-Parva. His purpose is to persuade Yudhishthira to perform the great Horse-Sacrifice in order to purify himself and his people after the great carnage of the war. However, Yudhishthira raises the objection that he lacks funds for such a big undertaking, which implies making arrangements for generous gifts to everyone. He feels that it would be inappropriate at this moment to raise money from all those kings and princes who are just recovering from their wounds and themselves short of funds, since the war efforts have emptied the treasuries. Vyāsa then tells Yudhishthira that much gold could be found at a certain place in the Himālayas, which was once left behind by a group of Brahmins in the wake of the sacrifice of king Marutta. This sacrifice had been performed in the mountains and Marutta had bestowed so much gold on the Brahmins that they could not even carry it home. Therefore, a substantial part of it was left behind and abandoned, and Yudhishthira could recover it now for the purpose of his own sacrifice.

Vyāsa proceeds to relate the story of king Marutta, the son of Avikṣit and grandson of Karandhama. Marutta was a most powerful ruler who posed a considerable challenge to Indra and could not be controlled by him. Therefore Indra one day approached Brhaspati, his *purohit*, and asked him to stop performing sacrifices for Marutta henceforth. Brhaspati's father Aṅgiras had been Karandhama's family priest and thus there was a natural relation between the priest and king Marutta. However, Indra too had chosen Brhaspati as his priest, after having vanquished the Asuras and having become Lord of the three worlds. He applied pressure on Aṅgiras's son now to make his choice and sacrifice only for him, the immortal Indra, for it would be disturbing if he should continue offering his services to a mere mortal.

O Brihaspati, if thou wishest to do what is agreeable to me, do not perform priestly offices for Marutta on behalf of the deities or the ancestral Manes. I have, O Brihaspati, obtained the sovereignty of the three worlds, while Marutta is merely the lord of the Earth. How, O Brāhmana, having acted as priest unto the immortal king of the celestials, wilt thou unhesitatingly perform priestly function unto Marutta subject to death? Good betide thee! Either espouse my side or that of the monarch, Marutta, or

forsaking Marutta, gladly come over to me.⁷⁹

Brhaspati reflects only for a short moment and then readily commits himself to serving Indra only. Marutta gets to know about Indra's move, but plans to perform a sacrifice with Brhaspati in spite of the contract between Indra and the priest. He pleads with Brhaspati to officiate for him, reminding the priest of the long-standing alignment of the two families. However, Brhaspati declines to officiate for Marutta and informs him that he will only officiate for the Immortals henceforth.

Marutta is taken aback by this development and returns home in a state of shock and depression. On his way he happens to meet Nārada who notices his affliction and enquires about its cause. When informed about Marutta's mishap, he tells the king about Samvarta who is wandering about the earth as a naked ascetic. He says that Samvarta is very powerful and that he could well perform Marutta's sacrifice instead of his brother Brhaspati. Marutta is highly pleased with this proposal. He asks Nārada how he could approach the sage and win him over for his sacrifice. Nārada gives him some strange advice: Marutta should place a dead body at the gate of Vārāṇasī where Samvarta keeps moving about, and when someone suddenly turns away from the corpse, it should be Samvarta. I am giving here the relevant passage in full length:

“Desirous of seeing Maheçwara, O prince, he wanders about at his pleasure in the city of Vārāṇasī, in the garb of a mad man. And having reached the gate of that city, thou must place a dead body somewhere near it, and the man who shall turn away on seeing the corpse, do thou, O prince, know that man to be Samvarta, and knowing him, do thou follow his footsteps wheresoever that powerful man chooses to go, and finding him (at length) in a lonely place thou must seek his protection with thy hands clasped together in supplication to him. And if he enquire of thee as to the person, who has given thee the information about his own self, do thou tell him that Nārada has informed thee about Samvarta. And if he should ask thee to follow me, thou must tell him without any hesitation, that I have entered into the fire.”⁸⁰

We find it openly stated here that Samvarta is ‘wearing the garb of a mad man’, like Durvāsā. It is not clear though why a person recoiling from the sight of a corpse should be identified as this sage, because it is a common and natural reaction. It is interesting to note that Siddheshwar Śāstrī Citrāv in his article on Samvarta has relied on a source (which is not named—we are given only the reference Mbhr., Āśvamedhika Parva, Chapter 5) which says just the contrary, namely that the one who would stop to pay reverence to the corpse was Samvarta:

He was wandering about there, and venerating a corpse as the Lord of Benares, he was worshipping it. Among the people in Benares it was commonly believed that if someone, on seeing a corpse on the street, paid reverence to it, he would be the Rishi Samvarta. Accordingly, King Marutta brought a corpse and placed it at the gate of the city, and Samvarta came there to pay reverence to it.⁸¹

Marutta follows Nārada's advice and acts accordingly. Samvarta, on seeing the corpse, turns away from it, while Marutta follows him anxiously. Finally, when they reach a lonely spot, Samvarta angrily throws mud and spittle on the unfortunate king (which reminds us of Durvāsā's irrational outbursts). Marutta however remains undisturbed and keeps supplicating the violent sage. At last, Samvarta gets tired and sits down at the foot of a tree. He asks Marutta to state truthfully who referred him to himself, and adds that he would obtain his desire if he spoke the truth. Otherwise he may face dire consequences:

“And if thou speak truly, thou shalt attain all the objects of thy desire, and shouldst thou tell a lie, thy head shall be riven in a hundred pieces.”⁸²

Marutta tells Samvarta that it was Nārada who sent him. Samvarta enquires where Nārada is staying now, and Marutta answers, ‘he has entered the fire’. Nārada had already anticipated in 14.6.26 that Samvarta may enquire about him. K. M. Ganguli translates the verse, “and if he should ask thee to follow me, thou must tell him without any hesitation, that I have entered into the fire.” However, I believe the translation should read, “If he enquires about me with the desire to approach me,…” Samvarta wants to know where Nārada is staying so that he can go and burn him with his anger. Nārada in anticipation of this violent reaction says through Marutta that he has entered into the fire which makes him immune from ‘fire’. Samvarta receives this message with great joy:

Hearing these words from the king (Marutta), Samvarta was highly gratified, and he said (addressing Marutta), ‘I too am quite able to do all that.’⁸³

It is difficult to guess why Samvarta should enjoy Nārada's answer, unless we assume that the sage was happy to have discovered that someone had understood him and his mad nature and correctly anticipated his reaction as well as immunized himself against it with the mysterious sentence “I have entered into the fire.” But then again he has an emotional outburst against Marutta and abuses him with harsh words. He asks the king why he wants him to perform a sacrifice, since he (Samvarta) is in a mad state and acts according to the random caprices of his mind, being afflicted with some deformation.

“I am afflicted with a cerebral disorder, and, I always act according to the random caprices of my own mind, why art thou bent upon having this sacrifice performed by a priest of such a singular disposition...?”⁸⁴

Samvarta suggests that Marutta should rather approach Brhaspati, his elder brother. The two brothers had some rivalry from their early youth and Brhaspati prevailed over Samvarta, as the latter states in 14.7.10: “Brhaspati took away all my household goods and mystical gods, and sacrificing clients, and has now left to me only this physical body.”

Marutta informs Samvarta that he has already approached Brhaspati and been rebuffed by him for no fault of his own. On hearing this news, Samvarta changes his mind and he is now ready to help the king. However, he apprehends that Indra and Brhaspati might seek to harm Marutta, if he uses Samvarta’s offices for his sacrifice. Therefore he urges Marutta to commit himself with complete loyalty and steadfastness to this undertaking, otherwise he would burn him with his anger. It is to be understood that Samvarta’s main concern is his own reputation, for if he once makes a contract with the king and is then left alone by him or betrayed, he loses face, which he cannot afford after all the humiliations he has already suffered from his brother’s side.

Marutta vows solemnly that he will under all circumstances keep his word. Samvarta is pleased with the king’s determination and agrees to perform the sacrifice. He advises Marutta to solicit wealth from Śiva who is doing *tapasyā* on the summits of the Himālayas. Marutta acts accordingly and obtains plenty of gold for his sacrifice.

Brhaspati is severely shocked on hearing about this new development. With the great wealth that Marutta has obtained from Śiva, Samvarta can now eclipse his elder brother. Indra notices Brhaspati’s grief and calls Agni to approach Marutta with the offer that Brhaspati himself would be ready to sacrifice for him. The text does not explain Indra’s motive for this offer, but it is not difficult to guess. His main concern under the new circumstances must be to make Brhaspati happy, and the best way to do so would be to sow dissidence between Marutta and Samvarta, relying on the potential destructive power of Samvarta’s curse if he gets angry with Marutta. Accordingly, Agni approaches Marutta and tries to tempt him with Indra’s offer: “If this Brhaspati officiate as thy priest, then shalt thou by the blessings of Devarāja (Indra) attain the highest region of the celestial mansion... and thou shalt be able to conquer all the regions inhabited by men, and the heavenly regions, and all the highest regions created by Prajāpati and even the entire kingdom of the gods.”⁸⁵ However, Marutta remains firm, keeping his promise to stay loyal to Samvarta. The latter addresses Agni and threatens to burn him if he should come once more into his presence with this tempting offer. Agni rushes back to Indra and refuses to go on another errand.

Therefore, Indra sends another messenger now, a Gandharva named

Dhṛtarāstra, who conveys to Marutta Indra's message that he will send his *vajra* if his offer is not accepted (that is, if Marutta does not accept Bṛhaspati as his priest). Marutta again declines to oblige Indra and answers that for him it is most important not to betray a friend (Samvarta), which would be as great a sin as murdering a Brahmin, since there is no expiation for it: "In this world there is no escape from the consequences of playing false to a friend."

Here we have the gist of the story and its morale—Marutta's nobility, his soul-strength which cannot be tempted even by the splendour of heaven, nor frightened by its fury. However, the king quickly faces the consequences of his firm attitude when Indra comes approaching with heavy rainclouds and roaring thunder. In the face of the imminent attack Marutta does get frightened now and seeks refuge in Saṁvarta. The latter feels quite confident of his power to face Indra's assault:

Thou hast nothing to fear from the god of a hundred sacrifices, I shall use my staying charms, O king, and the weapons of all the gods will avail them not ⁸⁶

Saṁvarta indeed is able to master the situation, using all his knowledge and all his powers to bring Indra under control. He even asks Marutta to choose a boon for himself now. Marutta wishes that Indra should come with all the gods and partake of his sacrifice, sharing the offerings and accepting the Soma libations. This too is accomplished by the skilled Saṁvarta with the help of appropriate *mantras*

I desire, O Brāhmana, that Indra all of a sudden should come in person at this sacrifice, and accept the oblation offered to him, and that all the other gods also come and take their appointed shares of the offerings and accept the libations of Soma offered to them

So the story is complete now with a happy end. Indra is reconciled with Marutta and praises Samvarta. In the concluding verses the poet dedicates a few lines to the glory of Bṛhaspati's brother, "the high-souled Samvarta, ascending the altar, and looking radiant as the second embodiment of the blazing fire", who has his great moment now after having brought about a near-impossible peace.

We can see here, as in the case of Durvāsā, that the reward of satisfying a sage in the guise of a madman can be invaluable. In Saṁvarta's case we even seem to receive some information about the background of his madness, when he tells Marutta that he was deprived of all his assets by Bṛhaspati. To assume the role of a strange wandering ascetic may just be his own way of working out his anger and inner revolt which render him incapable of functioning properly as

a member of society as such. as well as the more exclusive society of saints and ascetics. And yet his true genius remains there like a hidden diamond, and persons of great determination such as Marutta manage to push through the veil and draw pure water from a seemingly poisoned well.

(To be continued)

WILFRIED HUCHZERMEYER

Notes

- 79 Mahābhārata, 14 5 16-19
- 80 Mahābhārata, 14 6 22-26
- 81 Prāchīn Charitrakoś, p 1000 (translation mine)
- 82 Mahābhārata, 14 7 2
- 83 Mahābhārata. 14 7 6
- 84 Mahābhārata, 14 7 8
- 85 Mahābhārata, 14 9 27-28
- 86 Mahābhārata, 14 10 12

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Lights on Life-Problems, Sri Aurobindo's views on important Life-problems compiled from his writings by Kishor Gandhi. Second Edition—reprinted 1995. Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Dept. Pages 200. Price Rs. 50 Available at SABDA, Pondicherry, 605 002.

I HAVE been waiting for this book. This unique book was unavailable for quite a few years. Originally it was published as a series of instalments in the then fortnightly *Mother India* from 1949 to 1951. A note, revised by Sri Aurobindo, placed at the top of each instalment stated that the aim of this series was to provide authentic guidance from Sri Aurobindo's writings regarding many questions that arise in the minds of thoughtful persons. This interesting note is reproduced in the "Compiler's note" at the beginning of this book.

I say that this compilation is unique for three reasons. It is the only compilation from Sri Aurobindo's writings in the format of a dialogue, questions and answers, between a seeker and the Master. Then, as the compiler has stated in his note in the beginning of this book, each instalment except the last was seen, perused and approved by Sri Aurobindo before publication. Finally the compiler's note also states: "... while seeing these instalments Sri Aurobindo himself made alterations in the text of some of the passages quoted from his works in the answers "

The book is divided into two series. The first series deals with the problems of philosophy of living, the aim of life, good and evil, free will, Karma theory, rebirth and its necessity, the role and value of ethics, subjectivism and objectivism and finally materialism.

The second series deals with life and art and includes poetry, literature, painting, sculpture, architecture and their relationship with thought, philosophy, religion and human progress.

Sri Aurobindo's published works are very exhaustive. Any compilation from his writings is an attempt to edit and compress material into a cogent whole that satisfies the compiler aiming to illumine a particular topic—in the case of this book a particular question. The questions asked here are fundamental, relating to topics that bewilder us by their complexity and we seek clarity for the purpose of understanding life and the need for a purposive living. We read a compilation as a shortcut to understand a particular topic or a question. Necessarily the compiler's personality dictates his work. We often go to the reference to first confirm the correctness of an excerpt, then, especially in this book, to find what changes Sri Aurobindo has himself made to an excerpt and finally to clarify doubts that arise from reading an excerpt. These questions, like that of Good and Evil, being complex, do not have short simple straightforward answers. Hence any answer does not fully satisfy and demands further effort. We

then go to the reference cited.

Quite often I find myself as if in a sudden flash of light when I go to the original, the reference. This light illumines much more than the question asked. Actually a question which occurs to a reader while going through the excerpt gets answered, as if by magic.

As an example let me take up pages 40-41. The heading is "The Problem of Good and Evil" and the question deals with the value of moral standards and moral laws in the growth of man. The answer compiled ends with the statement that only the supramental consciousness can harmonise the divergencies of the conflicting forces in my nature. This leaves me unsatisfied for it does not answer my unasked question as to what I should do *now* since I cannot even see the possibility of the supramental consciousness for myself even on the distant horizon, even though it may be my aim. Going to the references I find these two gems, extremely useful in telling me how I should live now, what attitude I should practise. Let me quote from the Centenary Edition of Sri Aurobindo's works, Volume 15, page 138, where we find these two references:

"... in the sphere of what by an irony of our ignorance we call especially practical life,—although, if the Divine be our true object of search and realisation, our normal conduct in them and our current idea of them is the very opposite of practical,—we are less ready to recognise the universal truth. We take a long time to admit it even partially in theory, we are seldom ready at all to follow it in practice. And we find this difficulty because there especially, in all our practical life, we are content to be the slaves of an outward Necessity and think ourselves always excused when we admit as the law of our thought, will and action the yoke of immediate and temporary utilities."

And "All life is only a lavish and manifold opportunity given us to discover, realise, express the Divine."

What a wonderful thing to discover and rediscover and live!

I have been looking for this book since hearing about it. I have browsed through it and take at a time a question or two, read the answer, and then go to the references to find out what have been the changes made by Sri Aurobindo. Then I slowly try to understand first intellectually the answer. Later the process of assimilation and deeper understanding starts. While reading the reference, whether from *The Synthesis of Yoga* or from *Letters* I go on reading passages which interest and attract my being. The process continues.

I cannot thank Kishor Gandhi adequately for this compilation and the publishers for at last bringing out this reprint. The *Mother India* readers no doubt have had some of these questions bothering them. I would suggest to them to please get hold of this book, the price is quite affordable, indeed rather cheap

relative to many fictions we find at book-stalls. They can then find out for themselves what delights and gems of knowledge this book contains within its 200 pages.

DINKAR D. PALANDE

The Splash and the Ripples (a Collection of Poems). Pp. 60. Price Rs. 20/-. And *The Costly Dowry and Other Short Stories*. Pp. 191 Price Rs. 30/-. Both books by George Moses, Published by Geobel Publishing House, Pondicherry-605 005.

Mr. George Moses (b. Feb. 6, 1915), Retired Supt. of Police Pondicherry and Editor of Youth Age, a now-defunct monthly, passed away in his sleep on Jan. 10, 1995. He was one of our regular contributors in the early '70s.

—Editor

It is easy to think of a policeman as anything else but a poet and novelist. But here is one who has proved that a policeman can wield not just his pistol and cane, but the pen as well.

These two books by Mr. George Moses under review are very thought-provoking mainly because of their social themes. They are passionate outbursts of a sensitive soul deeply perturbed by the unhealthy trends in the present society. In both the books he has remarkably portrayed the facts of life.

The Splash and the Ripples is a collection of forty poems. It carries a scholarly foreword by Prof. P. Marudanayagam. The most dominant feature of Mr. George Moses' poems is his genuine concern for the neglected section of society who form a majority group. In 'Journalists' he condemns outright the evils pervading the world: the wars and the disputes and the soul-eating fashions. He boldly decries the ruth-rusting wrongs with stories, skits, poems and songs. His deep concern for the poor and unheeded people is evident in the following lines:

Come my beloved!
Let's plant our trees
to protect with shade, the sun-weathered folk.
Let's plant our kindness and love
for the oppressed, the depressed, the orphans,
the wearied and the weak.

('The Rural Call')

Mr. George Moses' poems are imbued with the element of seriousness, though subdued in tone. Some of these heavy pieces charged with emotion tell us a tale

of sorrow and disillusionment, yet with hope and courage:

The Mother of Christ, even she,
 you spared her not.
 Mark Mary mute at the foot of the cross
 and wipe your tears
 For the noon-set sun,
 For the noon-set son.
 Oh, Life is tragic—a Divine Tragedy too!

(‘Sunset at Noon’)

The poet calls upon mankind to run away from “the furious waves of political wranglers,/of power-crazy wranglers” to the “peace-loving shores”. Strong indeed is his disdain of the strife-torn and corrupt world. ‘Is God so cheap’ is a virulent attack on hypocrisy and the corrupt clergy:

Some went in with flowers;
 a few with garlands;...
 their bejewelled hands
 counting their beads;
 their slanderous lips murmuring
 their memorised chants...
 They came out
 by the same door
 they went in
 to worship;
 their hearts still dark;
 their hands still soiled;
 their heads still heady;
 their looks still covetous.

His pen is “oft dipt in the hearts of the wounded”. The themes in these poems are varied but the down-trodden and the poor have a permanent place in his heart:

I searched and searched for the Baby Christ
 And found him in a rain-soaked hut at last

(‘Found at Last’)

Mr. George Moses is quite conscious of the temporality of life. He knows for certain that there is no escape from birth and death, and considers birthdays as a renewal of birth. His three Birthday poems are strikingly optimistic.

From this distance
 I see in the dark night
 the streak of light
 drawing nigh and nigh
 in a straight flight
 to overwhelm me in a
 flood of light.

(‘Born Anew’)

There can be little doubt about the high quality of Mr George Moses’ poetry. His craftsmanship is evident in the skilful application of sound to sense and in the use of alliteration.

deep in the deep
 dust of the past
 dust unto dust
 unto present dust
 crusted by rust...

(‘Centenary Celebrations’)

Considering the themes of his poetry, the technical aspects and the relevance of the subject-matter today, we would not be exaggerative by saying that Mr. George Moses is one of the readable contemporary poets in India

A Costly Dowry and Other Short Stories covers a wide range of human experience. What makes this collection a treat to read is the element of simplicity and naturalness. Nothing is out of the ordinary and day-to-day life, be it events, situations or characters. The men and women who appear in these stories are those we come across in our routine life.

An undercurrent of sadness pervades most of these stories. In ‘A Costly Dowry’ we have Meena and Gopal, a newly married couple. Mittoo, the parrot, is an inseparable part of the paraphernalia of Meena. Meena later dies, soon after giving birth to a son. The bird that so often uttered Meena’s name vanishes one day. While Mittoo of the costly dowry is traced, Gopal faces a tragic death in the dock. Laden with sentiments and intense with a portrayal of feeling the story is very touching and remains green in our memory.

‘The Professor’s Model’ is the story of a rickshaw-puller Rangan who by some turn of fortune becomes a hotel-proprietor. The professor sees him as a model of humility.

Recreation of typical Indian scenes is the hallmark of Mr. George Moses’ stories. ‘Death of a Visitor’ conjures up precisely this feature. The visit of a captain and his sudden disappearance after a drinking-bout draws out all sorts of

weird stories. The anxiety of the householder, the curiosity of the neighbours, the investigation led by the servant Ethiraju, are interesting to observe. The final revelation that the captain had given up being prompted by the call of duty sets our curiosity at rest.

We really feel deep anguish over the station-master's tragic death in 'The Language of Anguish'. The narrator is persuaded by an anxious station-master against entering a village reeling under an epidemic. Taking lightly the gravity of the situation, the narrator goes, finishes his work in the village and returns to the station only to hear that the station-master has fallen a victim to the epidemic. It goes to show that the language of human relationship is a strange one understood only by the persons involved.

'The Portrait' is the story of a young boy Doss eager to draw a portrait of his mother Clara. But when he gets to know that he is a motherless boy, he becomes eager to see his mother's photograph at least. Finally, his aunt, a look-alike twin sister of his mother, provides him the model for the portrait of his dead mother. The child's eagerness to see his mother is convincingly portrayed. Also, Clara, the step-mother who lavishes her love on Doss, and her feelings when her step-motherhood is revealed to him, are admirably brought out.

'The Probationary Wife' reveals marital compatibility and understanding. Manoharan and Manogary are a newly wed couple. Manoharan's sudden dislike for fried chicken and his change of mood threatens to darken their joy on the occasion of Manogary's birthday. Manoharan's furtive glances at a young and beautiful woman is misconstrued by his wife. All her doubts are cleared when Manoharan explains to her the photograph and the letter he receives on his birthday. Aunt Malathy, whose photograph it was, was like a mother to him after his own mother's death. She had inculcated in him a dislike for chicken curry. The young lady at the restaurant resembled his dear aunt which made him stare at her.

The Costly Dowry and Other Short Stories establishes Mr. George Moses as an interesting and at the same time a serious story-teller. The depth and intensity of the passion that these stories carry and his verbal gift suggest that he has all the makings of a great writer. However, his short stories are not without shortcomings. Sometimes they run to an unreasonable length and contain unnecessary explanations that hamper reading.

Each of his stories has a moral to convey. In that they are quite edifying. The writer's deep insight into the human psyche, combined with an easy and natural style, make his autobiographical stories impressive.

The two books are a real delight to read and deserve high ranking because of their contemporary relevance, subtle humour and down-to-earth portrayal of characters and events.

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

(Continued from the issue of May 1995)

60. A HEAD FOR A SONG

KOOTTHAR had a dazed expression on his face, when his eyes saw a group of men from his community approach him. Saluting him in unison the Sengunthars said: “We would like you to immortalize our community by your songs.”

Kootthar bit his lower lip to keep from laughing out loud. Sensing the mischief in Kootthar’s eyes, the Sengunthars said: “Our community can boast of only one living poet. That’s you... We are proud of you for you are the Poet Laureate in the court of King Kulothunga Chozhan. And so you are the right person to do the job. And if you neglect the request of your own community, who else will...”

“It’s not that I neglect your request,” interrupted Kootthar. “But I just want to know what prompted you to come to me with such a request.”

An old man stepped out from the group and said: “Poet Kamban wrote *Eirezhupathu* and *Silaezhupathu* thereby immortalizing the Vellalars (Agriculturists) and Vanniyars (Kshatriyas) respectively.”

Another in the group said: “Prince Elango immortalized the Vaisyar (merchant) community in his epic *Silapathikaram*. Avvai has a poem on a Yadhavar (milkman) named Aivel Asadhi... It’s needless to tell you that poets have immortalized almost all communities. But what about ours?... Just think. And if we don’t get immortalized...”

“The future generation will never know that a Sengunthar community existed at all,” completed another in the group.

Kootthar silently enjoyed the plight of the Sengunthars plagued by notions of inferiority.

“Save us from Oblivion’s Maw,” pleaded yet another.

“Hm, I see! You want to live even after your death... That’s quest for immortality,” guffawed Kootthar.

“Our community must not go unremembered,” the Sengunthars voiced in a chorus.

“Well! Well! I’ll do it... but only if you will give me a gift.”

“We’ll give you anything you ask for.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes! Just name it. And it’s yours.”

“Well then! Get me seventy severed heads of the firstborns of our community ”

The Sengunthars stood so shocked that none of them breathed for a minute.

Kootthar heckled and said: "If you can't keep your promise, don't expect me to favour your request."

"Too much... This is too much... Ask for anything else and we'll give it," cringed a Sengunthar.

"I ask for nothing else," said Kootthar.

"But what are the heads for?"

"That's none of your business. Can you keep your promise or not?"

The Sengunthars consulted one another. Some were for and a few were against the butcher-like act. At last after heated discussions the opposition group gave in.

"We'll keep our promise. By hook or by crook we want to be immortalized by you," shouted all the Sengunthars.

"Then I assure you I will compose a long poem and thereby immortalize our community," said Kootthar.

The Sengunthars did what they had said. They came carrying big baskets containing the bleeding heads of their firstborns. "Where shall we heap them?" asked a man, his head trembling under the weight of the basket.

"Not here! Take them and heap at the chief entrance of the king's palace, so that everyone can see," said Kootthar.

The Sengunthars did as they were advised.

Stupefied at the sight of the bleeding heads King Kulothunga Chozhan inquired into the matter.

Kootthar briefed him of his community men's quest for immortality and the heavy price he had asked them.

Watched by the king, Kootthar asked the Sengunthars to arrange the heads in such order that he could use them as a throne to sit on.

Sitting on the throne of bleeding heads Kootthar composed seventy songs and called his work *Ettu Ezhupathu* (Seventy Spears) all in praise of his own community. The word 'Sengunthar' means spear-bearers, whose spearheads are red with the blood of their enemies.

Elated, the Sengunthars lifted Kootthar above their shoulders, danced in glee and shouted with joy: "Our community will be remembered as long as the Tamils live."

As King Kulothunga Chozhan wondered at what cost these people had immortalized themselves, Kootthar meditated upon Goddess Saraswathi and invoked her help.

As soon as the invocation song was sung, every head moved in search of its respective body and joined with it. All the dead firstborns came back to life.

King Kulothunga Chozhan applauded the divine power of Kootthar. He then proclaimed, "Since Kootthar has performed a miracle by joining the heads to their bodies, hereafter he will be known as "OTTAKOOTTHAR" (Otta = join).

As the Sengunthars went on rejoicing, the king asked Ottakootthar "But

why did you choose my palace to heap the bleeding heads?"

"To tell you and the world that the Sengunthars are the boldest people on earth, who will go to any extent to get things done."

King Kulothunga Chozhan nodded his head and said. "Truly they are SIRASINGASANAPATHIGAL," (Siram = head + Singasanam = throne + Pathigal = leaders).

That's how Poet Kootthar came to be known as Ottakootthar and the Sengunthars as Sirasingasanapathigal.

61. THE QUEEN'S RUSE

Ottakootthar was at the backyard of his house washing his hands. He had just finished his supper.

An owl on the tree-top hooted thrice and fluttered away. The hootings were immediately followed by the bloodcurdling howls of a stray dog. The poet's face turned grave. "Tcho. tcho," he clicked his tongue and murmured, "Bad omen. It forebodes death."

A call from the king's messenger pulled him back into the house. "Matter's urgent. You are summoned to the old king's chamber immediately. A palanquin is waiting for you at your main door," said the messenger.

Once inside the palace Ottakootthar dashed towards the old king's chamber. He saw king Kulothunga Chozhan standing at the entrance. At close quarters he saw the king's eyes sparkling with tears. He looked at the king consolingly.

"My father is sinking. He has expressed his desire to see you before he breathes his last," said the king and ushered him in.

"Father! My guru, Ottakootthar is here," said the king softly

The old king Vikrama Chozhan opened his eyes and saw the poet who stood at a respectable distance from his bed. He motioned him with a nod of his head to come nearer.

"I'm leaving," said Vikrama Chozhan "And so I leave my son Kulothungan with you. Continue to guide him in the proper way. Promise me that you'll arrange the marriage of my son with Varaguna Pandian's daughter. Taught by Poet Pugazhendi she is a genius. She will best suit my son."

"I do promise," said Ottakootthar

Vikrama Chozhan smiled and with a sense of contentment breathed his last.

A few months later, Ottakootthar went to Madurai, entered the court of king Varaguna Pandian and took everyone by surprise.

Ottakootthar paid glorious tributes to the king and at the right moment rehearsed to him the last wish of the dead king.

King Pandian thought awhile and then asked. "Is your king superior to us in any way?"

“In every way, your Majesty!... Take for example the perennial river Kaveri that flows in the Chozha kingdom. When compared to that river, your river Vaigai is small fry. Our king Kulothungan is a descendant of the Sun, whereas you are of the Moon. It is needless to tell you who is superior. Your flag bears the insignia of a fish, whereas our emblem is a tiger. And so in every way king Kulothunga Chozhan is superior to you,” said Ottakootthar.

Pugazhendı, the Poet Laureate of the Pandian kingdom, sprang to his feet and retorted: “Sage Agastya taught Tamil language on Podhiyal Hills in our kingdom and not on Neri Hills of your kingdom. Fish is one among the many incarnations of God Thirumal, the Preserver. And it is needless to tell you that no God took the shape of a tiger. It is the Moon that sits on the matted hair of God Siva, the Destroyer. Sun has no place there. Is there any iota of doubt that king Kulothunga Chozhan is in every way inferior to our king Pandian.”

Ottakootthar felt ashamed. Perhaps he had met his match. Jealousy gained the upper hand. He looked daggers at Pugazhendı, who disarmed him with a victorious smile.

Gritting his teeth, Ottakootthar raved to himself: “I’ll wait for the right moment.”

While king Pandian applauded the poet Pugazhendı, a senior courtier stood up and said: “Ottakootthar has come all the way here seeking a bride for his king. This is neither the appropriate time nor place to argue over who is superior. And so, your Majesty! I would like you to give him a reply.”

King Pandian consulted his ministers and courtiers.

“Kulothunga Chozhan is well-versed in administration.”

“He is highly educated, educated under Ottakootthar.”

“His granaries and treasuries are always found overflowing.”

“He is as handsome as Manmathan, God of Love ”

“The countless battles he has won speak of his valour.”

King Pandian who was so far listening to his well-wishers said: “And so .. he is the suitable boy for my daughter.” He then wrote a letter inviting king Chozhan to come to Madurai and marry his daughter and despatched the same through poet Ottakootthar.

On an auspicious day, amidst beating of drums and blowing of pipes and timbrels, the Princess of the Pandia kingdom became the Queen of the Chozha empire. After the feasting and joy that went on for weeks together in the court, king Varaguna Pandian gave the best in everything to his daughter. In the long list of dowry items to go with her, he included the name of poet Pugazhendı.

Ottakootthar giggled at the sight of Pugazhendı in the palace. “Ha... ha... At last... ha... ha .. the long awaited opportunity has come,” he guffawed and had Pugazhendı clapped into prison. He convinced the king by saying that he had done so only to avenge the insult.

Inside the prison Pugazhendı was given only a measure of rice and a handful

of salt. "To live in isolation like this," Pugazhendi cried out, striking his forehead against the window, "What torment?"

But the next moment he changed his mind and said, "Oh, what a pleasant sight!"

He saw through the window a bevy of young women, each carrying a pitcher of water on her hip and balancing two on her head. He burst into a song. The melody attracted the attention of the women and they gathered near the prison window and happily listened to the singer. And they paid him royally with vegetables and grocery items. Pugazhendi cooked sumptuous food and made himself happy.

Within a short period he sang many ballads like *Alliarasani Maalai*, *Pavalakkodi Maalai*, *Purandaran Kalavu Maalai*, etc. in a style that is simple and effective. As a greater number of his fans gathered to listen to him he was able to provide good food to the other prisoners and the jailor too and he thereby made everyone happy.

As Pugazhendi's fame began to spread throughout the Chozha kingdom, news reached the queen that Pugazhendi was behind bars. A tremor went through her body and tears pricked her eyes.

She probed into the matter. When the truth was revealed to her she said: "I thought so... I've heard of the two poets quarrelling in my father's court."

In the privacy of the bedchamber the queen told her husband: "It's unworthy of you to imprison a royal guest... If you don't like to keep him in your court, then send him back to my father."

"I've nothing against Pugazhendi. In fact I heard him sing the other day and he is fit to adorn my court. But Ottakoothar has some personal grievance against him. And I am helpless," said the king.

"You are the king. You have every right to command Ottakoothar to release Pugazhendi."

"No! I can't. He is my guru. It embarrasses me to go against his wish."

"I am your queen. You have to please me."

"But I can't displease my guru."

The queen snarled. "Then go out of my chamber," she yelled and pushing her husband out she said: "Go and sleep with your guru."

The poor king had to spend the night in the loneliness of his chamber.

On the morning of the next day, he as usual went to his court. And when he returned he was surprised to see the door of the queen's chamber still shut. He was told that the queen had refused to open the door to anyone.

The king at first banged at the door. He then cajoled his wife and then begged. But none of his efforts bore fruit. He sought the help of his guru

Ottakoothar sang a song in praise of the queen's beauty and thereby requested her to open the door.

The queen became so angry with the poet that she double-bolted the door.

The king, finding no way out of this problem, sought the help of the imprisoned poet.

Pugazhendi sang a song advising her to calm down and never to be so rude to her husband.

The queen opened the door and welcomed the king and poet Pugazhendi.

From that day Pugazhendi found a respectable place in the court of king Kulothunga Chozhan. But Ottakootthar continued to dislike him.

62. I HAVE COME TO FINISH YOU OFF... BUT

Poets Ottakootthar and Pugazhendi truly adorned the court of king Kulothunga Chozhan. The peace that prevails between the hammer and the anvil prevailed between them too.

One day when Pugazhendi was reading out verses from his minor epic *Nalavenba* entertaining the king and the courtiers, Ottakootthar stopped him and said: "Please read out that beautiful image once again."

Ottakootthar was always on the lookout for mistakes in others' poetry and even if he failed to find one, he would cook up something. Pugazhendi was not unaware of that.

"I've compared the jasmine flowers to the white conches and the singing honeybees to the conch-blowers," said Pugazhendi.

"Wah! What a beautiful image! But there is a flaw."

"Is it in the image itself or in the use of it?"

"Had I found fault with the image, I would not have called it beautiful. I only question the use of it."

Pugazhendi looked at his cadjan leaf and read the lines again and again, at first to himself and then aloud. But no one including the king was able to find fault with the use of the image. They looked at one another betraying their ignorance.

"Hm! There lies the genius of Ottakootthar," said Ottakootthar puffing up. He then added, "What others' ears are incapable of..."

"Don't boast," interrupted Pugazhendi, "go ahead with what you call flaw."

"Have you ever observed the conch-blowers?... They blow from the back of the instrument and never from its front. But your conch-blowers seem to be of a strange species."

Pugazhendi staggered for a second but managed the situation by saying: "The bees, drunk with honey from the jasmine flowers, can't make out which is the front and which is the back."

The whole court roared with laughter. Everyone applauded Pugazhendi's presence of mind. Highly embarrassed by such a witty remark, Ottakootthar

looked daggers at Pugazhendi.

Back home Pugazhendi sat on the pial of his house. Even though he emerged victorious in the court, the dagger-like eyes of the rival poet gave him the jitters. "I saw him fretting and fuming," he murmured, "He will avenge my insult. He will put me to shame at an unexpected moment, as he has done on many occasions." After more serious thought, he said: "I have had enough of his insults. I can't stomach any more. The best way is to get rid of him once and for all."

Determined he stood up, found a heavy stone twice as big as a human head, and carrying it he moved clandestinely into Ottakoothar's house and hid himself under a cot.

It was supper time when Ottakoothar came back home. He sat on the cot and yawned.

"Your supper is ready. Eat before you go to bed." It was Kannamma, Ottakoothar's wife.

"No! I can't eat anything today, for I have listened to poet Pugazhendi reading his *Nalavenba*. It was a real feast for my mind. My stomach too is full," said Ottakoothar with a sense of satisfaction.

Pugazhendi hiding under the cot was unable to believe his ears.

"Drink milk, at least. I'll mix it with sugarcandy," cajoled Kannamma.

"Only if you can mix it with the sweetness of Pugazhendi's verse," said he and stretched himself on the cot.

Unable to hold himself, Pugazhendi came out of his hiding place. To the great shock of his arch rival, he hugged him and said: "Oh! What a foolish fellow I am! I came to finish you off but you have killed the murderer in me. I never knew that you had so much liking for my verse."

Pugazhendi and Ottakoothar looked into each other's eyes. There were tears of joy in them. They were to remain good friends till death separated them.

(More legends on the way)

P. RAJA

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Thirty-first Annual Conference

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SRI AUROBINDO'S BIRTH

Speech by Sunayana Shukla

WE celebrate the 15th August every year as a golden date on our calendar because it is the day not only of Sri Aurobindo's birth but also of the birth of independent India. In fact, the two are irrevocably linked. But Sri Aurobindo has an importance that surpasses the boundaries of our country. His teachings and his work are for the whole of mankind.

In the history of the world, some exceptional beings have taken birth to radically change the course of events of a particular country or of humanity as a whole. Sri Aurobindo is pre-eminently one of them. His thoughts and acts continue to live and spread out in time and space like a pebble which falls into a quiet pool and silently sends out ripples over the entire expanse of the water.

Sri Aurobindo's life was not on the surface for us to understand. His work was on an invisible plane and in that invisible plane he can be likened to a great explorer who discovered a new continent. Not only that but he showed to others, in minute particulars, how to get there, charting out a detailed map of the new continent.

To come back to what I said a little while ago, Sri Aurobindo and the independence of India are irrevocably linked. Sri Aurobindo started his work for his country as a political revolutionary, but after a while he changed his path to become a spiritual revolutionary. Why did he change his course of action? Only an exceptional being like him could understand that the enduring solution of the age-long human problems is neither the political nor the economic, nor even the social reform but the spiritual change. India needed to be politically and economically free, but of what use would have been this freedom if her great mass of people were spiritually asleep? Moreover, with his yogic power Sri Aurobindo could act with greater force from a spiritual plane to liberate the country than he could have done by merely remaining in the political arena and acting on the physical plane.

But what have we done with this independence for which so many Indians sacrificed so much? Where does India stand today as a nation? Are we moving in the right direction? We all agree that there are many problems, but what are we

doing to solve them? These are some of the important questions which come to mind on this special day. But to find a proper answer to them we have to consider them in their larger world-wide context because in one form or another these same problems afflict the whole of humanity.

Even today a vast majority of people in the world believe that all our woes would end if we could create a perfect society. But how can we do that by merely trying to deal with the symptoms and not striking at the root of the malady? Why can't we find out what is at the root of these difficulties? What causes, for example, crime and war? What causes the inequality in the human mind that tolerates poverty and degradation of one's fellow human beings? What causes the deep psychological dissatisfaction which brings about sometimes serious physical illnesses?

When we think of a society we think in terms of groups: the socio-economic groups, the religious groups, the ethnic groups, etc We forget to take into account the individual. After all, the individual is the indispensable element of society. In order to change a society we have to change its basic element, and that is the individual.

There has to be a change in the consciousness of the individual because it is these millions of incoherent individual consciousnesses that come together and form the dissatisfied societies of the world. So, unless these individual consciousnesses are changed, no lasting change of society is possible.

It is easy to speak of change of consciousness, but what is the first step in that direction? First of all, we have to be aware of the whole range of our consciousness before we can bring about a complete change. This is necessary because normally we are aware only of a small, superficial layer of our consciousness, but behind, below and above it are vast ranges of our being of which we are not aware There is a Chinese proverb which says, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step." Living consciously with full awareness of our whole being then is the first step in the journey of the thousand miles leading to the Spirit

While thinking about this subject of how we live only on the surface of our being, a beautiful image often comes to my mind. I think about those delicate flowers that live only for a day. How intensely must these flowers live that one day! Or those animals whose life-span is a mere fourteen years at the most. Each passing year takes away such a large portion of their lives. The keenness with which animals live every moment shows how deeply they experience the present without awareness of the past or the future. This line of thought eventually brings me to that unforgettable phrase in *Savitri*:

"If for a year, that year is all my life."¹

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* (Cent Ed , Vol 29), p 435

How intensely Savitri lives those twelve months that she shares with Satyavan before Death comes to stake his claim on his life. Every moment suddenly becomes a precious moment.

Why can't we live like that? Why must we wait for calamity to make us aware of the value of our lives? So many factors put together have dramatically increased man's life-span, yet we take life absolutely for granted. We drift from one day to another on the surface of our being, secure in the knowledge that there will be many more such days. We go through a series of activities each day in a state of semi-consciousness, driven by the force of habit. The years of our lives roll by while we live like the proverbial cog in the wheel, or like a tiny piece in the great puzzle of the world. Even our thoughts move in the pre-ordained orbit of mass thinking. And a large part of our emotions are conditioned by our environment and upbringing. Occasionally, however, in rare moments of joy or in dark moments of sorrow we touch the depth of our own being. It is as if we had a large palace at our disposal but we chose to live in one of the smallest rooms, never bothering to enter the magnificent halls of the palace.

Then something happens which brings about the turning-point of a person's life, something which acts as the point of friction which dislodges him from his state of inertia. It could be anything—a chance meeting, something he hears, or a glimpse of something exceedingly beautiful, a book that comes his way or, as it often happens, a personal catastrophe such as the loss of a loved one or failure in one's work. At this point he questions everything, his thoughts, his emotions, and even his very existence. From this self-questioning is born the conscious individual.

After this point, if the human will is firm, then with the help of the Divine Grace, man can take up the path of yogic inner development. Having first established his individuality in the surface consciousness he must go beyond that into the deeper and higher ranges of consciousness. We have all read the oft-quoted aphorism: "Ego was the helper, Ego is the bar."¹ We dream of the day when many such awakened beings, free from their egos, will congregate and form enlightened communities.

Outwardly everything may remain the same but inwardly everything will be altered. When a person opens his gaze to the deeper and higher ranges of his consciousness, then he lives more intensely. He controls and guides every inner movement, every thought that enters within his mind, and even his physical movements and gestures are made meaningfully. Any work he takes up is done perfectly and with full attention. He is vigilant like a warrior, alert and fully awake, watching over his own movements, not only in his waking hours but even when his body sleeps.

In the past people believed that if a man wanted to follow an inner life he

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glances* (Cent Ed , Vol 16), p 377

had to renounce the world and follow his discipline in solitude. But Sri Aurobindo, who was a revolutionary, has shown that the time has come to give up that mentality. The work of awakening the consciousness and then deepening, heightening and enlarging it can be done very well in the midst of the activities of daily life. Rather one can test one's inner strength by pitting oneself against the difficulties of everyday life, just like a wrestler who must fight with his opponent to test and increase his own strength.

The message of Sri Aurobindo is that life has to be divinised by a personal effort aided by the Divine Grace. The Kingdom of Heaven is not elsewhere. It is within us here and now.

How far has modern India lived up to the dreams of Sri Aurobindo? Is the new force which he brought down upon earth and in the life of the world working in the atmosphere of this country? I think that in spite of certain difficult situations which India must face there are clear indications that something is happening. There are many upheavals but slowly and surely India is lifting her head proudly before the other nations of the world. In every field there is a will to go forward, be it in science and technology or in art and literature. Even in the economic field she is now in an important position. There is a growing movement of bringing perfection into the material world that surrounds us. Something else which looks encouraging is the effort not only of identifying our real problems but of trying to solve them at their root. The biggest miracle is that we continue to be a united country in spite of all the differences that exist between the various regions. It is clear that it is the spiritual bond that holds us together and gives to our country a distinct character. And in the midst of all this national development, the individual is changing. Even the average Indian is undeniably eager to widen his horizon, shedding his fatalistic attitude of the past and asserting his individual will. And hidden from the glare of public attention are individuals of great accomplishment, wisdom and selfless dedication to the betterment of India.

We should then celebrate with all our hearts this auspicious date of Sri Aurobindo's birth, having full faith in the wonderful future of the country and of the world. The Mother has assured us that India will one day be the Guru of the world. This will surely come true and we should consciously work towards this goal.