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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>		
THE INCONSCIENT (Poem)	...	781
PURIFICATION—THE LOWER MENTALITY	...	782
<i>The Mother</i>		
‘TO ABIDE ALWAYS IN THEE...’	...	787
‘THE DIVINE PRESENCE IN MATTER’	...	788
<i>Nolini Kanta Gupta</i>		
MACHINERY AND THE LOGICAL INTELLIGENCE	...	790
<i>Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)</i>		
A FEW NOTES ON MY EARLY YEARS	...	802
<i>Narad (Richard Eggenberger)</i>		
NOLINI-DA—A REMEMBRANCE IN REVERENCE	...	809
<i>Abani</i>		
THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS	...	813
<i>M. S. Srinivasan</i>		
STUDY OF WORLD HISTORY—TOWARDS A NEW APPROACH	...	814
<i>Gopika Karthikeyan</i>		
PEACE (Poem)	...	822
<i>H. P. Shukla</i>		
MEANING OF BIRTH AND QUEST IN SRI AUROBINDO’S SAVITRI	...	823
<i>Sanjay Rajvanshi</i>		
SILENCE ENVELOPS ME...	...	827
<i>Falguni Jani</i>		
TIME AND TIMELESSNESS	...	828
<i>Shyam Sunder Jhunjhunwala</i>		
INDIA AND PAKISTAN: A VIEW	...	830

<i>Jyotsna Mohanty</i>		
NOT HERE (Poem)	...	834
<i>Nolinikanto Sarkar</i>		
BETWEEN THE ARRIVAL AND THE DEPARTURE	...	836
<i>Linda</i>		
YOU (Poem)	...	841
<i>C. C. Dutt</i>		
SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT	...	842
<i>Maggi</i>		
NEW TIDE IS COMING IN (Poem)	...	847
<i>Aster Patel</i>		
YOGA AND THE INDIAN SPIRIT	...	848
<i>Sampadananda Mishra</i>		
VASISHTHA GANAPATI MUNI	...	854
<i>Prema Nandakumar</i>		
THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY	...	856
<i>Amita Sen</i>		
MONSIEUR AND MADAME FRANÇOIS MARTIN IN PONDICHERRY	...	864
<i>C. Subbian</i>		
ON THE YOGA-VASHISHTHA	...	868
<i>Goutam Ghosal</i>		
TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO	...	870
<i>Nilima Das</i>		
SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA	...	873
<i>Aryadeep</i>		
MADANLAL—AN AUROVILIAN TRIBUTE	...	877
BOOKS IN THE BALANCE		
<i>Sachidananda Mohanty</i>		
<i>Review of INITIATION: SPIRITUAL INSIGHTS ON LIFE, ART AND PSYCHOLOGY</i>		
by MICHAEL MIOVIC	...	879

THE INCONSCIENT

Out of a seeming void and dark-winged sleep
Of dim inconscient infinity
A Power arose from the insentient deep,
A flame-whirl of magician Energy.

Some huge somnambulist Intelligence
Devising without thought process and plan
Arrayed the burning stars' magnificence,
The living bodies of beasts and the brain of man.

What stark Necessity or ordered Chance
Became alive to know the cosmic whole?
What magic of numbers, what mechanic dance
Developed consciousness, assumed a soul?

The darkness was the Omnipotent's abode,
Hood of omniscience, a blind mask of God.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 133)

PURIFICATION—THE LOWER MENTALITY

EACH instrument has, it has been said, a proper and legitimate action and also a deformation or wrong principle of its proper action. The proper action of the psychic prana¹ is pure possession and enjoyment, *bhoga*. To enjoy thought, will, action, dynamic impulse, result of action, emotion, sense, sensation, to enjoy too by their means objects, persons, life, the world, is the activity for which this prana gives us a psycho-physical basis. A really perfect enjoyment of existence can only come when what we enjoy is not the world in itself or for itself, but God in the world, when it is not things, but the Ananda of the spirit in things that forms the real, essential object of our enjoying and things only as form and symbol of the spirit, waves of the ocean of Ananda. But this Ananda can only come at all when we can get at and reflect in our members the hidden spiritual being, and its fullness can only be had when we climb to the supramental ranges. Meanwhile there is a just and permissible, a quite legitimate human enjoyment of these things, which is, to speak in the language of Indian psychology, predominantly sattwic in its nature. It is an enlightened enjoyment principally by the perceptive, aesthetic and emotive mind, secondarily only by the sensational, nervous and physical being, but all subject to the clear government of the buddhi, to a right reason, a right will, a right reception of the life impacts, a right order, a right feeling of the truth, law, ideal sense, beauty, use of things. The mind gets the pure taste of enjoyment of them, *rasa*, and rejects whatever is perturbed, troubled and perverse. Into this acceptance of the clear and limpid *rasa*, the psychic prana has to bring in the full sense of life and the occupying enjoyment by the whole being, *bhoga*, without which the acceptance and possession by the mind, *rasa-grahana*, would not be concrete enough, would be too tenuous to satisfy altogether the embodied soul. This contribution is its proper function.

The deformation which enters in and prevents the purity, is a form of vital craving; the grand deformation which the psychic prana contributes to our being, is desire. The root of desire is the vital craving to seize upon that which we feel we have not, it is the limited life's instinct for possession and satisfaction. It creates the

1. [The terms "Psychic Prana" and "Psychical Prana" in this passage may be puzzling to some readers. The word "Psychic" here does not refer to the true soul but to the false soul of desire. In the Chapter, "The Double Soul in Man" in *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo writes, "...we have a double psychic entity in us, the surface desire-soul which works in our vital cravings, our emotions, aesthetic faculty and mental seeking for power, knowledge and happiness, and a subliminal psychic entity, a pure power of light, love, joy and refined essence of being which is our true soul behind the outer form of psychic existence we so often dignify by the name." (*SABCL*, Vol. 18, p. 220) In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo refers to the psychic prana as the nervous life mind, the vital part of mentality. He goes on to say, "This nature of the emotive mind as a reaction of chitta with a certain close dependence upon the nervous life sensations and the responses of the psychic prana is so characteristic that in some languages it is called chitta and prana, the heart, the life soul; it is indeed the most directly agitating and powerfully insistent action of the desire-soul which the immixture of vital desire and responsive consciousness has created in us. And yet the true emotive soul, the real psyche in us, is not a desire-soul, but a soul of pure love and delight; but that, like the rest of our true being, can only emerge when the deformation created by the life of desire is removed from the surface and is no longer the characteristic action of our being." (*CWSA*, Vol. 24, p. 649) —Editorial note]

sense of want,—first the simpler vital craving of hunger, thirst, lust, then these psychical hungers, thirsts, lusts of the mind which are a much greater and more instant and pervading affliction of our being, the hunger which is infinite because it is the hunger of an infinite being, the thirst which is only temporarily lulled by satisfaction, but is in its nature insatiable. The psychic prana invades the sensational mind and brings into it the unquiet thirst of sensations, invades the dynamic mind with the lust of control, having, domination, success, fulfilment of every impulse, fills the emotional mind with the desire for the satisfaction of liking and disliking, for the wreaking of love and hate, brings the shrinkings and panics of fear and the strainings and disappointments of hope, imposes the tortures of grief and the brief fevers and excitements of joy, makes the intelligence and intelligent will the accomplices of all these things and turns them in their own kind into deformed and lame instruments, the will into a will of craving and the intelligence into a partial, a stumbling and an eager pursuer of limited, impatient, militant prejudgment and opinion. Desire is the root of all sorrow, disappointment, affliction, for though it has a feverish joy of pursuit and satisfaction, yet because it is always a straining of the being, it carries into its pursuit and its getting a labour, hunger, struggle, a rapid subjection to fatigue, a sense of limitation, dissatisfaction and early disappointment with all its gains, a ceaseless morbid stimulation, trouble, disquiet, *asānti*. To get rid of desire is the one firm indispensable purification of the psychical prana,—for so we can replace the soul of desire with its pervading immiscence in all our instruments by a mental soul of calm delight and its clear and limpid possession of ourselves and world and Nature which is the crystal basis of the mental life and its perfection.

The psychical prana interferes in all the higher operations to deform them, but its defect is itself due to its being interfered with and deformed by the nature of the physical workings in the body which Life has evolved in its emergence from matter. It is that which has created the separation of the individual life in the body from the life of the universe and stamped on it the character of want, limitation, hunger, thirst, craving for what it has not, a long groping after enjoyment and a hampered and baffled need of possession. Easily regulated and limited in the purely physical order of things, it extends itself in the psychical prana immensely and becomes, as the mind grows, a thing with difficulty limited, insatiable, irregular, a busy creator of disorder and disease. Moreover, the psychical prana leans on the physical life, limits itself by the nervous force of the physical being, limits thereby the operations of the mind and becomes the link of its dependence on the body and its subjection to fatigue, incapacity, disease, disorder, insanity, the pettiness, the precariousness and even the possible dissolution of the workings of the physical mentality. Our mind instead of being a thing powerful in its own strength, a clear instrument of conscious spirit, free and able to control, use and perfect the life and body, appears in the result a mixed construction; it is a predominantly physical mentality limited by its physical organs and subject to the demands and to the obstructions of the life in the body. This can

only be got rid of by a sort of practical, inward psychological operation of analysis by which we become aware of the mentality as a separate power, isolate it for a free working, distinguish too the psychical and the physical prana and make them no longer a link for dependence, but a transmitting channel for the Idea and Will in the buddhi, obedient to its suggestions and commands; the prana then becomes a passive means of effectuation for the mind's direct control of the physical life. This control, however abnormal to our habitual poise of action, is not only possible,—it appears to some extent in the phenomena of hypnosis, though these are unhealthily abnormal, because there it is a foreign will which suggests and commands,—but must become the normal action when the higher Self within takes up the direct command of the whole being. This control can be exercised perfectly, however, only from the supramental level, for it is there that the true effective Idea and Will reside and the mental thought-mind, even spiritualised, is only a limited, though it may be made a very powerful deputy.

Desire, it is thought, is the real motive power of human living and to cast it out would be to stop the springs of life; satisfaction of desire is man's only enjoyment and to eliminate it would be to extinguish the impulse of life by a quietistic asceticism. But the real motive power of the life of the soul is Will; desire is only a deformation of will in the dominant bodily life and physical mind. The essential turn of the soul to possession and enjoyment of the world consists in a will to delight, and the enjoyment of the satisfaction of craving is only a vital and physical degradation of the will to delight. It is essential that we should distinguish between pure will and desire, between the inner will to delight and the outer lust and craving of the mind and body. If we are unable to make this distinction practically in the experience of our being, we can only make a choice between a life-killing asceticism and the gross will to live or else try to effect an awkward, uncertain and precarious compromise between them. This is in fact what the mass of men do; a small minority trample down the life instinct and strain after an ascetic perfection; most obey the gross will to live with such modifications and restraints as society imposes or the normal social man has been trained to impose on his own mind and actions; others set up a balance between ethical austerity and temperate indulgence of the desiring mental and vital self and see in this balance the golden mean of a sane mind and healthy human living. But none of these ways gives the perfection which we are seeking, the divine government of the will in life. To tread down altogether the prana, the vital being, is to kill the force of life by which the large action of the embodied soul in the human being must be supported; to indulge the gross will to live is to remain satisfied with imperfection; to compromise between them is to stop half way and possess neither earth nor heaven. But if we can get at the pure will undeformed by desire,—which we shall find to be a much more free, tranquil, steady and effective force than the leaping, smoke-stifled, soon fatigued and baffled flame of desire,—and at the calm inner will of delight not afflicted or limited by any trouble of craving, we can then transform the prana from a tyrant, enemy, assailant of the mind into an obedient instrument. We may call these

greater things, too, by the name of desire, if we choose, but then we must suppose that there is a divine desire other than the vital craving, a God-desire of which this other and lower phenomenon is an obscure shadow and into which it has to be transfigured. It is better to keep distinct names for things which are entirely different in their character and inner action.

To rid the prana of desire and incidentally to reverse the ordinary poise of our nature and turn the vital being from a troublesomely dominant power into the obedient instrument of a free and unattached mind, is then the first step in purification. As this deformation of the psychical prana is corrected, the purification of the rest of the intermediary parts of the *antaḥkāraṇa* is facilitated, and when that correction is completed, their purification too can be easily made absolute. These intermediary parts are the emotional mind, the receptive sensational mind and the active sensational mind or mind of dynamic impulse. They all hang together in a strongly knotted interaction. The deformation of the emotional mind hinges upon the duality of liking and disliking, *rāga-dveṣa*, emotional attraction and repulsion. All the complexity of our emotions and their tyranny over the soul arise from the habitual responses of the soul of desire in the emotions and sensations to these attractions and repulsions. Love and hatred, hope and fear, grief and joy all have their founts in this one source. We like, love, welcome, hope for, joy in whatever our nature, the first habit of our being, or else a formed (often perverse) habit, the second nature of our being, presents to the mind as pleasant, *priyam*; we hate, dislike, fear, have repulsion from or grief of whatever it presents to us as unpleasant, *apriyam*. This habit of the emotional nature gets into the way of the intelligent will and makes it often a helpless slave of the emotional being or at least prevents it from exercising a free judgment and government of the nature. This deformation has to be corrected. By getting rid of desire in the psychic prana and its intermixture in the emotional mind, we facilitate the correction. For then attachment which is the strong bond of the heart, falls away from the heart-strings; the involuntary habit of *rāga-dveṣa* remains, but, not being made obstinate by attachment, it can be dealt with more easily by the will and the intelligence. The restless heart can be conquered and get rid of the habit of attraction and repulsion.

But then if this is done, it may be thought, as with regard to desire, that this will be the death of the emotional being. It will certainly be so, if the deformation is eliminated but not replaced by the right action of the emotional mind; the mind will then pass into a neutral condition of blank indifference or into a luminous state of peaceful impartiality with no stir or wave of emotion. The former state is in no way desirable; the latter may be the perfection of a quietistic discipline, but in the integral perfection which does not reject love or shun various movement of delight, it can be no more than a stage which has to be overpassed, a preliminary passivity admitted as a first basis for a right activity. Attraction and repulsion, liking and disliking are a necessary mechanism for the normal man, they form a first principle of natural instinctive selection among the thousand flattering and formidable, helpful and

dangerous impacts of the world around him. The buddhi starts with this material to work on and tries to correct the natural and instinctive by a wiser reasoned and willed selection; for obviously the pleasant is not always the right thing, the object to be preferred and selected, nor the unpleasant the wrong thing, the object to be shunned and rejected; the pleasant and the good, *preyas* and *śreyas*, have to be distinguished, and right reason has to choose and not the caprice of emotion. But this it can do much better when the emotional suggestion is withdrawn and the heart rests in a luminous passivity. Then too the right activity of the heart can be brought to the surface; for we find then that behind this emotion-ridden soul of desire there was waiting all the while a soul of love and lucid joy and delight, a pure psyche, which was clouded over by the deformations of anger, fear, hatred, repulsion and could not embrace the world with an impartial love and joy. But the purified heart is rid of anger, rid of fear, rid of hatred, rid of every shrinking and repulsion: it has a universal love, it can receive with an untroubled sweetness and clarity the various delight which God gives it in the world. But it is not the lax slave of love and delight; it does not desire, does not attempt to impose itself as the master of the actions. The selective process necessary to action is left principally to the buddhi and, when the buddhi has been overpassed, to the spirit in the supramental will, knowledge and Ananda.

The receptive sensational mind is the nervous mental basis of the affections; it receives mentally the impacts of things and gives to them the responses of mental pleasure and pain which are the starting-point of the duality of emotional liking and disliking. All the heart's emotions have a corresponding nervous-mental accompaniment, and we often find that when the heart is freed of any will to the dualities, there still survives a root of disturbance of nervous mind, or a memory in physical mind which falls more and more away to a quite physical character, the more it is repelled by the will in the buddhi. It becomes finally a mere suggestion from outside to which the nervous chords of the mind still occasionally respond until a complete purity liberates them into the same luminous universality of delight which the pure heart already possesses. The active dynamic mind of impulse is the lower organ or channel of responsive action; its deformation is a subjection to the suggestions of the impure emotional and sensational mentality and the desire of the prana, to impulses to action dictated by grief, fear, hatred, desire, lust, craving, and the rest of the unquiet brood. Its right form of action is a pure dynamic force of strength, courage, temperamental power, not acting for itself or in obedience to the lower members, but as an impartial channel for the dictates of the pure intelligence and will or the supramental Purusha. When we have got rid of these deformations and cleared the mentality for these truer forms of action, the lower mentality is purified and ready for perfection. But that perfection depends on the possession of a purified and enlightened buddhi; for the buddhi is the chief power in the mental being and the chief mental instrument of the Purusha.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, pp. 655-662)

‘TO ABIDE ALWAYS IN THEE...’

December 10, 1912

O Supreme Master, Eternal Teacher, it has been once more granted me to verify the unequalled effectivity of a full confidence in Thy leading. Thy Light was manifested through my mouth yesterday and it met no resistance in me; the instrument was willing, supple, keen of edge.

It is Thou who art the doer in each thing and each being, and he who is near enough to Thee to see Thee in all actions without exception, will know how to transform each act into a benediction.

To abide always in Thee is the one thing that matters, always and ever more and more in Thee, beyond illusions and the deceptions of the senses, not drawing back from action, refusing it, rejecting it—a struggle useless and pernicious—but living Thee alone in the act whatever it may be, ever and always Thee; then the illusion is dispelled, the falsehoods of the senses vanish, the bond of consequences is broken, all is transformed into a manifestation of the glory of Thy Eternal Presence.

So let it be. Amen.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 12)

‘THE DIVINE PRESENCE IN MATTER’

Mother, I have not understood this: “It is for this meaningful development of consciousness by thought, will, emotion, desire, action and experience, leading in the end to a supreme divine self-discovery, that Man, the mental being, has entered into the material body.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 82-83)

WHY has the mental being taken a material body? Is that what you are asking?

Sri Aurobindo says, “leading in the end to a supreme divine self-discovery.”

The divine discovery is the discovery of the Divine in oneself. So man, that is, the mental being—for what we call man is a physical body with a mental being within, a mental being manifested in a body, a physical body—so the mental being has incarnated and become man in order to find within himself the divine Being, the divine Presence.

Why? Are you asking why? It’s a funny way of going about it! (*Laughter*)

I don’t know if he is going to explain it here, I don’t remember now, but one thing is certain, that this marvellous thing, the divine Presence in Matter, which is at the origin of the formation of the psychic being, belongs in its own right to life on earth.

So—we have already said this many times, I believe—our earth which from the astronomical point of view seems to be only a small insignificant planet in the midst of all the stars and all the worlds, our earth has been formed to become the symbol of the universe and the point of concentration for the work of transformation, of divine transmutation.

And because of that, in this Matter which was perhaps the most obscure and most inconscient of all the Matter of the universes, there plunged and incarnated directly the Divine Consciousness, from the supreme Origin right into the obscurest Matter, without going through any intermediate stages, *directly*. Consequently, the two extremes touch, the Supreme and the most inconscient, and the universal circle closes. And so earthly life is the easiest means, one might say, or the most rapid, of becoming conscious of the Divine.

And it is so true that even the great cosmic Individualities, when they want to be converted or to unite with the Origin, take a physical body for that, because it is more convenient for them, for it can be done faster and better than if they had to progress through all the states of being, from any one of the states of being in the universe to the supreme Origin.

It is easier to come down into a human body and find the divine Presence there, it is quicker. Imagine the serpent biting its tail, it makes a circle, doesn’t it? So, if something wants to be united with the Divine, it is easier to enter the tail than to go

the whole round of the body! As the head bites the tail, well, if you enter the tail you are immediately in contact with the head, otherwise you have to go all the way round to reach the head.

(*To the child*) Mind you, I am not quite sure if this is what he means, but any way it is one explanation.

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1956*, CWM, Vol. 8, pp. 34-36)

Myself and My Creed

I belong to no nation, no civilisation, no society, no race, but to the Divine.

I obey no master, no ruler, no law, no social convention, but the Divine.

To Him I have surrendered all, will, life and self; for Him I am ready to give all my blood, drop by drop, if such is His Will, with complete joy; and nothing in His service can be sacrifice, for all is perfect delight.

Japan, February 1920

The Mother

(*Words of Long Ago*, CWM, Vol. 2, p. 166)

MACHINERY AND THE LOGICAL INTELLIGENCE

THERE is no doubt that the machines, factories and workshops of the modern age have helped us immensely facilitating our life in many ways; but, at the same time, they have been destroying something in man, the absence of which cannot be replaced by any other thing. Whenever man does any work he takes the help of machines, that is to say, he does not utilise his hands and feet, eyes and ears. At the most, he utilises them only to the extent as is necessary to run the machine. As a consequence, the natural capacities in man's limbs and sense-organs are not getting much scope to blossom; they are getting withered and they are perishing due to disuse or misuse. Sister Nivedita has said somewhere that as the Europeans use spoons and forks for eating, their fingers suffer from a sort of wooden-stiffness and they seem to lack expression. On the contrary, as the people of India make use of their fingers for eating, they look so lively, as if they were a living expression of an idea caught and expressed artistically at every stage. However poetic these words may sound, it cannot be said convincingly that they do not contain any truth in them. We find now-a-days that each one of our students inevitably requires an 'Instrument Box'—they need either a 'foot-ruler' or a 'set-square' in order to draw a straight line. They have virtually forgotten how to draw, just with their hands, a perfect straight line or a neat circle. The clay modeller prepares dolls, the goldsmith makes ornaments, the weaver spins thread and weaves cloth moving so deftly their fingers and observing so keenly with their eyes. The modern craftsman, in contrast, would require so many thermometers, barometers and a host of other apparatus for measurement. But even today we are charmed by the carpentry of a Chinese artisan, whereas the work done by a machine fails to please our eyes. There is no knowing in how many ways the machines have assailed us, overwhelmed us. After the invention of the printing press, printing and dissemination of books has become enormously convenient for us. In the past we needed so much time and labour to print a book, and now the matter has become so easy, so cheap for us. While previously it was so difficult to procure a single book, we can now collect thousands of books for the asking and those too with a variety of get-ups. The printing-type has done us a world of good, but it has driven out one thing which may or may not be useful materially and outwardly, but was the inner essence of man. There was a science or an art of calligraphy which has been destroyed by the assault of the modern printing machines. Formerly every book used to be regarded not merely as a book but as a collection or an album of pictures. But today we are forced to move at every step with the help of and by the grace of machines. We are unable to move forward without their certification. Bereft of machines, we are a helpless lump of matter—*dārubhūta murāri* (God turned into wood).

It is not our purpose here to analyse how the disharmony, the newer forms of injustice, oppression, conflict and strife have emerged in our society or how the health of our people is being wasted or how the moral degradation is taking place as a

consequence of the proliferation of machines and factories. We want to look into the matter from a deeper perspective and focus on a still profounder menace. The fundamental problem is that the very nature of man is undergoing a change: his mental and moral qualities, his impetus towards action and his exaltation, both inner and outer, are dwindling and their sharpness is gradually waning and becoming more and more hardened and inert resulting in a rigid and restricted movement instead of a playful, unobstructed and spontaneous movement of life. We no longer believe in the truth that the sense-organs of man possess an innate power, a keen perception and a flawless instinct. We cannot even imagine any more how infallibly the vigilant sense-organs move, how effortlessly they can master things. That is why the Vedic seers used to call the sense-organs deities; but, in this 'enlightened age', we no longer offer food to the deities, we do not even believe in them. Today the deity is no more, there is only the black geode*—our hands and feet have become inactive due to lack of work, lack of use; or as a result of unenlightened action or imprudent use, they have become blunt and useless.

But the fact is that machines accelerate production, minimise the overall involvement of labour. Besides, we have realised the great value of time and we need commodities also; hence there is no way out without machines. Whether there exists or not any way out, we can see clearly that though we are producing heaps of articles in a great hurry we are getting, really speaking, very few beautiful things. Indeed, beauty is a colour of the heart; how shall we find beauty in things which we have not created with all our heart, with the loving touch of our senses? Still, we do not mind whether we get beautiful things or not, but it is the man himself who is the worst victim—his senses, his heart are becoming inane, powerless and helpless. By slow degrees, we have become so dependent on machines that we can no longer rely easily on our own physical organs, on our own senses; we always harbour this fear lest we should make a mistake, we grope at every moment for apparatus, we want to rely entirely on them, making ourselves completely subservient to them. But whose powers [*vibhūti*] and riches are these apparatus, these machines? Who created them in the beginning? These questions never appear in our mind. The senses are not blind, they are not inanimate—they do not go about merely making mistakes. The senses are like the self-poised Self who knows what to do, where and how. If we can pick up courage to liberate our senses in order that they may move unimpeded in their own way, then we will get in no time the proof of the wonderful power that our senses possess. A man is indeed talented only to the extent he has been able to extricate himself from the tyranny of machines and to the extent he has been able to make his own sense-organs awakened and strong. No one knows which tools were used to build the Taj Mahal or how many cranes and engines and other things were used to construct a Buddhist monastery, yet, it can be said, without an iota of doubt, that they did not use even one percent of the huge and variegated equipment that the present-

**śāliḡrāma*

day engineering knowledge is using to build the Victoria Memorial Hall [Kolkata].

It is true that man is man because he has invented machines, because he knows how to use them; but machines are beneficial so long as they are only instruments. But we find that the machine no longer remains a machine always, it turns out to be a master; coming in close contact with the machine man becomes a part of the machine itself. In this situation, man can no longer wield his wakeful authority, his conscious power to which he is wont; he does not feel that it is he who is creating and controlling things. Though he works, yet it seems as though the work was merely being done by him—he is not moving, he is being moved. He is not the master but only an agent. He ends up losing his sense of uniqueness, freedom and individuality. Man no longer drives the machine, it is the machine who drives man. Even in this modern age, it is in the domain of material science that our Jagadish Chandra has become so successful; the reason is that he had in him the attitude of a master, not of a machine. The Western scientists were most surprised because his subtle theories were based on such simple and unsophisticated machines. Jagadish Chandra had in him a vigilant and independent sense-perception—it is this that created his instruments and it is this that brought even into his instruments such a simplicity and liveliness.

When we talk about machinery, the very first thing that comes to our mind is physical science. In fact, machines are, in a way, a creation of physical science. Along with the development and advancement of physical science, there has been a spectacular growth and improvement of machinery too. If we want to show the deficiencies of machinery, we have to show the deficiencies of physical science itself. It is physical science that has shaped the mind in such a manner that the senses' natural vigour of perception no longer exists and man's spontaneous and lively power of comprehension dies gradually. How does physical science exhort man to see the world, on which part does it put more stress, on which faculty does it rely in order to move? The support of physical science is the logical faculty, the sceptical intelligence of man. Physical science does not want to come to a conclusion immediately and directly—it collects first a few material facts, that is to say, such facts about the veracity of which the gross senses of each and every human being can give evidence; thereafter, it tries to move gradually from cause to effect, from a narrower and grosser truth to a greater and subtler truth by comparing these facts with one another, arranging and putting them in order and discriminating one fact from the other. Even the new truth which it uses is tested in two ways: firstly, it discovers the existence of new material facts from this truth, that is to say, the existence of such facts which the individual sense-organs cannot always seize easily and ordinarily; secondly, it makes sure that this new truth does not take a stand diametrically opposite to the simple material facts—rather it gives a sound explanation for their existence and continues to substantiate them at every step. It is this method that is termed as Scientific or Experimental Method, isn't it?

Now, this method is fraught with two defects. In the first place, our attention

remains always confined to the exterior, we put an excessive emphasis on the material part of the thing, on the slough of it. We hold on tightly to the superficial level of the thing, to its solid, fixed and static aspect with the help of a similar mould that the sense-organs too possess. In other words, the logical faculty gives the Laws of Solids, or to put it in a more general way, the Laws of Gross Expansion of things—the essence or the gist of the Scientific Method is the Geometric Method. But, is solidity the sole property of a thing? Or does the thing extend only in material space? Are there no other properties of a thing or is there no other thing which possesses still more properties of different kinds? If they exist, they cannot be detected through a scientific method. The second defect of this method is that it cannot move even a step forward without comparison and classification. To test and understand a thing, it first segregates the thing, cuts and clips it, and then it starts comparing it with other things, equally segregated, cut and clipped in the same fashion; at the time of this comparison too, it sees each thing analytically, separating one limb from another, opening and tearing out the layers one after another like what one does while peeling an onion. It cannot get the identity of a thing by the self of the thing, keeping each thing entirely as it is and contemplating only upon the thing in question (Patanjali in his *Yogasutra* has termed this process as *samnyama*). Hence the ultimate conclusion of the scientific method is the Law of Relativity—to a scientist, the world is nothing but a system of relations. There is no absolute truth in creation, all truths are relative; one truth depends on another, that is to say, a particular truth is considered to be a truth only when another particular truth proves it to be a truth. Again, this last-mentioned truth also stands leaning against another truth. Thus the creation has as though taken the form of a closed chain. The earth is motionless in relation to the movement of man, but it is in motion in relation to the static position of the sun; the sun again is in motion in relation to the static solar system; the solar system is in motion in relation to the static position of the whole of space. In this way, truth is constantly being reversed. The thing which you call a truth or a fact has no absolute substance either, what we call a thing or a fact is but a sum-total of various properties—even these properties are only a manner of observation. Hard or soft, cold or hot, small or big—everything without exception is comparative, the result of looking at the same thing by relating it to different kinds of things.

We have slipped into the domain of philosophy while talking about science. After all, the fundamental principle of science is included in philosophy itself. In philosophy too the logical intelligence has carved a niche for itself—we would rather say that by the very word philosophy we mean the play of the logical intelligence. Science and philosophy go hand in hand. What we call in one place the Scientific or the Experimental Method, in another place we call the Critical or the Rational Method. What is the Critical or the Rational Method? Its base is doubt; if one wants to attain the truth one must also move relying on this doubt (Descartes). What the ordinary mind accepts easily and directly as truth, the philosophical mind frowns and hesitates

at—it asks: what is right, what is truth? Everything has to be viewed sceptically. Mind is a slave of prejudices and the senses perceive wrongly—therefore, one must begin with nothing, one must make one's mind like a clean slate to begin with, a *tabula rasa* (Locke). Well, suppose we make our mind empty, but then how do we go about it? With the help of reflection [*vicāra*]. Then, what is reflection? After all, the sense-experiences have to be admitted—all right, then admit them, but for the time being only, as experimentation; see what happens after you admit them and also see in what manner they should be admitted so that consistency is maintained in every way and no self-contradiction comes to the surface. Reflection has three steps: admission, denial and synthesis, or, support, opposition and conclusion (Affirmation, Negation, Limitation of Kant and Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis of Hegel). It is the gradual succession of these three steps that constitutes the Critical or the Rational Method. Now, in philosophy, the result of following this method is that the innate and sure sense of reality in man, or more clearly, the common sense in man disappears. The logical intelligence erects an imaginary world, a system of theories bringing out of itself various deductions like a spider; it gets entangled in theories in its quest for the fundamental principle of creation, while the real creation is neglected and left aside.

When we proceed relying on the logical intelligence alone, we do not find any absolute truth in philosophy either, as we did in science. We lose as if the very yardstick of truth which we hold as something real, immutable and eternal. Just as in Science we visualise our world as a System of Relations, so in philosophy too we consider the truth as a System of Consistencies. Truth is that in which there is consistency, and as long as there is consistency there is truth—where there is no inconsistency, either inner or outer, there lies the ultimate truth. The reason is that, by logical intelligence we do not find anything as absolute—everything is phenomenal according to the logical intelligence. The world is only a cumulation of experiences. Reality or Nou-mena is unknown and unknowable to this faculty. The Buddhist philosophy is the culmination of the logical intelligence: it is silent about soul or God or the existence of an eternal Self in creation. Not only is it silent but it does not believe in them at all—it is concerned only with the 'cycle of karma', with the 'collection of momentary cognitions'. In the West, the master of 'Critical' Philosophy, Immanuel Kant, too has shown that the veracity and the existence of soul, God and the original Nature cannot be proved by Pure Reason; he intended to establish these things with the help of another faculty called Practical Reason. Even our Rishis of the past never wanted to treat doubt as the basis of knowledge. According to them, knowledge, true knowledge begins with *śraddhā* [faith]—*śraddhāvān labhate jñānam* (he who has faith attains knowledge). They also said clearly that the Absolute, the Self, the Truth cannot be attained with the help of reflection—*naisā tarkena matirāpaniyā* (this wisdom is not to be had by reasoning); That can be seized by That alone, and not by any other means—

Yamevaiṣa vṛnute tena labhya
Tasyaiṣa ātma vṛnute tanum svam.

(Only he whom this Being chooses can win Him;
 for to him this Self bares His body.)

We shall try to clarify our subject of discussion citing two domains of knowledge where this Critical or Experimental Method is being applied today in a great measure. Let us take history first—especially archaeology, which is related to it. What is the ‘scientific’ method of recovering ancient history? The first and foremost requirement is that the mind should be made free from all sorts of prejudices, anticipations, predilections, from all propensities in all directions—the mind must be vacant (a *tabula rasa*, of which we have already spoken). The next requirement is to collect data without harbouring any likes or dislikes; whatever signs or tokens relating to the happenings and state of affairs concerning the period of history in question are traceable, have to be searched out and assembled—be it a legend, a piece of literature, a ballad, a document, a deed of gift, a coin, royal inscriptions, a handicraft or a piece of art—they have to be gathered as far as possible from all possible sources. Thereafter, they have to be compared, checked and after selection, arranged and placed in order; thus a complete picture has to be derived from them. In other words, the scientific problem of history is this: is it possible to reconstruct a complete creature out of a few pieces of bones that have been discovered, and if possible, what would it be like? Now, if we say that everything hinges on the sleight of hand, shall we be too much at fault? This at least can be said without any hesitation that the scientific method merely gives us a few theories and it may also at its best indicate which one of these theories is more consistent but seldom can it say anything definite about what is pure truth or whether the pure truth is a thing totally different or not. The uncouth wrestle amongst the historians is a clear proof of it. As a consequence, the scientists are reluctant to pay attention to the two defects that lie at the very root of the scientific method, knowing fully well that they cannot be avoided by any means. First of all, it is impossible to collect all the data, yet a decision is taken relying on a few of them. Secondly, the personal equation factor also is there. The mind of the scientist, that is, the mind of man cannot remain vacant—the moment you get the data or begin to put them in order, even the moment you make up your mind to do it, then and there or even before, a rough idea, a formation, be it distinct or indistinct, develops in your mind. Realising very well how difficult it is to get at the pure truth in this manner, Renan, the great thinker and scholar, at the fag end of his mortal days, somewhat frustrated, observed with a sigh: ‘Our poor little conjectural sciences!’

And then comes literature—I shall speak particularly of poetry. Here, not only has the logical intelligence created a confusion, but it has also sacrificed even common sense. We shall try to explain this observation with the help of an example. Let us take the case of the Ramayana. We will have to restore the original Ramayana—now,

even before doing that, it is necessary to prove that there existed the entire epic called the Ramayana and that it was written by a single person. What do we require for this? What is needed is to collect all the manuscripts on the Ramayana wherever they are available in any country. Next, we have to see what we can make out of them after collecting, checking and arranging the internal evidence, that is, the facts mentioned in the manuscripts, distinct (or indistinct). Apart from the internal evidence, we will have to see what is available from the external evidence, that is, whether there are any references in other books and documents or in folklore or legends. Keeping before us these two things, we have to take up some parts of them for comparison and then we will have to decide, we will have to examine whether the Ramayana was written by one person or not, if so, how much of it was written by one person and how much by others. But the point is that in spite of all these planned procedures the proof that ensues from them does not appear to be totally satisfactory or convincing. We find before our very eyes that this type of higher criticism fails to affirm the existence of the poet called Homer and that it considers the *Iliad* as nothing but a collection of ballads scattered here and there over many ages; further, there was no Shakespeare, Shakespeare was no one else than Lord Bacon. This sounds like the story of the great physician who proved by comparing the symptoms with the laws of medical science that the living patient was indeed dead. Or we can call to mind the story of the physician depicted by Molière who exclaimed wide-eyed: “The patient dies without the permission of the physician—what an unmedical proposition!” Such obvious facts are also at times denied by theories or the *sāstras*.

Be that as it may, what we want to say is that the logical intelligence is destroying the taste, the sense of humour—in common parlance, the connoisseurship in literature (not only in literature, but in all domains). We do not recognise Valmiki by the style of Valmiki, we cannot single out a poet or differentiate between two poets from the Roman hand imprinted in poetry. We want to recognise man with the help of a yardstick, that is to say, by measuring the circumference of his head, placing a foot-rule upon his nose, calculating the area of his forehead, surveying the length, width and breadth of his hands and feet. We take resort to physiognomy in order to know the identity of a man. However, even if we do not accept that there is no truth in physiognomy, let us not forget the fact that a man can be known and that the depths of his heart can be fathomed by a mere look, by a single glance at him and it is to this fact that we want to draw our attention.

The main defect of the logical intelligence lies in the fact that in order to understand a thing, it first breaks it into pieces and then collecting and collating those pieces it arrives at a form and thereafter it wants to seize it. It cannot have an integral look at the whole thing. To express it in terms of logical intelligence itself, we can say that the logical intelligence wants to proceed gradually from the particular to the general. This is because the very property of the logical intelligence is that it can hold only one thing and not two things together at a time—*‘eka samaye cobhoyānā-*

vadhāraṇam’ (nor can it be in both states at the same time), adding one with another it arrives at two. It is the particular which is particularly true to it, the general is for it only a means to bind together some particulars, it is not so much a living truth, it is only an abstraction. But the disconcerting fact is that the world is not a sum-total of the particulars only, the infinite is not merely the aggregate of the finites—all the particulars are continuously disappearing into a ceaseless motion (Bergson; *sarvam prāṇa ejati*—All this universe of motion moves in the *Prāṇa*); not only that, all the particulars have been one in a general oneness without a second. Therefore, in order to understand and seize a thing, we may start from this *ekam* [oneness]; it is from this *ekam*, this soul or this permanent Self that we can move towards various external phenomenal things, from this motion, rhythm and life towards immobility, measure and matter. In other words, as there is a way to move from the particular to the general—the way of the logical intelligence, so also there is a way to move from the general to the particular—which is the Intuitive Method, the way of direct realisation, the process of *saṁnyama*.

Now, what is the process of this direct knowledge or of *saṁnyama*? There are three modes or levels of this process. First, *dhāraṇā* [concentration] i.e., the mind—not only the mind, but also the *citta* [the general stuff of mental consciousness], which is the base of the mind, the intelligence and all the modes of the mental consciousness, have to be focused on and fastened to the object to be known and realised—*deśabandhacittasya dhāraṇā* (*dhāraṇā* is fastening the *citta* to one spot). In other words, the first thing needed is resolve—even at the beginning of the ritualistic worship of our deities, we are to make this resolve. Secondly, *dhyāna* [meditation], i.e., the entire *citta*, all the currents of the *citta* have to be pointed to and kept absorbed in the object—*tatra pratyākatanatā dhyānam* (the continuation of the effort at one-pointedness is *dhyāna*). Thirdly, *samādhi* [trance] i.e., the *citta* plunges into the object in such a manner that its familiar outer form as though disappears, while only the substance of the object, its real essence alone shines forth—*tadeva vastu mātra nirvāsam svarupa śūnyamiva samādhiḥ* (in *samādhi* the *citta* loses its own nature, as it were, and shines as the object alone). These three powers constitute the power of *saṁnyama*—*trayamekatra saṁnyamaḥ* (the three together is known as *saṁnyama*). It is through *saṁnyama* that indubitable knowledge can be acquired—*tajjayāt prajñālokaḥ* (by mastery thereof, superior knowledge of the objective world) [is obtained]. In whatever field it may be, not only in the metaphysical or the spiritual field but in worldly or material field as well, one can apply this power of *saṁnyama* and acquire a variety of knowledge concerning these fields—*tasya bhumiṣu viniyogaḥ* (its application is to the varied objective states) [of the *citta*]. One has to be united with the indwelling spirit of the object and one must plunge into one’s own self in order to seize the spirit of the object. As a bee completely absorbs itself in the flower and as it becomes motionless and mute when immersed in drinking honey, so also the mind and intelligence have to quieten their own restlessness and agitation so that the inner

Self, the Purusha alone may continue to relish the *rasa*, the sap of truth. The first requirement is to sow the seeds of resolve in the field of the mind and *citta* after cleansing them thoroughly; next, to germinate them by the force of meditation and by the heat of the inner being's askesis and finally, to sprout them into leaves, flowers and fruits. With the help of mind and intelligence alone one can reach the external body only, the golden vessel of the truth only; if one wants to seize the true nature of a thing, one has to embrace its inner self with one's own inner self. And if one seizes, realises the true nature of a thing, one does not find it particularly difficult to seize, to realise its forms of expression. The saying—*tasmin vijñate sarvam vijñatām* (That being known, all is known) is not a hyperbole, it is but a natural expression.

There are two modes of knowledge: reflection [*vicāra*] and discrimination [*viveka*]. Our fault is that we make reflection all in all and leave discrimination aside and let it perish. But it is discrimination that is the foundation of knowledge, it is a faculty very close to the source of knowledge, whereas reflection is the secondary faculty of knowledge. We can describe the difference between reflection and discrimination in three phases. Firstly, discrimination is self-evident, but reflection is not self-evident—*na tatsvabhāṣam* (but not to itself, as it is not self-illuminating). We use very often the English word 'conscience' to denote discrimination in Bengali; in Sanskrit, though the philosophical sense of discrimination is not that, still there is a remarkable similarity between these two things. Conscience is that faculty which expresses spontaneously and without any deliberation what is *dharma* [righteousness] and what is *adharma* [unrighteousness], what is virtue and what is vice, what is good and what is evil. Likewise, discrimination too declares spontaneously, without any deliberation, what is right and what is wrong, what is truth and what is falsehood. Discrimination is the faculty of a direct identity, and it is for this reason that the second difference between discrimination and reflection presents itself thus: there is no sequence, that is, step by step movement in discrimination (*akramam*—without sequence), but reflection proceeds by following a sequence, grasping one thing after another—because, we have already said that reflection cannot hold two things at a time.

Western philosophy mentions two things called Mediate and Immediate Knowledge; we will say, reflection is Mediate Knowledge—it cannot move without the help of a mediator, and discrimination is Immediate knowledge, neutral and unsupported. To grasp or to understand a thing, reflection takes resort to many other things, moves slowly in a round-about way; it cannot say decisively at the outset about the final goal or the conclusion; it cannot see, at least for the moment, anything more than the goal or conclusion that it has succeeded in grasping for the time being. On the other hand, discrimination can enter directly the heart of a thing, it does not have to depend on any other thing—in the words of the Upanishads, as the arrow hits the target, the knowledge of discrimination too goes in the same manner to the thing to be known, gets to it and merges with it—*śaravat tanmayo bhavet* (one must be

absorbed into That as an arrow is lost in its target). The third difference between reflection and discrimination is that reflection gives the sense of a part—the same form of knowledge of one thing at a particular moment; but in discrimination we get the sense of the whole—the knowledge of various forms of one thing or of many things at a particular moment. The knowledge of discrimination is the synthesis and union of ‘one-many-and-manifold’—*Sarvaviṣayam sarvathā viṣayam kramenceti vivekajam jñānam* (Freed from the notion of succession in time one just gazes at all things at all times. This is called the state of discriminative knowledge).

Reflection does not discover the truth; it is discrimination that discovers the truth, reflection comes later to explain the ‘why’ of it, the ‘how’ of it, to collect evidence for it. Discrimination is like the theorem of geometry, while reflection is its demonstration—Q.E.D. (*quod erat demonstrandum*—which had to be proved). Reflection is not useless, it has its utility. But its utility is felt only at that moment when discrimination upholds reflection from behind. It is when reflection makes the discrimination visible giving it an external form, arranging and dressing it up properly that it can take a firm decision, set a realisable goal and purpose. Reflection becomes effective only when it can establish itself in the physical and make evident to others what is subtle and self-evident in discrimination. Otherwise, reflection becomes a jugglery of argumentation or a play of words—a repetitive turning of the mind—*andhenaiva niyamānā yathāndhāḥ* (like blind men led by one who is himself blind).

Now, the point is that we understand the thing called reflection, we see its existence in man—but where is discrimination? If a thing exists, it exists everywhere, under all circumstances. We find reflection everywhere in all circumstances, but why don’t we find discrimination? If discrimination is a faculty or a property of man, then it must be there in the natural and general play of man’s mind. But as we say to God, don’t we feel like saying to discrimination also: ‘Verily thou art a god that hidest thyself.’ Is it really so? As a matter of fact do we not see that in normal circumstances, man does not act so much with reflection as he does with discrimination? In every matter, man takes a decision straightaway under the simple and straightforward impulse of a feeling—if he does resort to reflection and reasoning, he does it afterwards and not beforehand. But, in reply, it will be said that this is like equating discrimination with sense-perception, and demoting and restricting man to the level of gross senses absolving him from the hold of reflection. It is true that the common man moves straight ahead under the fresh impulse of feeling; but, certainly that is not the genuine thing—it is thus that he makes mistakes and errors. To act according to his reflective intelligence, controlling his impulse of innate feeling is man’s manhood; otherwise there would not have been any difference between man and the inferior creatures. We would like to reply that the inferior creatures which move according to the natural and alert instincts and senses, never make any mistake. In them there is such a link and harmony between the senses and the object in view that they have, by virtue of an unwavering allegiance to their senses, established a simple

and unbreakable hold on the object or the thing. Reflection and argumentation intervening in man have separated the senses from the object, severed the link and harmony between the two, and are now trying to establish a laboured link and harmony.

The second point is that the natural and infallible perception of the inferior creatures is blind and ignorant and its field is the narrow animal mind. This perception is in them only for satisfying the demands of their vital sheath, that is to say, for their self-preservation and reproduction. Yet, the mind or the sense-perception of the animal is sharp, alert, unsceptical and correct within the limits of its requirements. On the other hand, the mental sheath in man yearns to be established in the Gnostic sheath overcoming the predominance of his vital sheath. The 'self' in man does not want to do anything in self-oblivious ignorance like the 'self' of the animal. Man wants to become conscious and awaken not only the feelings but the sense of the feelings as well and thereby widen and diversify his field of consciousness. Here lies the difference between animal and man. Reflection is a means to awaken self-consciousness in the natural sense-perceptions—but it is a means only. Discrimination is another means and not only that, it is discrimination that is the real and true means. Reflection builds a discord between the soul and the body, between the sense and the object, because the first step of self-awareness to know oneself, to recognise the soul, is this discord, this antithesis, this knowledge of difference between Purusha and Prakriti, this negation—*neti, neti*. But this discord, antithesis, knowledge of division are not final—after the knowledge of division, even within the knowledge of division, there is an intimate knowledge of unity and within the truth of diversity where there was or is only the truth of antithesis, there is established or there already exists a truth of unity. At first, we see the separate truth of each thing, the truth of one thing standing in opposition to that of another—this is the field of reflection and argumentation; then we find that the truth of each thing rests as it is, united in oneness with the other—this is the function of discrimination.

Man is considered as man because he has reflection and discrimination in him. However, reflection separates man fully from the animal, while discrimination helps him to grasp the thread of union between the two. Reflection represents and suppresses the natural spontaneous feeling, it only examines this feeling by cutting it into pieces, while in discrimination that natural feeling reappears wholly after being transformed. What is spontaneous feeling in ordinary consciousness is discrimination in self-consciousness. Therefore, when we say that man should not be a slave of reflection and argumentation, that he should awaken, sharpen his spontaneous feeling, then it does not mean that man has to revert to the animal level, it only means that the instinctive feeling of the inferior creature has to be awakened. In other words, he must be made self-conscious, he must turn this feeling into a higher faculty, i.e., into discrimination. We say here 'must be', but as a matter of fact, it is this very thing that is taking place. We have already stated that by nature man moves under the impulse of an instinctive feeling and discrimination, reflection wants to present this very feeling

in a mature and orderly manner. There is a still subtler faculty of knowledge even above discrimination, even within discrimination—this is called the Divine Vision or Revelation or *Kaivalya Jñāna*—Knowledge of Aloneness (Patanjali says that discrimination is the state that precedes *kaivalya*)—but there is no need to dwell upon it here. In man there are at different levels faculties that are involved one in another. In fact, man's knowledge moves gradually from the innermost cavern to the outer. But the inner levels of knowledge remain involved. In the process of evolution the more we ascend the more the inner faculties are evolved. In the animal-like physical man mainly the sense-perception is awakened and manifested, whereas in the civilised, educated and cultured man we find a preponderance of reflection and logical intelligence. Those who are endowed with talent, have in them the discrimination, the divine vision which is far above the logical intelligence. Excepting in the talented, this hidden subtle faculty has not developed amongst common people because they have not reflected the light of their own consciousness on this faculty, they have not concentrated on it, they have not cultured it—they rely more on the logical intelligence and it is by this logical intelligence that they try to suppress it. At a particular stage of evolution, by virtue of the spirit of the age, the autocracy of reflection and argumentation has, therefore, been established.

We were talking about machinery in the beginning. In the modern world, in the field of mind and heart, reflection and argumentation have gained prominence over discriminating sight; it is for this reason and it is in the same manner that machines hold sway over human sense-organs in the external field of work. There is an inextricable cause-and-effect relationship between these two pairs—the relation that exists between the logical faculty and discrimination is the same as between machines and sense-organs. The straight-forward vision of discrimination and the instinctive feeling of the senses move hand in hand, while the orderly sequence, the methodical arrangement of the logical intelligence and the rigid states of the machinery go hand in hand. The knowledge that discrimination imparts contains an integrality, an entirety, a kind of wideness and intimacy, a sense of joy, while the knowledge imparted by the logical intelligence is partial, fragmentary—it is formal. What the conscious organs of action create contains a free, vivid and beautiful movement of life; and what the machines create is clipped, made according to measure to a degree, like a bare skeleton—as if the one is a picture and the other a geometric figure.

Man has a necessity of the reflective intelligence, there is also no such compulsion that the machines too have to be dispensed with lock, stock and barrel. But if the reflective intelligence becomes the master of the faculty of which it should be the follower, if the machines transgress their creator and swallow him, then the kind of loss or misfortune that befalls man is what we have been talking about.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(Courtesy SACAR, for this essay taken from *Education and Initiation*, translated by Amarnath Dutta from the Bengali original—*Shikkha O Dikkha*, first published in 1926.)

A FEW NOTES ON MY EARLY YEARS

[*AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MATTER WRITTEN IN 1951*]

THE moment I was born the big lamp in our drawing-room flared up. My father had to answer the frightened servant's cry and run from my mother's side to prevent a fire. The English lady-doctor in attendance on my mother took the flaring lamp as an omen and said: "This boy will be a great man." It seems to me that she went beyond her data and should have confined herself to saying: "This boy will be a fiery fellow." I displayed from the beginning a very hot temper and the fury with which I, as a baby, yelled and grew red in the face was worthy of a Riza Shah Pahlevi. And it is quite on the cards that I might have become a soldier or at least a man of action if misfortune had not dogged my steps in my third year. In the literal sense my *steps* were dogged by misfortune, for a severe form of infantile paralysis attacked my legs.

I was a sturdy baby and could as a small child walk up and down the hill-station of Matheran and was once daring enough to get myself lifted to the back of a huge horse hired by my father and disappear for nearly an hour with the 'syce'. Among my other exploits was grabbing ugly-looking insects and playing the Grand Inquisitor with them without the least nervousness. For a child of bounding spirits to be struck down by just one night of fever and lamed for life was indeed a catastrophe. The disease attacked not only my left leg but also a part of my right and affected even my speech, so that I have retained up to this day a certain stammer on occasion. The heel of the left foot was pulled up so much that I had to walk with my hand pressed to my knee in order to keep the foot down to the floor-level. Such a way of walking was bound to cause spinal curvature in the long run. What prevented that deformity and greatly decreased the paralytic effects was the operation performed in London, where I was taken in my fifth year by my father, himself a brilliant doctor, and my mother, who had a natural nursing ability.

The trip to London stands out in my memory from the haze of childhood. Prior to that I can only remember the electric shocks received, evening after evening, by my limp left leg in the room of a doctor to whom my father had submitted me for treatment.

I became a writer of poetry overnight. For no sooner did a cousin of mine who was then at College mention that he was writing verses about a girl called Katie than I resolved to outdo him. I asked him how many lines he had written altogether. "Three hundred," he said. Within two days I had penned five hundred lines. They were piffle more or less but here and there was a genuine drive towards self-expression which my cousin noticed and appreciated.

This cousin of mine had much to do with my literary awakening in many ways—and was also responsible indirectly for several complications in my mind. It was he who introduced me to the Major Poets. That was in my very first year at school. I

began reading with him, and afterwards continued reading by myself, the plays of Shakespeare, the oriental narratives of Byron and almost all the poems of Shelley. Wordsworth and Tennyson followed suit, with Keats coming soon after.

It was only when I came to the fourth standard that I resolved to pay attention to my studies. In the meantime I had written prolifically: two interminable poems in the Byronian *ottava rima*, based on surreptitious feasting on *Beppo* and *Don Juan* (two works my father as well as my grandfather had forbidden me to read), long rhymed versions of the lives of Napoleon and Shivaji, an imaginary history in verse of an Utopia, a few plays, thousands of gnomic couplets, twenty-six novelettes, each with an alliterative title like 'The Sign of the Serpent' or 'The Mine of Madrid'—novelettes which I used to read to my private tutor, an aged Hindu, every morning when he came to coach me in mathematics. He particularly relished the detective yarns I turned out and I would make him scratch his head and sit guessing who the criminal was before allowing him to proceed with the story. Every time my father or mother entered the room we would hide the novelettes under the mathematics book and loudly start pretending we were doing 'sums'. The old man was a great sport—of course to my mathematical detriment—and proud were the hours for me when I saw the gleam of admiration in his eyes at the variety of plot I had spun and my thrilling development of episode on episode.

I don't know how long the conspiracy would have gone on if it had not been cut short one day by a terrific slip my tutor had on our staircase. With a crash as of a whole set of furniture breaking up, he tumbled from the fourth floor to the third and landed at the foot of the flight with his head below and his legs high up. He was unable to regain the normal position until I with my mother and the rest of the family behind me rushed to the scene and pulled his legs down and lifted his head up. After this accident my private tuition was dropped. I sometimes think my tutor's own drop was caused by his getting too absorbed in an intricate and intriguing crime-situation I had invented in the story with which both of us had been busy that morning.

The atmosphere of my home was conducive to literary as well as artistic inspiration. My father—a gold-medallist in medicine—was an extremely clever man with a multiplicity of interests. His reading was profuse and covered all subjects from poetry and fiction to occultism and astrology. When the day was over, there would frequently be an after-dinner sitting, with father reading to us out of a book. He had a bulky tome of his own in which he used to put down the best passages he came across in prose and poetry. He would often read out to us from it and we would listen to whatever he read as if it were holy scripture. The quintessence of the whole world's wisdom seemed to be there. And our attitude to it was like that of Caliph Omar to the Koran when the news was brought to him that the famous library of Alexandria had been set on fire by his army. He was expected to give orders to put out the fire. But he said: "If the books there contain the same thing as the Koran, they are superfluous. So let them burn. If they contain something contrary to the Koran, they are pernicious.

Then too let them burn.” We children often thought that if there was a fire in our house what we would first grab and run out with was father’s book of quotations.

On several occasions father’s reading out to us would be followed by his playing his violin and mother singing in accompaniment, while I and my brother (two years younger than myself) and my little sister (many years junior to both of us) would be sprawling on the carpet. As likely as not, I would be sketching my father’s profile: apart from his nose the special feature that attracted me in his face was the disposition of the hair on his high forehead in the Sherlock Holmes manner, which seemed to me such a wonder that I once pleaded with him that I should be allowed to have my hair cut to create for myself also a high forehead with receding corners and a strip of hair running out in the middle like a promontory! I may mention here that on the strength of my portraits of my father and other sketches as well as paintings, I was fondly looked upon as a budding Raphael. The hope that I would some day come off as painter in flying colours has not been fulfilled though pencil-work and brush-play came easy to my hand and I could turn them to forceful imaginative uses. Quite early I had to choose between literature and painting, for the urge to both was so great that to yield fully to the one pursuit would have excluded indulgence in the other. I plumped for the pen: it served more satisfyingly those unfathomable secrets within, which Keats had felt as an awful warmth about the heart like a load of immortality. But I have the dream that some day I shall isolate a few years of my life in an ideal studio and project in coloured scene and symbol the poetic visions that always press upon my mind. So far I have illustrated only two of my poems.

Owing to my literary exercises as well as my profound studies of the Zoroastrian scriptures and, to a lesser degree, the Bible at home I found myself head and shoulders above my class-mates and had an exceptionally brilliant school-life, once actually carrying away all the prizes except that in mathematics, which subject—thanks to my private tutor’s predilection for my novelettes—had remained my weak point. Brilliance of academic career continued up to my B.A. Only my matriculation was a poor affair—it marked the sole gap in distinction in English won every year for nine years. In my Intermediate Arts examination I made, I believe, a record by winning the Selby Scholarship in Logic as well as the Hughlings Prize for English, and my graduateship was marked by what was regarded as perhaps a rarer phenomenon: a student of Philosophy Honours happened to beat all the Literature students in Compulsory English and took the Bombay University’s coveted Ellis Prize. I lost my first class in Philosophy by a small margin after my case had been discussed by the examiners. I was told that I did not evince sufficient familiarity with the prescribed textbooks. My reply was that I had appeared not as a student of philosophy but as a philosopher! After my graduation I was advised from home to take up law. I detested law and having been freshly launched on a rather lawless individualistic life I decided to have two more academic years for natural as well as artistic self-growth and went in for M.A. studies.

Ever since early boyhood my father had set me two ideals to follow: to speak the truth and feel no fear. His way of training me up was to assume straight away that I never told lies and that I was always brave. Such an assumption had a powerful compulsive effect on me. I felt that I must never disappoint my father or shatter his ideal of me. So I suffered agonies of self-control in dark places which any normal child would have run away from, and I developed a most ingenious system of equivocation in order not to sneak on my friends whenever I was called upon to act George Washington. My 'courage' once or twice enraged my own father, for, on the very few occasions he caned me on the palms I refused to cry and kept laughing brazenly in his face. This courage has also taken me through most difficult and dangerous passes. Nobody could believe that a lame boy whose left leg had very little voluntary movement and whose right one had none too good muscles could dare to be a horse-rider for over fifteen years—and that too at a canter or gallop—since the rise and fall in the saddle necessary for trotting could not be well managed with such legs. Innumerable times have I saved myself by a hair's breadth from falling off a furiously galloping animal. Most risky of all my riding trips was the fast one along the turns and twists with precipitous edges of the long run from Dehradun to the Himalayan foot-hill Mussoorie six thousand feet above sea-level. The fact that I had only one serious accident in all my riding career speaks volumes both for my good luck and the reckless grit with which I was determined not to look a fool in a family of excellent horsemen. My method of keeping poised on the back of a horse was to fix my knees to the saddle by pulling over them the hanging leather straps in which the stirrups were held. This method was fraught with danger as I found when I once lost my balance and dangled from a galloping horse with my head an inch or two away from the ground and my right leg entangled in the straps! Luckily the animal soon stopped, surprised to find my face right under its own nose. I think I have fully accomplished the ideal of courage given me by my father.

I entered St. Xavier's College with a mind razor-sharp and an imagination richened by a many-sided culture. Literature was still my main inspiration, but together with it I had found another source of inner growth: this was philosophy. My early preoccupation with religious studies had inclined me towards questions of metaphysics and in an irregular way I had brooded quite a deal on the problems of soul, free-will and God. For a schoolboy to be caught up in such serious matters was a rather bewildering spectacle to many people. I had collected a whole library of philosophical classics—Plato and Seneca and Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius were my daily companions. I cannot aver that I understood all they had written but I did imbibe in general the metaphysical attitude and appreciated with keen logical pleasure the general unfolding of their systems. Perhaps more deeply felt by me than their metaphysics was the discussion they stirred up of the problems of good and evil, of justice, charity and equanimity. The practice of philosophy, so to speak, became my ideal and even my father was struck with the wise air I used to carry about me. Not

that I grew dull and platitudinous—I remained alert in intellect and exercised a keen ingenuity with regard to most topics that came up for consideration. But I lost the old hot temper, became full of understanding and the boy who had at one time been the despair of his parents for his reckless and wayward disposition—a disposition which on a few occasions made me almost indulge in obstinate physical tussles with my father—took on a most gentle manner. This gentleness was the outcome of my ‘philosophical’ development and did not reflect any weak or goody-goody element in my nature. For the mind remained critical and forceful. Only, at the moment its critical force was turned against cheap materialism and cheap eroticism. The part played by my Jesuit teacher was evident here; but his influence worked in another and more unexpected direction too. He was a man with a strong scientific bent; religion, philosophy and art were rich enough in him, yet the most dynamic side of him was scientific. In response to his general magnetism for my imagination I turned to the fascinating realms of science. At first it was the storing up, in my memory, of various interesting facts about things, then a study of the processes of Nature and life, and finally a confrontation of the ultimate issues by the scientific outlook. While this was going on, I was drawn by a kind of mental-strength affinity with my Jesuit teacher to strong critical semi-pragmatic intellects wielding the literary pen in English.

I was in the habit of exchanging reading matter with a friend and one day he gave me the plays of Bernard Shaw. It proved a momentous event. Bernard Shaw strode like a laughing colossus over my mind and I could never read enough of him: his pungent, penetrating, humbug-proof and dare-all advocacy of new ideas and ideals made the growing strength of my own intellect look around and feel that there was cheap religionism as well as cheap materialism, puritanical sham no less than erotic tawdriness. At this psychological stage, the full drive of the scientific movement came home to me. Shaw had dabbled in biology and his theory of the Life Force was attractive and inspiring but did not then seem to me quite a logical assumption. Shaw’s biological philosophy took me to biological science proper and there I met another big figure, Ernst Haeckel. I found that there was a large literature about Haeckel: the Jesuits had done their best to ‘heckle’ him and to ‘riddle’ with criticism his famous *Riddle of the Universe*. But nothing they wrote could ever equal the perfectly poised yet deadly championship of Haeckel by that Catholic priest who had renounced Rome, Joseph McCabe. McCabe I regard as the most powerful factor in the demolition of orthodoxy in the English-speaking world in the first twenty-five years of the present century. There was nobody in that period so inexhaustibly, indomitably, effectively anti-Rome and anti-religious. He had a first-class scientific brain with a first-class critical faculty equipped with a balanced yet not bloodless style, a stimulating and finely organised gift of word working in a range of knowledge that was both culturally and scientifically broad. He had certain serious *lacunae* in his mind, but these I discovered much later with the help of Indian philosophy and the extraordinary experiences which are the commonplace of the East. Lesser defects I lighted upon

during my early College days, defects that the re-reading of the major poets laid bare, defects of appeal to the higher idealistic imagination without which Art would cease to be a living force.

All these things, however, were forgotten in the first flush of my enthusiasm for Haeckel. What Haeckel and McCabe gave me was a spur to tear to pieces the complacent dogmas of orthodoxy. As soon as I began to reason things out, I saw that the so-called proofs about God and the immortal soul were open to criticism. The vast accumulation of scientific fact in the nineteenth century seemed to support this criticism and to be utilisable for carrying the war deeper and deeper into the celestial country. Still, it was no easy thing to give up God. A very long while, my emotions fought against my intellect. I suffered fits of sombre depression, a tearing at the vitals made me miserable whenever I wanted to reject the unseen Friend whom I had taken to my heart so fervently in my early school days. Under the night sky I would sit with tears in my eyes at the prospect of infinite emptiness where there had once been an invisible omnipresence. I put up every argument I could to keep in its place the old religious conviction, but nothing was of any avail against the relentless march of the outward-looking analytic mind. At last I became an atheist. Something in me heaved a sigh of relief. I understand it now to have been the sense of freedom from the bigoted background of all orthodoxy, the obscurantist tendency latent in every formal creed, the puritanical bleakness which is half sincere and half hypocritical in each religion. A strange courage flowed into me as at long last I had become my own master and could carve life to whatever shape I liked. There was as yet no desire to live lawlessly, no licentious impulse; my atheism was intellectual and dispassionate and though it rejected puritanism it had not been tinged by the subtle sensuality of an Anatole France or the Dionysiac zest of a D'Annunzio.

I distinctly remember the day on which I declared my atheism to my father. I was still at school, but this was a holiday. It was nearing noon. I was sitting at my desk reading Haeckel. My father had noticed some time before that I was devouring scientific books and he had marvelled how I could take in with delight such heavy stuff. Now he came from his morning medical round and saw me absorbed in my study. He leaned over my shoulder and found it was Haeckel I was poring over. I think he made a remark to the effect that Haeckel was rather blind to religion. I lifted my face and slowly said that I too feared that there wasn't a God. The shock to my father was as if a thunderbolt had struck him. He went pale and said that he did not wish the wrath of the Almighty to be brought down upon his house. I plucked up courage and replied that the wrath could come only if the Almighty existed and that I was pretty sure He didn't. Baffled, my father left me and I believe he was very much troubled in mind. But he had enough admiration for his son's intellect not to adopt an intolerant attitude: he began to talk with me at night and argue out the issue. I am afraid I made mincemeat of his arguments. Then he suggested that I should meet some noted *savants* of our community who were in a position to discuss theology

and philosophy. I accepted the suggestion with a war-whoop as I felt I could give them all a tough fight and deal them a decisive knock-out. Forthwith I projected a treatise logically and scientifically demolishing all the supports of religion. I took up point after point and kept enlarging the treatise until it became almost a book. My father waited for the *magnum opus* to get complete. I admire the way he handled me. After that first outburst he was all tact and understanding and even in such a crisis he never forsook the warm sympathetic relationship he had established between himself and his children as between friends. I was the first atheist in the old and large Sethna family, I had done something unprecedentedly shocking—but the intellectual in my father was equal to the occasion and gave me ample room for free thought and free speech. Perhaps he had the confidence that in course of time I would outgrow my folly. He did not see the day I plunged into Yoga and found God to be the most intense and constant fact of my life. Nor did he see the end of my materialistic book. For I could not finish it soon and just a year after my matriculation he died suddenly of heart-failure early one morning.

The death of so fine a man and so beloved a parent was a tremendous blow. I missed him terribly; but his absence caused a new strength to awaken in me. Up to then I had been dependent a good deal on him for guidance in practical matters. His death threw me back upon myself; I had to tap my own resources, face difficulties, meet people and get things done. Also his presence had served as a moral light; its removal unloosed energies and passions that in the three remaining years of my undergraduateship went rather recklessly forward. The intellect was never submerged, it burned and shone with ever-increasing force; the poetic imagination was still a great light transforming all commonplaces and keeping a golden gate open for the true soul in me. I was no more a mere precocious dreaming yearning searching adolescent: I became with an all-round wakefulness and a multi-mooded realism a grappler with life adventuring between the abyss and the empyrean: in short, a man.

And with the advent of the man I may appropriately close these few notes on my early years.

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

NOLINI-DA—A REMEMBRANCE IN REVERENCE

IN the mid to late 1970s I had a series of remarkable visits from Nolini-da. To the waking consciousness little remains, which is as it should be, yet the remembrance of his kind and gentle teaching holds a sweetness to which I return again and again.

Nolini-da was for many a formidable force who often displayed a fierce demeanour, causing one to think twice about coming before him. Yet something in me knew that he was only acting as the lion at the gate, giving one pause to reflect on whether an issue was important enough to take up his time. To me, however, he always lowered the mask so that I might know him as an elder brother, a helper and guide to keep me focused always on the Mother's feet.

I remember the time when my wife Mary Helen and I went to him just after my head had been stitched and bandaged at the hospital in Pondicherry. A stone had split it open during the infamous confrontation at Bharat Nivas. I had rushed in while calling Mother's name to pull a friend and brother away from those who were beating him viciously with clubs. I recall very clearly speaking Mother's name aloud as I reached him and immediately the violence ceased. I guided him to safety but just as he was free and I was nearly away, I believe I stopped calling Mother's name, for then a stone opened my scalp and someone had to pull me to safety.

I remember being so shaken that this could have happened in Auroville, and even though weak from the loss of blood and the stitching of the wound, I asked Mary Helen if she would come with me to see Nolini-da. We arrived at his room late in the day and he immediately came out. Seeing my condition he was shocked. "What happened to you?" he said. I told him and he became very quiet, with a look of such intense love and concern that I will carry the moment ever within my soul. Looking deeply into my eyes he quietly spoke and said: "Take no part in all of this." He then caressed me and gave me his blessing. These words penetrated me deeply and gave me an understanding of the plane that we must reach in Auroville, above all conflicts and ideologies, towards a true collective harmony.

But now to return to the beginning of my remembrance. I now know that Sri Aurobindo and Mother send representatives or emissaries from time to time to help the growing soul. I had been the recipient of such blessings more than 10 years before, when another of their disciples came to me. In a similar way, Nolini-da began visiting me at night when I was asleep. It seemed that he was with me for hours, teaching me in a voice filled with love and sweetness,—this emissary sent to speak to my soul and guide me ever closer to the Lord, Sri Aurobindo and Mother.

I cannot now recall how many days or even weeks this continued or all of the things he taught me, nor do I wish to do so with the reasoning mind, as Mother once told me (through Pavitra) that I need not try and reconstruct any experience mentally for it would bring about a deformation of it that would be quite useless. I did go to Nolini-da at one time and asked him about his coming to me night after night. He

only smiled and said some non-committal things causing me to understand that I should be silent and not question further with the inquisitive mind. Then, with a twinkle in his eye and poking me a little, he said, “Who knows, it could even be your own soul!”

I remember Nolini-da so often these days and seem to feel him very close. I thank Mother and Sri Aurobindo for his being amongst us. He was a model for me of a true disciple of the Integral Yoga.

Experience with Nolini—1

I do not have a date on the following note, but it was in the late 70s, prior to the meeting on my birthday in July 1979.

A couple of days before my birthday I wrote to Nolini asking if I could see him on that day, giving a brief summary of recent events regarding the Matrimandir, and asking the following question: “Is Auroville, individually and collectively, now strong enough to stand on its own and seek the truth of its being or is a reconciliation with the Sri Aurobindo Society necessary?” Mary Helen gave him the letter and he told her I should come on the morning of my birthday.

When we were near the door he warmly called: “Come in, come in, sit down anywhere, all places are the same!” and indicated to Mary Helen to take his secretary’s chair while I sat on the floor near him. Though we can’t reconstruct his words completely we will try to give the substance of what he said and hopefully convey something of the feeling behind the words. It was an aspect of Nolini one rarely sees, a great sweetness and closeness, and contrary to his usual tendency to avoid commenting on any current situation, he spoke generously and candidly to us for more than 10 minutes.

He began speaking about Auroville and the numerous experiments Mother was making there. He said: “She is trying a thousand ways”, and spoke of individuals and groups as units expressing or working out something specific. He said the whole world is like that but... “You haven’t come here to be like the rest of the world, you’ve come here to realise the Oneness, the Unity. That is why She is building up Auroville—it is to be the last refuge of the world.”

Then he said, pointing to each of us in turn, “Your body (to Mary Helen) and your body (to me) and my body may all look different but they are not, they are all the same...they are all Her body, really. She has put a part of Herself into each of us.”

Regarding the question in my letter he said, “...It need not happen like that...” and he spoke at length about the necessity for goodwill. He said it can’t be just a superficial goodwill but “a deep sincere ‘bonne volonté’”. He repeated this many times in different ways and then spoke of the destructiveness of rancour. He said rancour and hatred... “eat at the consciousness, it makes a man as low as an animal,

no, lower, a worm or an insect; it comes from the lowest part of the being.” Then he said the world is in such a state “...but one has to be a guru to be the leader of a nation.”

Then he was quiet for a while. When he spoke again, referring to goodwill he said, “I tell you this because it is your birthday, that you have the capacity.” He was silent for a moment then said, “No one has the capacity, it is all Her.” “One only has to see Her for a moment.... She casts Her glance... and it is enough.” I then asked him, “What about the Matrimandir?” He said, “Do not trouble yourself about it, it will go on. The work means nothing.”

He was quiet for a moment, then smiled, and we got up to leave. He asked me: “Have I given you your card?” His secretary gave him a card and two blessing packets and handing the card and one blessing packet to me he said in a joyous, powerful, resonant voice, “Bonne Fête!”, carrying something in it of the way Mother wished us a happy birthday. I bent down to touch his hand and he held my head with both of his hands, giving me his blessings. Then he took Mary Helen’s hand firmly in his, pressed the blessing packet into it and held it there for a long time, giving us all the while the most radiant smile.

Experience with Nolini—2

On My Birthday July 29, 1979

When I entered his room he broke into a smile of deep tenderness and said to me: “Richard”. A few hours have now passed and I have had a little time to reflect on the love and sweetness he has bestowed on me, though, as I always felt with Mother, a lifetime would be needed to fully absorb such a force. His using my former name has made a profound impression. I felt something in it of the timeless friendship of an elder brother for a younger, for almost all my inner experiences except for X, Mother and Sri Aurobindo, have been with Nolini.

I had picked many of the new colours and forms of ‘Psychological Perfection’ and I arranged them on a tray with Mary Helen’s help. He looked at the flowers for a long time, something I had not observed before, and then expressed concern that the tray should be returned to us. Then he looked at me and said: “All right?” I nodded yes and he said: “I have not been quite all right, I have been feeling a little weak, my heart.” And then, with a tenderness that is inexpressible, he caressed my head, my face, passing his hand so softly over my cheeks and finally placing it gently on my shoulder. I gave him some sweets that had come from the U.S. and I asked Mary Helen to give him a cupcake she had baked. She wanted me to give it to him as she was always a bit shy but he said, clearly and joyously: “Let her give it.” And she placed it in his hand as he held hers. He then held my hand for a long time and finally

smiled, a smile that filled the room and all the fibres of my being. I am not a poet and I would struggle with words to describe something that I shall carry into eternity. I can only say that I experienced behind the human mask of Nolini, a treasure vast and immeasurable, the smile of Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

In the Ashram courtyard Mary Helen quietly said to me: “I felt he was saying good-bye to you.”

Afterwards I went to see Huta and I mentioned my meeting with Nolini. She was surprised and happy that he had seen me because he had not been seeing people since his illness. But then she said: “It was his way of saying good-bye to you.”

There is no sadness at the thought of this, for if he stays, it will be by Her Grace and if he leaves, it will be Her Will.

His soul is a subtle atom in a mass,
 His substance a material for her works.
 His spirit survives amid the death of things,
 He climbs to eternity through being's gaps,
 He is carried by her from Night to deathless Light.

(*Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 28, p. 64)

(Written after returning from seeing Nolini on my birthday, 1979.)

Experience with Nolini—3

It was a painfully difficult period in Auroville during the mid-1970s. Our work of preparing plants for the Matrimandir Gardens was strenuous and intensive. We worked seven days a week, usually eight hours or more per day. Our food situation was meagre, the heat was unrelenting, and we often had no electricity at night during the hottest months. In short, I found myself exhausted.

I went to Nolini's office and he greeted me warmly as always. I looked into his eyes and said: “Nolini, I need my batteries recharged.” Immediately, he put both of his hands on top of my head and held them there for two minutes or so. Then he said quietly and with a smile that seemed to contain the love of all the world: “They are recharged.” The feeling I experienced was one of such lightness and freedom it is indescribable, as if I could have soared out of his room.

As I left, Anima was on the side reciting a little rhyme she had made up on the spot, using my name: “Reechard, Recharged, Reechard, Recharged.”

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS

(Continued from the issue of July 2004)

(15)

Mother Divine,


Pray accept this offering of Rs. 100.00 as my offering to Sri Aurobindo's centenary.

And my prayer to You—may I be worthy of His centenary.

With pranams,

2-1-72

Your child
Abani

Blessings


(Concluded)

STUDY OF WORLD HISTORY—TOWARDS A NEW APPROACH

IN our modern techno-commercial culture the study of history has lost its appeal for young minds. There are many reasons for this lack of interest in history among modern youth. The first reason is the lack of employment opportunities for the scholars of history. In our industrial age where education is no longer the great instrument of culture, but reduced to the status of an instrument of “economic growth” for producing efficient, skilled and productive workers for industry and commerce, history is possibly the least “job-oriented” among the fields of knowledge. But even among students who are less job-oriented and more inclined towards research and pursuit of knowledge, history holds no attraction because it is viewed as the knowledge of the past with little relevance for the present or future.

But is this the purpose of history? Is it a mere record of the past with no value for the present or future? Does this flow of events, people, ideas, achievements, failures, calamities and euphoria of the past have any meaning at all or, as one of the characters of Shakespeare contends, is it a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, but signifying nothing? In this article we will be exploring an approach towards a vision of History based on Sri Aurobindo’s insights, which will make the study of history an exciting and meaningful intellectual voyage into the past experiences and the future destiny of humanity.

The Nature of History

What precisely is the nature of history? There are many ways of looking at history. The angle of vision depends on our view of man and his progress on earth. The angle we want to explore views man as a living conscious organism seeking a progressive fulfillment or self-realisation, and in the process developing his potentialities and evolving towards his terrestrial destiny. For Man, since the day he stood erect on earth, is seeking for some form of fulfillment and his history is the story of his eternal seeking for fulfillment. The human march through history is the record of this progressive seeking of man, his effort and struggle, his successes and failures, in his search for fulfillment of his body, life, mind and soul.

The first and the most primitive seeking of man is the effort towards survival and security and the fulfillment of his basic instincts and the needs of his body. This is the source of a large part of early economic history and the beginning of social history. When these basic needs of his body are to a certain extent fulfilled he seeks for a greater enjoyment of life. This is the other major motive behind the economic history of man especially of the modern age. The need for wealth is the more external expression of this inner need for enjoyment. For man seeks for wealth not for its own sake but for the means it gives for the better enjoyment of life. At present, this need

for enjoyment has grown into a multi-billion dollar business in what is now called the leisure and entertainment industry.

As the human being progresses in his consciousness he becomes aware, successively or simultaneously, of two major clusters of needs of his life-force or vital being. First are the needs of the life-force in the heart of man for love and to be loved, and some form of mutually beneficial and harmonious relationship with others. This is the source of the later part of social history. The second cluster of life-needs are the needs of the life-force in the will and the pragmatic mind in man for power, conquest, mastery, order, efficiency, expansion and progress. This is the source of political history and also much of economic history in the modern age.

Again, as the human being progresses further up in the evolutionary ladder, he becomes aware of the needs of his higher mind for knowledge, understanding of the higher values and aims of life and right living, which are the motives of our intellectual, ethical and aesthetic being. And finally comes the primal need of our soul or spiritual being to realise the ultimate meaning and aim of life, which is the source of spiritual history.

This is, in brief, the psychological history of man. Thus the history of man is the outer expression of inner urges, needs, motives and aspirations of his four-fold being: Body, Life, Mind and Soul. The first two parts or the levels of our being, our body, heart, life-force and will and their motives, are the inner source of the economic, social and political history. The other two higher parts, the higher mind and soul, are the source of cultural and spiritual history of humanity. These four parts and their motives form an evolutionary hierarchy. The human being begins his evolutionary journey as a physical man governed by the needs of his body and goes on to become progressively the vital, mental and spiritual being. The actual process of development may not happen exactly in the order we have indicated; what we have indicated is only a broad pattern of progress effected through complex cycles of Nature. In the course of this progress all the powers, faculties and qualities of the various parts of our human organism are developed and the human consciousness is awakened to its highest destiny through progressive experiences, education, ideas and ideals.

Use of the Past

The other important question which we have to consider is the relevance of the past for the present and the future. As we have mentioned earlier, our modern civilisation is governed predominantly by the utilitarian and pragmatic mind. For everything in life we ask, "What is the use?" So what is the use of the Past? We will not at present enter into an argument with those who answer in the negative and say history has no use for the present or the future. We will begin with the views of those who have faith in the utility of history and try to counter the opponents of history with statements

like, "We can learn from the past" or "History repeats itself". But these statements are repeated so many times by the wise and the not-so-wise, with or without understanding, that they have become platitudes. But if we can get behind the words to the why and the how of these flat truisms, we may touch upon some of the true uses of history.

If history, as we have suggested, is the story of human development in the past, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that the past development of humanity contains lessons for the present progress and for its future evolution. But not many historians look at history in this developmental perspective. For example, a deep understanding of the causal factors behind the birth, growth and decline of civilisations may reveal some enduring truths of human development which may be relevant for all times. In fact, some of the questions which arise during the study of important historical phenomena have deep developmental implications. What was the secret of the immense cultural creativity of the small city-state of Greece which provided most of the founding ideas and ideals of western civilisation? Why did great cultures like the philosophic and aesthetic Greece or spiritual India which enriched humanity with great and noble ideas and values succumb to or were seriously disrupted by barbarian invasions? What are the success-factors behind the "Golden age" of civilisations? Why did the golden ages always pass and why could they not be sustained? What are the sources of vitality and endurance of a civilisation? These are all not solely historical questions of the past but developmental issues which are relevant for the present.

And history does repeat itself. The problems, issues and events of the past tend to repeat themselves. There is an element of repetition in history though it may not be a mechanical repetition with a clock-like precision or sameness. We have to understand this important aspect of the nature of history.

There are two causal factors behind these repetitions of history. The first factor is that Nature works through repetitive rhythmic cycles. We can observe these cycles not only in physical Nature but also in our human and psychological nature. And in our spiritual conception, our human nature and its outer expression in life through history is part of universal Nature. The second factor is that there are some constants in human Nature and World-nature or universal Nature which remain the same behind all changes in time. And these constants are repeated or rediscovered again and again in the course of history.

What are these constants? First, the fundamental laws, principles and structure of human nature and human life, World-nature and universal life are constant through the flow of time; second, the basic urges, needs, motives, faculties and powers of human nature are the same in essence through all the changes of history. Some part of human nature and its motives or faculties may dominate during a certain epoch in history. But the whole of human nature with all its motives and powers, is present and expresses itself at all times. This is the reason why certain situations, events,

problems and ideas recur in history, though not in the same form.

Whenever and wherever a part of human nature and its motives expresses itself forcefully in the outer life, it gives birth to more or less similar structures, events or problems, or makes similar discoveries. For example, whenever and wherever the thinking or intuitive mind in man is able to plumb into the depths of the inner world or outer life and touch the fundamental laws and principles of things it gives birth to similar ideas or conclusions or discoveries. The ethical and spiritual teachings of saints, sages and philosophers widely separated in space and time, are more or less the same in all ages. The law of unity discovered by ancient eastern sages in the spiritual realm by plumbing the depths of their souls are being rediscovered by the modern scientific mind in the subatomic depths of matter. The vital nature in man which seeks power and expansion, when it expressed itself in the ancient world, created huge political empires; and the same part expressing itself in the modern world creates global business empires. And the problems of organisation faced by empire-builders of ancient India and that of modern multinationals, for example, the problem of centralisation and decentralisation, are more or less the same in essence, however different they may be in their outer form.

This brings us to another important evolutionary factor behind the repetitions of history. In the individual or the collectivity, Nature repeats the unresolved problems of the past, again and again, until the true and permanent solution is discovered. Nature gives repeated opportunities for the individual and the collectivity for learning and progress.

What is the pragmatic significance of the repetitions of history for human development? Does it have any significance at all? This brings us to the critics of the past who say that history has no relevance for the present or for the future. They argue that history has not much to teach because in this world “change is the only constant”. Life is like a flowing river. No two situations in space and time are the same. So past situations or solutions cannot be a guide to the present or to the future. What worked in the past will not work in the present or the future. There is much truth in this argument. For, as we have mentioned earlier, the repetitions of history by Nature are not mechanical repetitions. They are progressive cycles. For change and progress are also constants of Nature, though not the only constants. Although it is undoubtedly true that no two situations or problems in history are the same, they may be similar. Though the form, environment and the circumstances in which they recur are always different, a discerning eye may detect some essential similarity behind the outer changes. So any attempt to revive the past forms and ideals as they were in the past is an uncreative exercise. For Nature never repeats mechanically her old forms and ideals but always progresses towards better forms and greater ideals. History should not be used as a support for reviving the past but as a means for a better understanding of the present and a foresight into the future.

But all these facts of the present or the future do not invalidate our proposition

that we can learn from the past. A deep understanding of a past event, situation or problem can give a better and a more holistic insight into a similar event, problem or situation in the present by indicating clearly and precisely what is new in the present situation. If we are able to penetrate sufficiently deep into a past situation and get to its root cause, we may stumble upon some enduring and timeless principles which are valid for all times. And if a past attempt, achievement or solution is itself based on such enduring principles, then it is valid for all times. For example, many modern management thinkers are discovering timeless managerial wisdom from the experiences and insights of past leaders in thought and action like Machiavelli, Churchill, Napoleon and even Shakespeare! As we have indicated elsewhere, some of the organisational problems faced by empire-builders of ancient India and those of modern multinationals are more or less the same in essence. And some of the solutions suggested by modern management thinkers are very similar to the ones conceived by ancient Indian sages!

Interestingly, we can find the most pragmatic use of the past in the modern corporate world. It is called “sharing best practices”. For example, a foreman or an engineer in a factory of a multi-national in Bombay, India, faces a problem and solves it successfully. He puts the problem and the solution into the knowledge-management system of the company which can be accessed world-wide through the company intranet. After a few days, months or years another foreman or engineer of the same company in a factory in Sydney, Australia, has a similar problem. The engineer in Sydney asks the knowledge-management system, “Has this problem occurred in past anywhere in the company and how was it solved?” The computer coughs up the solution arrived at by the Indian engineer in Bombay. The Australian engineer applies it to the problem he is facing, and surprisingly, it works! In a similar way, is it possible to “share best practices” on human development from the distant past of history? This may not be as easy as learning from the recent past. It requires a deep insight to compensate for the inadequacy of information and the wide gap and change in time, space, circumstance and environment. But still, a discerning eye which can penetrate into the essence and the root cause of things can find many useful lessons from the achievements of the past.

The Future Perspective

The other important “use” of history is its potential for giving a perspective into the future. A comprehensive “feel” or understanding of the manifest actualities of the past and present can give an insight into the unmanifest possibilities of the future.

When we examine the thought and lives of the great visionaries of mankind who have shaped evolution of human society, we will find that most of them had a deep insight into History. They have built their vision on the solid foundation of the past. It is precisely because of their deeper insight into the past that they have a better

understanding of the significance and drift of the present actualities and are able to discern the future possibilities with a greater clarity of judgment, in other words, a clearer vision. This capacity for a proper “historical perspective” which helps one to view the past, present and future in a meaningfully related whole is one of the important qualities which the right study of history can develop in the student. This is now recognised as one of the main purposes of studying history. As John C. B. Webster says in his *“Introduction to History”*:

Perspective, according to Webster’s dictionary is the capacity to view things in their true relations or relative importance. The things which history provides perspective on are present things—structures, events, pressures which participants in history have to deal with every day. Current events are viewed against the background of the events which preceded and led to them, in order to discover how we got to where we are at present. By seeing the present against the background or in the context of the past, we will be able to distinguish between the passing fad or mere ripples on the surface of our present-day life on the one hand, and the deeper, more profound and hence more significant currents which are affecting the world in which we live. This kind of perspective is particularly important for those who wish to make the future different from the present or past.¹

But what is not fully recognised is that this historical perspective is important not only for the student of history, but in every field of knowledge. For, as we have indicated earlier, there is a rhythmic pattern in every movement of Nature, whether it is the progress of events in life or in the march of Ideas in the Human Mind. So, a careful study of the evolution of a system of knowledge in the right historical perspective can give a dynamic holistic overview of the trend and drift and pattern of ideas in the field and also a glimpse of the possible direction in which it can or has to proceed. So this perspective vision with an orientation towards the future is the factor which must be emphasised in all historical study and research, to make the subject truly interesting and fruitfully creative for human evolution and progress. As Mother points out:

All studies, or in any case the greater part of studies consists in learning about the past, in the hope that it will give you a better understanding of the present. But if you want to avoid the danger that the students may cling to the past and refuse to look to the future, you must take great care to explain to them that the purpose of everything that happened in the past was to prepare what is taking place now, and that everything that is taking place now is nothing but a

1. John, C. B. Webster, *“Introduction to History”*, p. 21.

preparation for the road towards the future, which is truly the most important thing for which we must prepare.¹

But the intuitions and speculations of the human mind can only be uncertain and tentative because the human mind is not the power which decides the future destiny of humanity. The human mind, if it is intuitive, can at best have only a glimpse of the future possibilities. But mind cannot have a clear and comprehensive vision of the future of humanity with an unclouded perception of present actualities, emerging and future possibilities and the ultimate destiny of human evolution. To have such a total vision we have to rise beyond mind to the spiritual source of our being where the destiny of man and the world is determined by a transcendent and universal Power, Wisdom and Love.

Here comes the importance of insights and perceptions of spiritual thinkers like Sri Aurobindo, Teilhard de Chardin and St. Augustine. They have perceived the deeper meaning of history with faculties greater than reason. Among these spiritual thinkers, Sri Aurobindo had the most comprehensive vision of human and terrestrial evolution and its ultimate destiny.

History as Philosophy

This brings us to what we call the “philosophical” use of history. History is normally considered a mundane and secular subject which has nothing to do with the ultimate questions of life. Those who are interested in such ultimate truths of life turn to religion or philosophy. For these are the subjects or fields of knowledge which are supposed to deal with the ultimate meaning of life.

But what is not recognised is that History, when it is studied in the light of a comprehensive spiritual vision like that of Sri Aurobindo, can provide a more concrete and satisfying field for the quest into the ultimate. Not all the questions of philosophy and religion can be included in the study of history. But some important philosophical questions like how did we arrive on this planet, or why are we here on this planet, where are we going, and what is the significance of all this “sound and fury” of human life, can be explored more concretely through history than through religion or philosophy.

For in our modern age, most of the organised religions of the world have strayed away from their spiritual source and have become rigid dogmas and lifeless rituals. They have nothing much to offer to a sincere and intelligent thinker in quest of the ultimate meaning of life. When we come to philosophy, most of philosophical thinking is made of intellectual abstraction remote from the actual facts of life. Here comes the importance of history as a field for the higher quest. History can provide a concrete

1. *CWM*, Vol. 12, 169.

framework for exploring some of the ultimate questions in the context of the “sound and fury” of human life. But to do this, history has to be studied in the light of a spiritual vision.

But unfortunately, the modern scientific mind still obstinately and dogmatically denies the spiritual dimension. Or, if it admits the spiritual, it makes a rigid separation between the secular and the spiritual and says, “Keep your spiritual belief confined to your private and personal life and do not bring it into the secular and public life.” But such an approach is not conducive to a holistic understanding of life.

For, as the ancient sages clearly saw, and the modern scientific mind is beginning to see, life is a connected Whole. Nature and life, in man or in the universe, from the highest spiritual to the lowest material dimension are an interconnected and indivisible unity. We cannot understand fully any part or activity of life without a deep insight into the indivisible wholeness of life. This is because the nature of a part is determined by its relation to other parts and the whole. And the spiritual dimension is the very source of our being and life and the foundation of unity and wholeness of life. So we cannot hope to understand the deeper truths of history without understanding the spiritual dimensions of man and life.

This brings us to another unique advantage of history as a philosophical quest. Among modern fields of knowledge history covers a broader spectrum of human life than other subjects and therefore can provide a more holistic understanding of human life than others. For, in modern systems of knowledge, the emphasis is on narrow specialisation, with each field of knowledge poring over a small slice of nature or human life, for example, physics, chemistry, biology, or economics, sociology, politics or commerce. History to a certain extent escapes from this narrow specialisation because it looks and studies the human life of the past as a whole and in all its various activities, like its economics, politics, society and culture. So history can provide a better understanding of human life. But this is more of a potentiality lying untapped in history. To tap this potentiality of history we have to bring in certain factors or dimensions which are missing at present in the study of history. These factors we have already discussed. They are the psychological and spiritual dimensions, a spiritual vision of life, a human-development perspective and futurism.

Two Schools of History

By now the main features of our approach to history might have become more or less clear, though we have not yet stated it explicitly. But before summing up our approach we have to consider how history has been viewed until now.

For what we get from history depends on how we look at it. When we examine the history of historical thinking, we can see two broad view-points or, in other words, two major schools of thought. First, the religious or theological views, most of which belong to the ancient world; second, the secular-scientific schools, most of which

belong to the modern world. Both of these have their strengths and weaknesses. We may next examine the views and approaches of these two schools of history, their advantages and drawbacks and a third, alternative approach which tries to reconcile their views in a higher synthesis.

(To be concluded)

M. S. SRINIVASAN

PEACE

REFLECTIONS of voices
In the aura of deep thought.
The moon meditates in the sky.
Lotuses sway in cascading hair.
A golden bird in the heart
Whispers divine wisdom.

In the midst of breath,
Joy springs forth,
In the mind that expands endlessly,
A calm collects.
The heart opens the door of compassion
And a prayer rises from the soul.

Peace. Peace. Peace.

GOPIKA KARTHIKEYAN

MEANING OF BIRTH AND QUEST IN SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI

I

Savitri

To read Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* one needs an altogether different orientation than the one grounded solely in Western aesthetics and appreciation of poetry. Western poetics deals with a body of work which is devoid of any profound mystical tradition and is essentially fictional or else mythical. It concedes the fictionality of human reality, and then extends the same fictionality to the artist's vision. On the other hand, "To the mystic," says Sri Aurobindo, "there is no such thing as an abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event."¹ There are only a few poets in the Western tradition who betray a genuine mystical bent of mind—Blake, Emerson, Wordsworth and Rilke, for example—but none who even approach the status of a Rishi.

Sri Aurobindo belongs to the tradition of Vedic Rishis who used poetry for creating a symbolic representation of Reality, not a myth or fiction either for edification or entertainment. Truth is the native home of Rishis and their verses are an attempt to express those sublime ranges of Reality. The Vedas refuse to reveal their sacred body of mystical meaning if approached in a spirit of scholarship. Critical theories are tokens of the intellect and cannot unlock the doors of the Spirit. One needs to meditate, discover and then carry as living companions those truths enshrined in the Vedas. Then, and only then, do Vedic poetry and Indian mystic icons impart their inner significance.

When one reads a Romantic poet, one is uplifted for a moment by the sheer beauty of insight, maybe, captured and enthralled by it for a season, but then one goes back invariably to that fictional world to live happily ever after. When one touches a Mystic, there is always the threat that one's fictional unreality, one's cherished ignorance (*avidya*) may come tumbling down and be reduced to a debris of smitherens.... therefore one tries to keep Truth at arm's length, for one is content to supplicate in a temple or a church but only to bring God to one's service as the fulfiller of desires. One often lacks the courage to face the bleakness of one's psychological theatre, one is unwilling to see the false as false. A new orientation, a sincere courage to look into the burning splendours of Truth is what is required at the outset in approaching Sri Aurobindo's poetry.

There is always a central theme, a single major concern that runs through the entire body of an artist's work. It is as if the artist is born with a mission and all his

life is a labour towards its fulfilment. Or it may be, as the Gita suggests, that everyone is born with a *shraddha*; nay, not only that, but every point in the matrix of manifestation is nothing but *shraddha* (XVII, 3). *Shraddha* is not mere faith in the usual sense, nor a body of belief, but a secret, unrevealed splendour of Truth that opens its riches petal by petal through many cycles and stadia of our existence. The Truth of Sri Aurobindo, the entire burden of his poetic voice, is suggested even in his early poems:

Love, a moment drop thy hands;
Night within my soul expands.²

The three words, 'night', 'love' and 'soul', —in these opening lines written at the age of eighteen (1890) neatly sum up the mission, poetic and otherwise, of Sri Aurobindo's birth. *Savitri*, therefore, is the crowning, but not an isolated, achievement of Sri Aurobindo's poetic career. Its theme, the triumph of love over death, seems to have gripped his imagination all through his long literary life.

The first clear formulations of the dialectical theme appear in two long poems, both mythical in cast, *Urvasie* (1896) and *Love and Death* (1899). Both the poems, like the earlier short ones, are about love and separation; but, for the first time, we find here a conscious attempt to define the forces that bring about this separation and block the path to union. *Urvasie* is the poet's first definite statement about love and the forces that oppose it. Through many births and changing climes, Pururavus and Urvasie have returned again and again to renew their union. But no sooner has the joy of union engulfed the lovers than there arises from the darkness a shadow that questions and denies any possibility of bliss. If it is destiny that unites the lovers, a direr necessity of fate forces them to face the fact of separation. But the lover is also a heroic being. Twice is Pururavus separated from Urvasie, first by necessity and then by fate, and twice he rises like a warrior-lover, transmuting his pain and sorrow into strength and power that shake the seated Gods in heaven and force them to amend their laws. Pururavus wins back his lasting union with Urvasie, but not before paying a price: he has to abandon the earth and live in *Gandharva-Loka*. What Pururavus achieves is a partial victory, not a total resolution of the issue.

Obviously, the poet too is not satisfied. He returns, therefore, after a gap of three years, to the same theme in *Love and Death*. The Kshatriya has failed and now it is the turn of the Brahmin to stand up and face the eternal opponent. Ruru, the protagonist, is the great-grandson of Brahma and in his veins courses the blood of Rishis and Gandharvas. The opponent too is redefined. Fate and cosmic laws cannot be the whole truth behind the Adversary. Sri Aurobindo plunges his gaze deeper and comes up with a precise name: he is Death. Priyumvada, Ruru's wife, dies from snake-bite. The lovers, this time, are separated not by an inscrutable fate, but, very precisely, by Death. Ruru has the Brahmin's knowledge of the occult worlds and will

dare even Hades to return his beloved to him. But Death will not so easily yield. It reminds Ruru that sacrifice is the law of life. Will he make a sacrifice of the later half of his life, the period that promises him enlightenment, liberation and Rishihood? Ruru accepts the condition, pays the price and wins his beloved. The unity of love is restored, but there is no decisive victory. Death still proves stronger than Love. The poet has again not found a principle that can successfully handle the opposition of Death.

It is significant that *Savitri* was conceived soon after *Love and Death*. This shows how profoundly the poet was involved in working out the deep, mysterious and almost insoluble riddle of this theme. It will take some time before *Savitri* emerges with a definite shape. In the meanwhile Sri Aurobindo wrote five full-length plays: *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Vasavadutta*, *Rodogune*, *The Viziers of Bassora* and *Eric*. In all of them “the theme has been developed and the problem set and solved in somewhat different ways but always leading to the same conclusion, ‘Love conquering Death.’”³ Finally, it was in the *Savitri* myth that Sri Aurobindo found a story that carried his thesis further and provided a flawless solution to his quest. *Savitri* was Sri Aurobindo's lifetime's passion and he spent nearly half a century working on it. His own spiritual attainment of the highest Truth and the wide epic canvas of *Savitri* helped him to look at the problem afresh. Here was no compromise, no bargain struck with the Adversary, but a complete triumph over him. But *Savitri* was not to be only about love and death, a problem singled out from a much wider whole: here was the Cosmic Structure in its entirety and full splendour, the Brahman, the Whole. Sri Aurobindo, like his *Savitri*, has brought down his own fulfilment as a gift to the earth, and bequeathed a nobler destiny to mankind.

Savitri, Sri Aurobindo's *magnum opus*, is in many ways an extraordinary poem. With a massive frame of twelve books divided into forty-eight cantos and an epilogue, and running to a length of 23,837 lines, it is the longest epic in the English language. As to its content, the Mother says that Sri Aurobindo “has crammed the whole universe in a single book [. . .]. Everything is there: mysticism, occultism, philosophy, the history of evolution, of the gods, of creation, of Nature. How the universe was created, why, for what purpose, what destiny—all is there.”⁴ If its sheer magnitude—both linear and spatial—is not enough to make it anything but formidable, there is yet another difficulty to account for. Here is the Mother again: “I think that man is not yet ready to receive it. It is too high and too vast for him. He cannot understand it, grasp it; for it is not by the mind that one can understand *Savitri*.”⁵ No wonder, a great many scholars and academic pundits have shied away from approaching *Savitri*.

The key to the reading of *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* is to be found on its cover page in the subtext of the two words, ‘legend’ and ‘symbol’. A legend is usually a traditional tale associated with a particular locality or person, popularly believed to be grounded in historical fact but not authenticated. The term is also used to describe

tales of Christian saints. While a myth may concern itself with gods, the supernatural and the sacred, a legend necessarily is about heroes performing actions possible for ordinary humans. A legend is also something usually modified and handed over from generation to generation—‘thus have we heard’ or ‘thus has it been told’: in this sense it comes closer to the Indian tradition of *śruti*, a divinely heard revelation. Sri Aurobindo possibly combines all these meanings in his use of the term ‘legend’ for *Savitri*. The story revolves around a single person, Savitri; she is much greater than any saint, and yet remains fully human till the end; it is grounded in historical fact as narrated in the Mahabharata; and there are instances like Aswapati’s and Savitri’s sadhana, speeches of Narad and the Divine Mother, and Savitri’s dialogues with Yama that can be understood in no other way but as revelations received by the poet. The Mother has said that “In truth, the entire form of *Savitri* has descended *en masse* from the highest region and Sri Aurobindo with His genius only arranged the lines [. . .]”⁶ A legend may or may not be true. Is the legend of *Savitri* true?—To get an answer to this we must look into our second term, ‘symbol’.

What is a symbol and in which sense does Sri Aurobindo call his *Savitri* a symbol? “A symbol has been defined as the expression of some otherwise inexpressible truth”⁷; this is a rather bald and prosaic definition of a supremely poetic word. Symbolism, according to Sri Krishnaprem, is “like beauty itself: either you see it or you do not”; and “the nature of great art is always symbolic, because it takes birth in a realm whose only utterance is in symbol.”⁸ As a flower manifests in form a beauty that is essentially formless, so does a symbol bring forth the revelation of a mystery that lies hidden beyond the utmost ranges of mind. But symbolism in our age has become a lost and forgotten language, laments the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*: “The very power of seeing the physical world in terms of spiritual values has disappeared.”⁹ The Vedas, man’s supreme symbolic utterance, remain therefore inaccessible to the uninitiated. It is a hard but unavoidable fact that until one opens one’s inner eyes and a fairly-evolved aesthetic sense to the hidden symbolic significances of the poem, *Savitri* will remain a closed book. Not for nothing did the poet name his opening canto, perhaps the most difficult and most discussed one, ‘The Symbol Dawn’. It not only offers the challenge of an impregnable door but hides as well the golden key to *Savitri*. Only when the reader awakens to the radiance of an inner dawn illumining his psychological space does the clearly mapped-out landscape of *Savitri* begin to unravel the infinity of its horizons.

(To be continued)

H. P. SHUKLA

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SILENCE ENVELOPS ME...

SILENCE envelops me in unexpected hours;
 A whisper, a soundless orchestra, a perfumed odyssey
 Tell me you were here, once again near me.

Like mind's Shangri La—elusive and unlocated,
 Fading memories revive and fill the throbbing heart
 With mute delight and apocalyptic dreams...

Time's castaway robes reflect my kaleidoscopic journey:
 Promises past of a future soon to be.

SANJAY RAJVANSHI

TIME AND TIMELESSNESS

ONCE in a deep slumber I saw myself standing in front of a huge house. The name of the resident was written on it,—mine. I had never visualised my own house in such a distant and objective manner before. My curiosity and wonder led me inside. There were many chambers. All were half open and had a name on them. I stood in front of one of them named DESIRE. This chamber was full of mirrors. These mirrors reflected my own face. I went from one mirror to another as it reflected each year of my life. I was amazed to see my demand from life at different intervals of TIME. How I wanted This and That. The mirrors reflected my happy, sad, disappointed, thrilled and dejected states.

Next, I entered another chamber called MIND. Here I saw scattered pieces of glass on the floor. These pieces showed dark, obscure reflections of my thoughts, revealing time-bound goals and ambitions. The images were shifting, unstable, perhaps reflecting the restlessness of my mind. I wanted to get out as the atmosphere of the room was suffocating.

I came out and searched for a chamber that could reflect a whole, clear, peaceful, joyous face. I moved around and heard sounds coming from adjoining chambers. There were many people talking, none listening to the others. I could not recognise them, and wondered what they were doing in my house. How did they sneak in, why were they disturbing the peace of my house? I gathered courage, went inside and asked them who they were and why were they making much a deafening noise!

All of them started at once, and introduced themselves as guests who came by my invitation to fulfil the various longings and wishes of name, fame and material comforts of all kinds. I wanted to send them away but was shocked as I went near them. They all resembled me, I saw my own reflection in different distorted shapes and sizes.

I was utterly confused, dejected and desperate to get out. My aspiration to find a larger, wider chamber became intense. My faith led me on in this mission. Nothing was important for me except the quest to find my true face. I called for help to the powers that determine and guide our destiny to light my way. A faint voice in my heart urged me to go deep inside for the Key of the hidden chamber. I did as instructed, and found the way.

There was a narrow passage leading to a wider opening. Before entering the passage I had to leave behind the entire baggage containing worldly wisdom, preconceived beliefs and expectations of all kinds. This was not easy, as these possessions clung to me very strongly and stubbornly. Again, I implored for the grace of the higher Powers to free me. It seemed as if ages had passed in this period. The powers were testing my resolution to become free. I realised that I had prayed for liberation in the past but could no longer sustain the intervening period, and had quickly reverted to the old ways.

I did not give up and allowed the Higher Powers to choose the appropriate time. Meanwhile, I became very quiet and still.

Suddenly in a flash, I woke up and found myself lifted to a brighter, larger chamber. I saw my true visage, calm, joyous, and whole. It seemed as if this face had never known suffering, pain and restlessness. Then and there I willed to stay permanently in this chamber.

The name of this chamber was TIMELESSNESS.

Out of apprenticeship to Ignorance
 Wisdom upraised him to her master craft
 And made him...
 An aspirant to supernal Timelessness...

(Savitri, SABCL, Vol. 28, pp. 25-26)

FALGUNI JANI

...Time is a succession; you must be able to conceive that the Supreme Consciousness, before objectifying itself, becomes aware of Itself in Itself. There is a global, total and simultaneous perception and there, there is no Time. Likewise one cannot speak of "Space", for the same reason, because all is simultaneous. It is something more; it corresponds to a state of consciousness subjective rather than objective, for the aim, the motive of creation is objectivisation; but there is a first step in this objectivisation in which there is a plenary consciousness, total and simultaneous, beyond Time and Space, of what will constitute the content of this universe; and there, the universe is pre-existent, but not manifested, and Time begins with objectivisation.

The Mother

(Questions and Answers 1950-51, CWM, Vol. 4, p. 162)

INDIA AND PAKISTAN: A VIEW

1. TOWARDS PEACE

A DIALOGUE has started between India and Pakistan on the way to peace. No doubt it is a very delicate and sensitive matter and of equal importance to both of us, India and Pakistan.

Instead of saying ‘both India and Pakistan’ I am saying ‘both of us, India and Pakistan’. The words ‘both of us’ come from the heart of one who was born years before the Partition and who travelled to Lahore and Peshawar and Srinagar as part of his country and homeland and who believes that the Partition was a mistake and could have been avoided and can still be rectified.

How?

Just the other day a friend told me that Pakistan can be made to listen only by war. It is this mindset that prompted me to pen this musing. So, at the very outset, I start with the proposition that the time for settling the issue by war is gone. Now times have changed and none can afford a nuclear battle.

And, more importantly, both of us have learnt enough to perceive the futility of mutual fighting and the desirability of living in peace. This mindset on both sides, if it is genuine, is a first and sure sign of the advent of peace.

For the successful march to peace it will be of great help if we, the people of India and Pakistan, first stick to the principle of peaceful co-existence and proceed to redevelop the brotherly feelings between ourselves and positively act for peace.

The idea being mooted here is that the force of ‘we the people’ who are essentially a peace-loving people has to grow more powerful than that of the warlords—the politicians who rule by division, the bureaucracy that enjoys a comfortable life of status quo, the arms lobby, and the fundamentalists. This force has to grow so that a successful working out of the process becomes possible.

We, the peace-loving people, have to rise from our slumber of inaction and do our part firstly in the stabilisation of the dialogue towards the peace process, and secondly in its acceleration.

When disrupted families and separated friends and neighbours meet once again, when the long cut-off contacts and communication are restored, when there are exchanges between ourselves not on the basis of hostility and alienation, but of amity and mutuality, a change in the air follows. These exchanges—individual, social and cultural—will be the moral foundation and support for the new movement. The common folk, the professionals, the cultural organisations, the film-makers, sports-persons—all have to join in writing the new chapter.

Let us do it and let us do it in right earnest.

And of course, the media. The media wields tremendous power in the present times. It can make or mar things. It can work for the ‘peace psyche’ among the people

as it had done in the last century for the 'freedom psyche' of the country. Or it can create difficulties, consciously or unconsciously, by its hype or by its needling the politicians and officials to utter something new about a delicate negotiation or to make a statement which it would be better to leave unsaid for the time being. Let the media ponder and give peace a chance by providing a congenial atmosphere for it.

There are many who practise meditation and offer prayers, individually and collectively. The attainment of brotherhood between India and Pakistan is a deserving subject for their meditation and prayer. Those who do not believe in meditation and prayer can at least send forth their thoughts of goodwill and love.

If peace is established in the hearts of 'we the people', the thing will happen.

2. TOWARDS UNITY

The dialogue for peace has been going on between India and Pakistan for quite some time.

We are aware of the risks involved in unduly hastening the process, but there is also the danger of stagnation if it is unduly prolonged. Encouraged by the decision of the Heads of both the States to solve the mutual problems and issues by dialogue, eschewing the path of violence and strife, and also by the spread of the desire for peace, mutual understanding and goodwill among the citizens in both States, we venture to suggest a road map.

For this purpose we suggest what may be called moving forward backwards in time, i.e., the problems of recent origin are taken up first and solved.

In the history of the relationship between India and Pakistan since the partition in August 1947 there have been wars and landmark events when the situation worsened and steps of restriction and limitation were taken on both sides. The terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001 was the last such occasion.

Let a list be made of these measures and let the negative positions be annulled. Instead of simply annulling the negative measures let us arrive at a positive status on those points as if there were no hostility between us and we were good neighbours.

Similarly, we go back further beyond December 2001 and take up for consideration the steps that were taken during the five years preceding it and deal with them in the same way as we did for the post-December 2001 period. Then we go back every five years and resolve the matters similarly.

We could posit a time frame of 6 months¹ for the above journey, i.e., before the end of 2004. Within this time we should also be able to find a way to demilitarise the Siachen Glacier zone.

From there we will descend to Kashmir and the plains of India and Pakistan and work out a solution for unity in the form of a federation of States comprising

1. This article is written in April, 2004.

present India, Pakistan, Kashmir and Bangladesh.

Let us realise it. It will open the door to new horizons.

The spiritual map of India¹ drawn by the Mother after the Partition calls for its physical manifestation.

3. ROAD MAP TO PEACE AND UNITY

What is the ultimate goal of opening the peace process? It is not only the restoration of peace and concord, i.e., the programme for this year, but the restoration of unity between the two countries. The Partition must go because it was an artificial surgery; the body must be restored to its prior wholeness. It is a necessary goal for the further reason that in view of the present international conditions and the growing trends towards regional groupings and world unity on the different continents, the unity of India and Pakistan is a necessity for the equations and the balances in Asia which has China, Japan and the Middle East coming to the fore.

The road map for this purpose would start with taking up the following issues:

- i) A decision regarding nuclear armament. Both should agree for a de-nuclearisation of their arsenals and concentrate on welfare projects. Pending this decision the nuclear installations in both countries should be under strict control.
- ii) Serious thinking has to start on the process of unification. The present Indian Constitution has been suffering from several illnesses and needs to be recast. The Constitution of Pakistan has not been in working order for decades and needs a thorough overhauling. It is time that new Constitutions be adopted for both countries if they wish to continue to remain separate, or a new Constitution will need to be worked out for the Union that will come into being if the two peoples decide to unite.

The process of unification needs a change of mind as well as a change of heart. We were one before the Partition—so it is a case of restoration of unity, not of creation of a new unity nor of empire-building or of a new agglomeration or conglomeration. That makes it easier though it is not an easy task in itself.

This process, we must say, needs the support of the State machinery as well as of the people. It needs firm support of statesmen and of 'We the People'.

This road map is inspired by what Sri Aurobindo had said in 1947 and 1948. In his Independence Day message he said:

The partition of the country must go,—it is to be hoped by a slackening of

1. It is the map printed on the cover of *Mother India*.

tension, by a progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even of an instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic though not a fundamental importance.

In his message to the Andhra University in 1948, Sri Aurobindo said:

A Union of States and regional peoples would again be the form of a united India.

We feel the Time Spirit is now with us for its realisation.
Unity is the present *yugadharma*.

SHYAM SUNDER JHUNJHUNWALA

[On Mountbatten's proposal to partition India made on 2nd June, 1947]

Clearly, this is not a solution; it is a test, an ordeal which, if we live it out in all sincerity, will prove to us that it is not by cutting a country into small bits that we shall bring about its unity and its greatness; it is not by opposing interests against each other that we can win for it prosperity; it is not by setting one dogma against another that we can serve the spirit of Truth. In spite of all, India has a single soul and while we have to wait till we can speak of an India one and indivisible, our cry must be:

Let the soul of India live forever!

3 June 1947

The Mother

*

The Soul of India is one and indivisible. India is conscious of her mission in the world. She is waiting for the exterior means of manifestation.

6 June 1947

The Mother

(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 13, p. 359)

NOT HERE

ON the high mountains
I sought Thee
and in the depths of the sea.

Before my eyes
A mountain opened:
Into a forest of beauty
Entered I.

Animals and birds,
Green leaves and flowers
With a smile
They all greeted me.

Such the enchantment,
I wanted to stay
But the soft breeze
In my ear whistled,
“No dear, It is not here.”

I climbed to the high
Kingdoms of snow
Arms of peace
Around me I felt.
Here will I live, thought I.
But the snow-laden wind
Roared to me,
“No dear, It is not here.”

Through the countries I roamed
From temples to masjids and knocked
At every monastery door.
But always the same cry
Echoed back to me,
“No dear, It is not here.”

Into the sea then plunged I.
Its treasures of corals and pearls
It offered to me

And all its denizens round me came
And in its rippling voice said the sea,
“No dear, It is not here.”

Back to my own home I came,
And sat all alone:
Even my thoughts
Had abandoned me.

A ray of sudden light
I know not from where,
Came into my heart.

I looked within and saw
A room of delight
Its door ajar...

There I saw Thee
Looking at me.
Thy voice, soft and sweet
I heard
“Look, my dear, I am here.”

JYOTSNA MOHANTY

BETWEEN THE ARRIVAL AND THE DEPARTURE

(Continued from the issue of July 2004)

My aunt greeted me with, “Ah, at last you’ve come. I was really getting impatient. Go inside, I have something important to tell you.”

I bowed to her, then after a wash went into my room and sat on the bed. It was evening. Soon my aunt came in with a hurricane lamp and placing it in a corner sat down on the floor near my feet. Without much preamble she looked up at me and said, “I’ve arranged for your marriage.” I was stunned. She continued, “I can’t allow you to live like a vagabond. You must marry and lead a family life.”

As sternly as possible, I said, “Haven’t I told you again and again that I don’t want to get married. Why do you keep raising the subject?”

She was equally firm. “You have to marry. I’ve fixed everything. I’ve chosen the bride and given my word to the bride’s parents.”

I was truly annoyed. But when I opened my mouth to speak, she suddenly held my feet and started weeping and pleading with me. Ultimately I had to give in and agree to get married. My acquiescence surely made her happy but I was filled with a sense of disgust at being forced to break my vows.

*

On the appointed day I went to a village in East Bengal, participated in the elaborate wedding ceremony and brought back a young bride. I handed her over to my aunt and thereafter ignored her completely. When my aunt tried to thrust her on me, I told her bluntly that it was she who wanted a bride in the house, not I. To make my meaning clear, I took my personal belongings to my aunt’s house and started living there while they lived in my house. Only for meals did I come to my house. But there was no respite. Not only my aunt, but all the elderly men and women of the village bombarded me with their good counsel. I felt as though I were living in limbo. I was *neither a sannyasin nor a proper householder*. It was as though all the spiritual wealth that I had acquired so far was about to be wasted. What did Destiny have in store for me?

*

One of the prestigious magazines, *Bharatvarsha*, published some of my humorous articles and poems. While I was enjoying the thrill of seeing my name in print, I received a letter from Sri Baradacharan Majumdar, headmaster of the Maheshnarayan Academy of Lalgola. Although a householder, Baradacharan was a great yogi. [Sri Aurobindo, it seems, had called him the greatest yogi of modern Bengal, as reported in the Bengali magazine *Desh*, Ashwin 7, 1356, i.e., 1949 A.D. issue.] He was now offering me the post of the Librarian of the Lalgola Public Library: free boarding and lodging, together with a monthly salary. I was unemployed at the time, there was

no reason for me not to accept the offer. I wrote back to him that I would take the job and that I would be reaching Lalgola in a day or two.

My aunt was very glad. While packing for me she said, "Take your wife with you." I told her to her face, "It was never my intention to get married. You forced me. So let her live with you."

This was indeed an insoluble problem in my life. I did not have anything against my wife but at the same time there was hardly any relationship between us for I just did not feel the need to come close to her. At times I felt sorry for her, blamed myself for marrying and then ruining the life of an innocent girl. But then I was filled with resentment against my aunt. She was the sole cause of this sad state of affairs. By touching my feet she had blackmailed me emotionally into marrying this girl. But all this justification did not ease the pricking of my conscience.

I reached Lalgola. Baradababu took me to the Library. A comfortable room in the Library had been earmarked for my lodging. I would have my meals in the Dining Room of the Boarding School. This was a Public Library created by the Raja of Lalgola with his own collection of books and a few thousand rupees worth of books purchased by him. To meet all the recurring expenses he had deposited a big sum of money in the bank. I inspected all the book cupboards. There were many good books catering to all tastes. Even a few rare books met my eyes. For a mofussil town it was a very good library indeed.

In the evening Baradababu introduced me to the Raja, Yogindranarayan Roy. Later he received the title of Maharaja. I had a preconceived mental picture of rajas and maharajas, full of pomp and glamour. But the Raja of Lalgola took me by surprise. He looked like a sannyasin with his bare body, ochre lungi and wooden sandals. Like his dress, his mind too seemed to be very straightforward and upright. He talked to me like a close elderly relative, a guardian and well-wisher.

While working in the Library, I became very intimate with his grandson, Kumar Dhirendranarayan, a young man around twenty-three years of age. Some four years back he had been married. He had an inborn love of literature and music and it was this love that sealed our friendship. He was very generous by nature and he insisted on furnishing my room with beautiful pieces of furniture. Everyday he spent a lot of time there discussing literature or singing songs with me. Sometimes he would bring the game birds that he had hunted. I would do the cooking and we would have a feast.

In the evenings Baradababu would visit me. With him my relationship was on a spiritual level. He talked about his sadhana and his spiritual experiences. Sometimes we used to sing together, *keertan*, *shyamasangeet*, *Ramprasadi*. He had a beautiful voice.

I had now everything that I could ask for: a job which was to my liking, a wonderful friend and spiritual guidance. My days were passing blissfully.

On December 23, 1919, the Montague-Chelmsford Reform Bill was passed. As

a result many revolutionary leaders, such as Barindra Kumar Ghose, who had been sentenced to life imprisonment in the Andamans, were set at liberty. Early in January 1920, we learnt from the newspapers that they had returned to India and were now living in Calcutta. I was very eager to meet them.

After about two months, during Holi, I went to Calcutta. I got in touch with my friend, the poet Savitriprasanna Chattopadhyay, who was then editing the monthly magazine *Upasana*, thinking that he might know the address of Barindra Kumar Ghose. I had guessed right. He took me to a small house in Harish Mukherjee Road in Bhowanipore. On the first floor lived Barindra Kumar Ghose and Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya. Savitri introduced me to them. Although I had never seen him before, I recognised Barindra Kumar immediately. He was very thin with a sharp nose and high-powered glasses. When he looked at me, I felt as though through his glasses he was seeing my inner being. But he was not a serious man at all. When he spoke, it was always with a touch of humour.

He addressed me, "Savitri says that you're a writer as well as a singer!"

Abinash Chandra at once requested me to sing. Barindra Kumar said, "I would like you to sing a song that you've composed."

I sang, "Strike the instrument again and again and set it in tune, / O Musician, set it in your own proper tune..."

After the song was over, Barindra Kumar said, "Write it down. I shall print it in the *Narayan*." (After Barindra Kumar returned from the Andamans, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das entrusted him with the publication of his own monthly magazine the *Narayan*. He had also given him some money to meet the expenses.)

In the course of our conversation, I told Barindra Kumar a little about my own role in the revolution. After hearing me, he asked, "And what are you doing now?"

"I'm working for the Raja of Lalgola as his Librarian."

Barindra Kumar asked, "Are you ready to leave this job and join our group?"

"I'm ready to start working with you this very moment," I replied.

"Listen," he said, "I want to bring out a weekly magazine. I'm trying to collect money. I think I'll get it. As soon as I have enough, I'll write to you. Leave the Raja's employment and come here."

With a song in my heart I bade him farewell.

*

After returning to Lalgola, I told everybody about my meeting with Barindra Kumar, only omitting to mention his proposal. Next month, my song appeared in the *Narayan*. All my friends were pleased to see it. Baradababu too.

I waited anxiously for Barindra Kumar's letter. The idea that I would be working with the great revolutionary leader Barindra Kumar himself thrilled me. In the meantime, I diligently performed my duties in the Library. Dhirendranarayan spent an hour or two with me everyday. In the evenings I had the elevating company of Baradababu.

Then one day came the much awaited letter. Barindra Kumar had written that he had been assured of the monetary help. He would let me know the details later. Just now a discussion was going on regarding the name of the Weekly. *Akash Pradeep* or *Bijali*—these two names were the main contenders. He wanted to know my opinion. Apart from these practical matters, he had written about many other things. He had written about Sri Aurobindo, about their idealism, about the future activities. It was a long letter. It was a beautiful letter. It made me very happy.

I had to share my joy with somebody. In the evening when Baradababu came, I told him about Barindra Kumar's proposal. He was quite stunned. "You will go away from here!"

I said, "You tell me whether I should go or not."

He thought for a moment and said, "Go. A new chapter is about to open in your life. You ought to go."

I now told him that I had received a letter from Barindra Kumar and gave it to him. Very eagerly he took it and read it with utmost concentration. Then he said, "I had read about Barindra Kumar only in the newspapers. In this letter, I felt as though I were seeing him in person. It is a beautiful letter. You're indeed fortunate."

He now encouraged me still more to throw my lot in with Barindra Kumar. Now it was my turn to be surprised. I was speechless, so much so indeed that I quite forgot to tell him to keep this matter a secret. As a result, the very next day Dhirendranarayan confronted me with, "It seems that you've received a letter from Barin Ghose." When I nodded in the affirmative, he asked, "Is it a secret letter? Can't we see it?" By now all those who were reading in the library looked up and started eyeing us very curiously. The very name Barin Ghose plus his letter was a subject of great wonder to them.

I wanted to put a stop to this business there and then. So I said, "Even if there is no secret about it, what purpose will be served by showing it to everybody? How do I know that Barindra Kumar would not mind its being made public?"

Dhirendranarayan did not expect this kind of curt answer from me. I could see that he was a little hurt. But I pacified him when I met him in the afternoon. I said, "I couldn't show you this letter in the library this morning in front of all those people present there. Here's the letter. Read it and tell me what you think of it."

After reading the letter, my friend looked steadily at me and said, "You're going away, then."

I tried to lighten the matter. "Is that what you gathered from the letter? There is nothing about my going away. He has merely informed me about the present state of affairs. He has to get the money first, only then he'll think about starting the Weekly and calling me, if at all. Why worry about it now?"

But I did not have to wait long. After about a month, I think in July, Barindra Kumar's letter came. He had written, "We've the money. The magazine will be called *Bijali*. You're appointed the editor, printer and publisher of *Bijali*. Come at once.

Now, what is very important is that you'll have to find a place to stay—a friend's house or a hotel. Then you'll have to apply to a magistrate to the effect that you wish to publish a weekly magazine, *Bijali*, from that address. The present law demands that a security deposit be made for publishing a magazine. After you make the application, there will be a police enquiry. The magistrate will study the police report and fix the deposit amount. If he suspects that I'm involved with the magazine he'll fix a very high security deposit. Meet us secretly when you come to Calcutta. You'll get all your instructions then." Etc. etc.

I gave the good news to all my friends in Lalgola. Baradababu was very happy. But Dhirendranarayan was far from being so. He asked, "What will your salary be?"

"We have not talked about any salary," I replied, "I just want to be with these people. That's all. I didn't mention money at any time and I'm not going to."

Baradababu now reminded me of my duty. Propriety demanded that I inform Raja Yogindranarayan Roy that I was going to resign. He had been so kind to me, I just did not know how to tell him that I had decided to leave him. But Baradababu assured me that he would tell Rajabahadur what needed to be said.

Again it was evening, like the previous time. I bowed to Rajabahadur and stood up before him. When he looked at me questioningly, Baradababu said, "Our librarian has been offered a job in Calcutta. If you release him from his present duties, he'd like to accept it."

Rajabahadur asked me, "What kind of a job?"

Again Baradababu answered, "Editorial work for a magazine. He's quite a talented writer. In this work he'll have a lot of scope for improvement."

Rajabahadur said, "However good the work may be, why do you want to give up this job here? I shall grant you a leave of absence for say, six months or even a year. Suppose you've some problem in Calcutta, you can always come back to Lalgola."

I was deeply moved by such kindness. I followed his advice and applied for six months' leave. It was granted by the Library committee.

On the day of my departure, while I was packing my meagre belongings, Dhirendranarayan came to see me. He insisted that I should take with me all the beautiful things that he had given me. Very politely I refused, giving the excuse that since I did not even know where I would be staying, I did not wish to be burdened with unwieldy pieces of luggage. But when I saw that he was deeply hurt, I picked up an ash-tray as a memento.

(To be continued)

NOLINIKANTO SARKAR

(End of excerpts from Volume I. Translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original Bengali, *Asa Jaoar Majhkhane.*)

YOU

O MUSIC of pearl-tinted skies,
Blue on velvet blue,
Bird flights to the invisible,
In my mind's longing eye, pointing to You.

Your flowers blooming, whispering colours
Like fairy messages,
Wafting through the air,
Secret passages to my heart.

Your smile upon a glowing face,
New-born from untouchable realms of beauty,
Sun-rays upon my ancient body-self,
An unknown memory of ages past,
Gazing upon your eyes of amber.

Your mysterious nights of stars peering,
Reflecting spheres where diamonds are born,
Giving hope to pilgrim souls,
Sailing upon seas of time.

You, who have given birth
To a million shimmering worlds
With a blink of your long eyes,
Measuring eternity from edge to edge.

O you, tell me who am I,
Who've played with you since times
immemorial.
Now your gifts of dawn
And all I've loved of you
And all I've strived for,
Seem to fail
Behind leagues of clouds,
Storms denying, rushing to crush
My ancient dreaming, my arms reaching.

O you, immaculate playmate
I pray remove your robe,
Many hued, studded with suns and moons,
That I may truly find you in my heart,
The sacred chamber where we never shall part.

SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from the issue of July 2004)

IN thinking of Truth, Beauty and Good, we must not forget that they are above our normal and usual being—they are something into which our ordinary consciousness is striving to grow. What, then, is man's primary insistent aim in life? It is to make room for himself and his kind in this world, and then to possess and enjoy and dominate. It is this vitalistic impulse that keeps man going; without it he is bound to decay and disintegrate. And the two forms of the Life-Nature in us, both equally strong—egoism and association, competition and co-operation—have built up human society.

Modern Europe has been dominated largely by a vigorous vitalism ever since the establishment of Teutonic preponderance in the West. The European of today is a dynamic practical man to the core. His strong vital impulse has come on top and has overcome completely the older traditions of Christianity, and of Latin culture. His life in society is threefold—domestic, economic and political. Society is for him the organisation of these aspects of life. Learning and culture, science and philosophy, morality and religion, these are aids and embellishments of life, and form no part of its substance. "Life itself is the only object of living."

The ancients had a totally different outlook. It is not that they did not realise the importance of organised group life, but they thought that the development of the rational, the ethical, the aesthetic, the spiritual being was of far greater importance. Greece and Rome laid stress on the first three, while Asia considered them as stepping-stones to the fourth. The Greeks and the Romans were proud of their achievements in art, poetry and philosophy, while the people of Asia valued much more highly their spiritual heroes. The modern man has, moreover, by the aid of physical science mastered the material world and forced the material forces to work for his comfort, pleasure and prosperity, and made a remarkable progress in political and economic organisation. We see thus the clear difference between the two points of view—that of the ancients and the Asiatics on the one hand, and of the modern European on the other. The vital urge is individualistic; it creates the family, the society and the nation for its greater satisfaction. In the family life, the individual seeks to satisfy his craving for companionship, power and authority, and for prolongation of life. He possesses a family, exercises authority over it, has the members thereof as companions, and lives for ever in his progeny. Social life is an expansion of this domestic life and affords scope to the individual for enjoyment, mastery and companionship on a larger scale; a still wider field of power and possession and amity is provided for him by his national life. In this larger field, he can, if he is masterful, acquire name and fame and be a leader of men; but even if he is an ordinary man, he gets a chance of sharing

in the pomp and prestige and prosperity of the larger organised group. We are speaking of the normal man. But there are abnormal men in this world, people who lead a lonely life by choice, such as hermits and highwaymen; there are also those, who live in the midst of others but try to make of them a ladder by which they seek to climb up. Man, in his long history, has slowly built up the graded group units—family, clan, society and nation—with the idea of satisfying a larger and larger vital egoistic demand. The ancient Indian Kula (clan) or the modern Indian joint family has had the same objective—the satisfaction of a group ego. But we cannot characterise the group as a lower phase of life, for there is always behind it the principle of the self-denial of the individual. As with individual life so with the family, there are always two ideals before it. One family can look upon every other family as a rival, or it can lose itself in the larger unit of society, accepting the aim and satisfaction of the social group as its own. Still the satisfaction sought by society is nought but the satisfaction of the ego of a larger group. There is, however, one difference that should be noted. The social bond is principally an economic one, much more so than the bond of the family. Politics comes in as a result of the relationship between one social unit and another. When mutual rivalry and jealousy amongst the various social units lead to constant trouble and disorder, things are ripe for the establishment of a nation-unit which would swallow up the lesser units. A bigger group-ego would then claim man's allegiance.

Now, this modern civilisation, this corporate life of man with its selfishness, vital urge, cupidity and blood-thirst, what relation does it bear to our higher faculties? Sri Aurobindo says that there is constant warfare between the two sides. There are numerous indications of this stubborn struggle. The vital being clamours for wealth and ease, religion welcomes bare poverty. The vital being says "Enjoy," piety says "Renounce." The vital being demands work, unceasing work, piety enjoins calm, peaceful inaction. The vital being requires fearless courage, piety insists on humility, non-violence. The vital being urges propagation of species, religion recommends abstinence. We can, however, allow that man is sometimes able to draw strength from asceticism, that even recoil has some use in life. But we must not let it go too far. If man's fount of action is choked, society will first stagnate and then begin to recede. Action is necessary for the flowering of man's higher faculties. They are bound to wither if they are kept out of touch with the stream of action. We have to see if man's urge to action is an anti-divine impulse, if he cannot rise to divine consciousness through it. Sri Aurobindo has told us again and again that there is nothing in us that we must discard. Our Mind, Life, Heart, even Body, all have to be divinised. We have seen how man has evolved from the humblest origin, how in his long journey he has encountered many ugly things, and made many mistakes; still his steady progress has been maintained. He has achieved many things by his reason, but the supreme achievement still remains. For that, he will require the help and guidance of his Supermind.

Our domestic and social life is many-sided, but the urge behind it is mainly vital. When the divine principle slowly descends into the vital being, it turns Godward. The descent of the Divine implies the elimination of the separatist feeling and the awakening of a feeling of oneness. The mind of man cannot bring about this awakening; only the subtle power that transcends his mind can do it.

The bond of love is a powerful bond in human life. We see it in so many forms, both beautiful and compelling, in this world—love for the child, affection for the friend, devotion towards parents, conjugal emotion. There is no reason why we should seek to belittle these tender sentiments. They all take man outside the bounds of narrow egoism, and through them we can rise slowly to the Truth of unity. That is why so many forms of religion have recommended this method of teaching Bhakti. Likewise man's usual preoccupations in life—such as earning money, politics and patriotism—all have in them a little of pure gold. They bring us a well-ordered and refined life, power, influence, courage and self-sacrifice and lift us out of the sordid grooves of existence. Still, as has been said again and again, we have to surpass the rational mind. And then alone, in the consciousness of the one Self, life will find a harmonious fulfilment of all its powers. There is a supra-rational ultimate of life as there is a supra-rational Truth, Good and Beauty.

Admittedly, the object of our search is the Divine and to attain divine consciousness is our goal. In this quest neither reason nor culture can be our highest guide. Where, then, are we to find the directing light? "To make all life religion and to govern all activities by the religious idea, would seem to be the right way... and the lifting of the whole life of man into the Divine." Generally speaking, religion has occupied the principal place as man's guide in life. But every now and then, there has come a period when he has lost faith in this guidance and installed reason in its place. We are passing through such a period just now, though a change of outlook seems imminent. Religion is connected with some hidden Truth of our being, so it cannot leave us for very long.

On the other hand, ever since the two movements, the Renaissance and the Reformation, freed the European mind from the thralldom of ignorant convention, civilisation based on reason, in spite of many mistakes, has done a great deal for man. The period has been, says Sri Aurobindo, "a time of great activity, of high aspiration, of deep sowing, of rich fruit-bearing". All this has been achieved not by religion, but by man's newly awakened reason, by high ideals and by a spirit of philanthropy. This is why Europe has rejected religion as her guide. She boasts sometimes that she has killed it, but religion which has its roots deep in man's nature cannot die, it merely changes its guise. We can say, however, that modern man has imprisoned religion and religious ideas in a cell. He won't allow them to have any say in the affairs of this world, not even in matters of morality. In his eyes religion is ignorant superstition, so he keeps his science and politics and sociology far from its contamination. Religion replies, "The world and all in it are transient. What are you

running after? My calm peaceful state of inaction is much happier than yours." The average thinking man, however, is far from accepting this position. He answers, "Running after a new thing the whole time may be silly, but why should I accept motionless inaction as the law of life?" The whole truth of life of the individual and of the group we have got to discover. God-seeking is the chief aim of all religions, but what an amount of evil is being wrought in its name! Different sects and communities and their fanatical preachers and leaders have perpetrated disgusting atrocities. We must try to understand the urge behind such crimes. Sri Aurobindo says that there never was behind these heinous acts any impulse of true religion, they were always the result of narrow sectarianism. Never was the persecutor ashamed afterwards for his inhuman conduct. It is for these reasons that religion has failed to be the guide of our life. Man now understands it to be a sectarian affair under the control of priests and has consequently left his other-worldly interests in their hands while in his mundane life he has accepted the lead of the scientist and philosopher. This has set the man of science and the man of religion at loggerheads,—the former is engaged in the pursuit of truth, while the latter is afraid of it. True religion is, however, a spiritual force and never fights shy of the truth. Sri Aurobindo draws a distinction between religion and religiosity. It is the latter which is controlled entirely by the priest who has often proceeded to extremes in order to keep his hold on his flock. True religion, which is God-seeking, is a thing eternal. It can certainly be a force in human life in all its preoccupations. Religiosity, with its scriptures and rites and ceremonies, comes and goes. Yet even these have their uses in human evolution. Only we must know them to be transient and labour slowly to divinise them. If the Spirit is the principal thing in religion, then a question arises: Is this Spirit unconnected with life, inconsistent with it? For the realisation of the Spirit, then, must we repress, eliminate Mind, Life and Body? Sri Aurobindo's reply is clear. Every principle in our make-up is seeking fulfilment according to its own laws, its own nature. If religion wants us to shun earthly life, then we can get no aid from it in building up and in maintaining our society. If, moreover, religion takes its stand on pain and sorrow, then all hope of realising Ananda in this life is over. The sooner we "quit this world of Maya and enter the status of Brahman," the better. That would be tantamount to denying the God of Bliss, the God of Power, the God of Good. On the other hand, the materialist's view of life is equally disastrous. He has taken up with zeal the world of power and possession and enjoyment, but denies the divinity within it and beyond.

For the perfection of our life, then, both individual and communal, our ultimate hope lies in spirituality—a true spirituality that does not shun the world, but accepts and fulfils it. The world is waiting for a deeper and wider subjectivity that will spiritualise society and bring about individual harmony and communal happiness. In place of the half-spiritualised priest or the raw religionist, there must arrive the developed spiritual man to guide us to our destination—"the government of mankind

by the Divine in the hearts and minds of men.” This new theocracy will not come by a sudden change and magical transformation. It will arrive by an evolution of secret possibilities which have been undergoing a long course of preparation.

(To be continued)

C. C. DUTT

The mind can think and doubt and question and accept and withdraw its acceptance, make formations and unmake them, pass decisions and revoke them, judging always on the surface and by surface indications and therefore never coming to any deep and firm experience of Truth, but by itself it can do no more. There are only three ways by which it can make itself a channel or instrument of Truth. Either it must fall silent in the Self and give room for a wider and greater consciousness; or it must make itself passive to an inner Light and allow that Light to use it as a means of expression; or else, it must itself change from the questioning intellectual superficial mind it now is to an intuitive intelligence, a mind of vision fit for the direct perception of the divine Truth.

If you want to do anything in the path of yoga, you must fix once for all what way you mean to follow. It is no use setting your face towards the future and then always looking back towards the past; in this way you will arrive nowhere. If you are tied to your past, return to it and follow the way you then choose; but if you choose this way instead, you must give yourself to it single-mindedly and not look back at every moment.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 161-62)

NEW TIDE IS COMING IN

STILL memories are washing up in little waves
Though tide is going out,
It leaves me on a sunlit shore
Where pain nor pleasure reach me any more.

It is my ears that hear a distant shout
It is my ears that hear, it is not I.
And that is followed by a melody.
And neither moves my being now.
That tide is going out.

And to my nostrils wafts a fragrance
Those nostrils are not mine.
For to the universe they now belong.
That tide no longer sings its siren song.
Though I have sometimes stroked against it all night long.

New tide comes in from other shores
To wash away the little stores
Of dust of mind and heart and sense.

I watch: the world is shifting to a tranquil ever-present tense.
No rhyme nor reason echoes here
No past disgrace provokes a tear.
No phantom future raises fear.
That tide has swept far out.

Afloat in Light
That feeds its strength to every limb,
There is nothing more to fight,
No longer any need to swim,
All is carried by Delight.

MAGGI

YOGA AND THE INDIAN SPIRIT

[Adapted from a presentation for a panel discussion on the theme of “Indian Religions and Yoga”. It offers a rather distinctive perspective—and raises a few specific points that could be taken up for elaboration.]

All life is Yoga¹

Sri Aurobindo

A life divine but no religions²

The Mother

The world to-day presents the aspect of a huge cauldron of Medea in which all things are being cast, shredded into pieces, experimented on, combined and recombined either to perish and provide the scattered material of new forms or to emerge rejuvenated and changed for a fresh term of existence. Indian Yoga, in its essence a special action or formulation of certain great powers of Nature, itself specialised, divided and variously formulated, is potentially one of these dynamic elements of the future life of humanity. The child of immemorial ages, preserved by its vitality and truth into our modern times, it is now emerging from the secret schools and ascetic retreats in which it had taken refuge and is seeking its place in the future sum of living human powers and utilities. But it has first to rediscover itself, bring to the surface the profoundest reason of its being in that general truth and that unceasing aim of Nature which it represents, and find by virtue of this new self-knowledge and self-appreciation its own recovered and larger synthesis. Reorganising itself, it will enter more easily and powerfully into the reorganised life of the race which its processes claim to lead within into the most secret penetralia and upward to the highest altitudes of its own existence and personality.³

Sri Aurobindo

1. It is the pursuit of ‘Yoga’ which, like the pole-star in our northern skies, attracts the gaze of the Indian spirit. For it is irresistibly drawn to this practice—whether as a whole-hearted endeavour or as a ‘way of living’ in the varied settings and stages of the life of the individual, the family or the social group.

‘The Sense of the Infinite’ is the basis of this attraction and has deep roots in the individual’s psyche. It draws him forth to explore the myriad ways in which the finite can seek the Infinite and taste the ‘rasa’ of its manifold splendour. In every image—of bird and beast, of man and woman, and in the folds of ‘matter’—he cannot cease to look for the One who carved that image out of His own being. The passion

for Him is boundless. It knows no beginning and no end. As that is eternal, so is his longing for It...

2. The pursuit of Yoga finds a sure and clear-sighted base on a ground of truths and insights born of continuing experience. To indicate the most fundamental—

i) A deep and rich understanding, born of direct experience, of the human personality—of its hierarchy of levels of consciousness, the specificity of their formations at each level, the modality of action which is characteristic of each. The subtle and complex interaction of the levels with one another and the dynamics that is operative in the total functioning have been explored in depth and delicate intricacy and their secret mechanisms firmly grasped.

This hierarchy of levels has a twin formation, interacting mutually—one is horizontal in the form of concentric circles, from the ‘inmost’ to the most ‘outer’ and the other is vertical in a scale of gradation, from a base in Matter to the heights of the Spirit. The interpenetration, at certain points, of such a ‘structuring’ of the levels of consciousness and their reciprocal action and response, create the rich complexity of the human person.

ii) This psychological content of the human personality is rich beyond measure in its potentialities of growth—because it is the totality of the Real, in its transcendent and universal aspects, that is present in a latent form—in the individual. And the finite being is imbued with a sense of the Infinite, which it cannot cease from seeking in every form and manner because It resides in him—and can become manifest.

iii) The distinct parts of the human personality—the *manomaya*, the *pranamaya*, the *annamaya*—has each its urge to grow and become one in identity with that which transcends it—the Infinite.

iv) The Infinite is truly ‘infinite’ in its forms and levels of manifestation and gives of itself with an infinite variation of possible experience to the finite, to man.

3. Thus the pursuit of Yoga has followed innumerable directions of growth and has looked for possibilities of experience in this vast totality of the entire field of an exploration of the Infinite!

4. These paths of ‘exploration’ have discovered, evolved, experimented with and identified, with precision and the subtlest of subtleties, psychological processes that lead to such experience, thus enabling the human being to grow in undreamed of potentialities—as a fact of evolution possible for him.

Thus were the many Yogic disciplines created and practised over millennia, which are with us till today. The pathways are well hewed and generations have walked with a firm assurance on the familiar and arduous treads.

5. The experience of the Real gathered along the way and at the summits, and the processes leading to that experience, has been presented and shared. This is a body of incredible richness with a continuity of corroboration.

The totality of this experience has not been codified, formalised into a set of ‘beliefs’ and ‘observances’ and bound in one single sheaf to which one ‘adheres’ as

a matter of convention—or, even as historical ‘inheritance’, as is usually the case in ‘religion’.

In India, the pathway of each specific line of exploration has been presented no doubt—but as ‘experience’ that can be had by an individual, with the discipline and process laid out, which make it possible to have that experience for oneself.

The attraction of the individual is towards this possibility—and not towards making a collective attempt to codify the ‘result’ and weld people into an organised form of ‘acceptance’ of it. Experience of the Real and acceptance of ‘form’ are vastly different orders of things. Experience pursued and arrived at is the track that commends itself as being the most worthy of pursuit.

Wherever and whenever other forms derived from the religious impulse have got crystallised and taken hold of people, they have been like encrustations that have settled at a time when the quest for a living experience was at a low ebb and the easy weight of habit and routine were prevalent.

6. In our times, the hold and sway of the religious mould on the human spirit, in general, is going through a two-way swing of time’s pendulum! On the one hand, since the sixties in the West, the reaching out to experience beyond and other than the form of religion and convention within a prescribed pattern, has gained ascendancy. And this experience is sought in diverse ways and along many paths. There is a mood to explore—though not always wisely! And perhaps, in an attempt to resist this loosening of the hold of the religious form—and all that it implies for man in psychological terms—there is a violent assertion of the power that it can still exercise on man. So as to hold out against the winds of ‘freedom’ blowing from all sides!

The situation is interesting—and though seemingly paradoxical, it makes all the sense! There is a resistance to the losing of its territory—and it asserts itself as it knows how! The violence that erupts is a sign of the rigid constraints that must have been imposed by the force of religion to curb the free adventurous spirit of man. His freedom to seek the Spirit—the truth of himself and of the universe—in the manner most natural and innate to him. Being held back from this effort, the flow of his energies turns back upon him.

7. In our times, a new creative turn has been given to this abiding ‘attraction’ to the yogic pursuit of life.

In India, the many disciplines of Yoga have been like so many pathways to explore the Eternal. All the structures of life, both individual and collective, the patterns of culture and education, the polity and economy of organisation have been established on the firm basis of truths arrived at by the experience gained by the practice of Yoga. There is a progression in this structuring of life’s processes which indicates a path of man’s evolution.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, almost a hundred years back—which is very recent in the millennial history of the practice of Yoga!—experimented on themselves and then with a growing number of individuals gathered around them in the Ashram,

and now with a very richly diverse collectivity in the experiment of Auroville, with a process known as the 'Integral Yoga'. Their aim was to discover a process, consciously pursued in the psychological being of man, which was co-terminus with the process of growth that takes place in life itself, as part of nature's own evolutionary progression.

A process which took up, in a concentrated and appropriate form, the forces that were operative in Nature's own workings and in the manner of their characteristic action. Thus alone would a human endeavour to consciously accelerate Nature's process of evolution—in terms of attaining greater ranges of consciousness and their effectivity in action upon matter—form part of the universal movement that Nature represents and which scientific research seeks to unravel and utilise in its own distinctive way.

At the same time, in the discovery of this 'integral' path, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother explored, in depth and in essentiality, all the disciplines of yoga practised in India and they arrived at two central truths. One, that each major discipline—such as those of Rajayoga, Bhaktiyoga, Karmayoga, Hathayoga, the Tantric—seized on one of the great motive 'powers' of the human personality and worked on the uplifting of it to the height of its development, in an ultimate union of identity with the universal and transcendent Reality. If the lever of this transmutation in each of the disciplines could be identified, then the total personality of man could seize hold of this essentiality of process and make it serve the purpose of an 'integral' change in all the parts of the human being.

Second, they found that this essentiality of process rests in the psychological movement of 'surrender', of self-giving, of the finite to the Infinite, of the 'ego' to the 'beyond-ego'. This works progressively by invoking the power of the Infinite, of that which transcends the finite, with its many-sidedness of action, to take up the work of transmuting the stuff of habitual nature—body, heart and mind—into qualitative modes of its own status and dynamis of being. In fact of actual process, it signifies an 'upward' transference of all the powers of man's being to that which is 'higher' to it, and also 'deeper' and 'vaster'.

Thus, 'totality', as a possibility of being—and, eventually, of life and its structures—can become a fact of experience and manifest in our world of matter.

'Totality' or 'Wholeness'...is within reach of us humans on this very earth...lush and green it always was, but resplendent in gold is its promising future!

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have explored and laid out a pathway to make such a realisation possible—through an action of consciousness that takes us into these greater dimensions of 'depth', 'vastness', 'height'.

8. At the frontier areas of scientific research, there is a corresponding curve of the evolutionary spiral. In the very core of matter and in the functioning of the physical universe, the scientist discovers the presence of 'wholes'—dynamic in their action, rhythmic with a movement of 'totality' in the complex subtlety of structuring. The

‘infinitesimal’ becomes the gateway to the Infinite! They are lost in their embrace—whether the embrace is in the heart of matter, which the scientist observes, or, in the Spirit, which the ‘yogi’ experiences in consciousness.

Matter and Spirit are found to be one—incomplete without the other! Matter opening its radiant ‘doors’ of the infinitesimal to reveal the effulgence of the Spirit. And the Spirit delighting our senses with itself as ‘substance’!

Whichever way one travels—we reach the One without a second. But a One, which is the All.

9. The preceding centuries have laboured towards a conquest of nature—and have sought to unravel her secrets and to harness her forces for the convenience of man.

Man, in this process, has become dwarfed by the power and extent of his own creations—and wields a precarious control over them. Hardly a control—he is almost at the mercy of their gigantic sway!

The millennium just begun gives us a clear indication of what needs to be done. To sound the hidden potentialities of a greater consciousness in man—so that he may grow commensurate in his being with that which he has built up as the structures of life. Structures which evade his masterly hold.

The ‘wholeness’ discovered in matter must be made manifest in the being of man, in his life and in his action in the world. The centuries ahead call for an exploration of the consciousness of man to see what he can ‘become’.

10. This is the age-old quest of mankind—but holds for the Indian spirit a very special fascination. In this quest, India has worked out and practised the various disciplines of Yoga to explore all possible domains of consciousness, by all possible methods—leading to the ‘Integral Yoga’ of our present times in the contemporary setting of the world.

We hold the experience of millennia in our beings! We have a responsibility to give it a concrete and living form—and to create the world of tomorrow.

Themes to explore—

1. Yoga: In the Life and Culture of India
2. Disciplines of Yoga: Formulations of the Powers of Nature
3. Yoga: Its Place in The Modern Endeavours of Man
4. The ‘Integral Yoga’: Conditions of the Synthesis
5. The Processes of ‘Integral Yoga’
6. “All Life is Yoga”: As Evolutionary Progression
7. The Psychological Structure of Human Personality
8. Levels of Consciousness: The Concentric and Vertical Formations
9. Processes of Growth of Consciousness
10. The Psychology of Self Perfection

11. The Yoga of Self Perfection
12. From Mind to Supermind
13. The Supramental Instruments—Thought-Process
14. The Supramental Sense
15. A Conscious Body
16. Changing Qualities of Matter
17. Contiguity of Matter
18. Coherence in Matter
19. Transformation of Matter
20. The 'Wholeness' in Matter—As Perceived by the Physicist
21. A Conscious Handling of Matter or The Inwardness of Matter
22. The Yoga of the Cells
23. Conquest over Death
24. Yoga for Humanity

ASTER PATEL

References

1. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 4.
2. *CWM*, Vol. 13, p. 212.
3. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 20, pp. 1-2.

The deepest heart, the inmost essence of religion, apart from its outward machinery of creed, cult, ceremony and symbol, is the search for God and the finding of God. Its aspiration is to discover the Infinite, the Absolute, the One, the Divine, who is all these things and yet no abstraction but a Being. Its work is a sincere living out of the true and intimate relations between man and God, relations of unity, relations of difference, relations of an illuminated knowledge, an ecstatic love and delight, an absolute surrender and service, a casting of every part of our existence out of its normal status into an uprush of man towards the Divine and a descent of the Divine into man.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Human Cycle, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 131)

VASISHTHA GANAPATI MUNI

HIS ASSOCIATION WITH THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

VASISHTHA Ganapati Muni was born on the 17th November of 1878 in Kalavarayi, a small village situated in the Vizag district of Andhra Pradesh. He was a mighty spiritual personality with a vast knowledge of Sanskrit. A yogi, poet, philosopher, critic, scholar, an eloquent speaker, an ardent devotee of Mother India, he never deviated from his goals: the attainment of India's freedom through the power of *tapas* and the revival of the Vedic teachings. Thus he did intense *tapasya* to reach his goals. He untiringly endeavoured to reveal the inner significances of the Vedic hymns, and believed that the future of India rests on a complete revival of the Vedic truths.

The Muni was an ardent adorer of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. While going through the writings of Sri Aurobindo appearing in the *Arya*, he had developed an inner contact with the Master and the Mother. But he never had any opportunity to have their Darshan. On the 15th of August 1928 he came to Pondicherry to participate in the birthday celebrations of Sri Aurobindo. After he saw the Master he had only one word to express from the deepest depths of his heart—*Divya Purusha*, the Divine personified. Later he told one of his disciples here that he had witnessed a powerful spiritual radiance around Sri Aurobindo. He also exclaimed that Sri Aurobindo's face was 500 years old, there was so much wisdom, so much maturity, so much ripeness. Before he came to Pondicherry a copy of his *magnum opus*, *Umasahasram* (thousand verses in Sanskrit praising goddess Uma) was sent to Sri Aurobindo. It was Sudhanva, a disciple of the Muni who settled in the Ashram here, who had given this copy of *Umasahasram* to Sri Aurobindo. On going through the verses of this grand poem Sri Aurobindo had expressed that it was a 'superman performance' and he would like to meet the author. Later Sri Aurobindo passed this copy on to Kapali Sastri who wrote a splendid commentary on it.

After having Sri Aurobindo's darshan, the Muni stayed in the Ashram for fifteen days. He stayed at the residence of Sudhanva. On the 16th of August, at 9 a.m. he saw the Mother with Kodandaraman. Both Mother and the Muni had a joint meditation for half an hour. After the mediation Mother expressed her wish to hear a few verses of his Sanskrit rendering of Sri Aurobindo's book *The Mother*. Mother was highly pleased with him. Mother had remarked that the half an hour's meditation with the Muni was perfect. It was a continuous, unbroken state and that no *sadhak* with whom she meditated has yet done so for more than three to five minutes. On the other hand, the Muni also said that during the meditation, first he felt a current emerging through his head, and then he felt that an external current was very perceptibly falling on him from all sides. On the 19th the Muni had his second interview with the Mother. It lasted a full forty-five minutes. During the first fifteen minutes the Muni read the verses from his Sanskrit rendering of *The Mother*. Then there was a long talk between

them. During this conversation the Muni said to the Mother that she must consider him as her son and that he was at her service, to be utilised as her instrument for Divine works. As the Muni was expatiating on his revelations of the incarnation of *Shakambhari* (one of the aspects of the Divine Mother) Mother seems to have closed her eyes and fallen into a trance. Afterwards the Muni revealed to Sri Venkataraman that he saw a bright light emerging from her toe and there was a halo of light around her and the current emerging from all parts of her body was distinctly visible to the naked eye and the entire room was surcharged with electricity. Towards the end of this meeting the Muni gave to the Mother a copy of his incomplete renderings of *The Mother* for Sri Aurobindo's approval. The third interview with the Mother was on the 25th morning. It lasted for one full hour and ten minutes. The first half hour was spent in meditation, and then conversation followed. During this meeting the Mother returned the copy of the verses given for Sri Aurobindo's approval and said that Sri Aurobindo highly admired them and found them very beautiful and wanted him to complete the work. Then Mother said that Sri Aurobindo and herself have recognised him as a man who could do their divine work.

One day during his stay here in the Ashram, in one hour, he composed 108 aphorisms or *sutras* divided into 8 parts. These *sutras* explain many secrets of different Yogas. The work is known as *Tattvaghantashatakam* of which parts 7 and 8 are available. It is interesting to note that the Muni did not know English, yet many of the fundamentals of what Sri Aurobindo had written in *The Secret of the Veda* were written down by him in Sanskrit. When Sri Aurobindo was asked how it could be possible, he said that when the great truths descend they are received and given expression to by whoever is open to them. This was the secret of Vasistha Ganapati Muni—he was sufficiently open to receive truths descending from higher planes of consciousness.

After he went from Pondicherry he never returned. A few letters to the Mother written in Sanskrit are the only proofs of his gratitude to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Apart from these letters nowhere else do we find Vasishtha Ganapati Muni saying anything about the Mother or Sri Aurobindo or their yoga.

This article has been written on the basis of the following books and other writings:

1. *Vasishthavaibhavam* by Kapali Sastri.
2. *Nayana, A biography of Ganapati Muni* by Dr. S. Krishan.
3. *Bhagvan and Nayana* by Sri Sankaranarayanan.
4. *Selected Works of M. P. Pandit*, Vols. 4, 5 and 6.
5. *Collected Works of Ganapati Muni*, Vol. 1, edited by K. Natesan.
6. Sri K. S. Venkataramana's letters to Kapali Sastri published in *Sat-sang with M. P. Pandit*, Vol. IV, pp. 194-197.

THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of July 2004)

10. The Cosmic Boar

THOUGH we usually begin with the Matsya (fish) avatar when we enumerate the incarnations of Vishnu, it is the Varaha which has kindled the religio-poetic imagination of Indians ever since the *Vishnu Purana* gave it prime importance. The Cosmic Boar appears in the fourth chapter of the very first Aswasa of the Purana. The figure of Varaha is described as filling the spaces and we find Sanaka and other sages hailing the Lord. The Earth Goddess worships Him:

“You are the one who creates the world, sustains it and destroys it. No one knows about your transcendent form. The gods worship you. Indeed, none can aspire for Realisation without worshipping you. You created me. You are my sustenance. I have surrendered to you. Hence people call me Madhavi (one who belongs to Madhavan). You are the created things in the world. Please save me.”

Parashara says that the Lord heeded the prayers and dived into the ocean. Just as boars dig up the tubers of *Cyperus Rotundus* with their tusks, the Lord gathered the earth on his tusks and rose up from the ocean's waves, appearing like a blue hill, *samutthitonīla ivācalo mahān*. The Varaha incarnation caught the imagination of the religious mind very well and we have even a *Varaha Purana*. The third Skandha of the *Bhagavata* gives a sublime account of this avatar. Shuka reports to King Parikshita the account of the Varaha manifestation as detailed by Maitreya to Vidura. Brahma was worried that even as he went on with his work of creation, the earth lay submerged in the waves, quite helpless. As he meditated, a thumb-sized boar emerged from his nostrils. Within seconds of its emergence, the boar grew to cosmic proportions. As the sages praised the Lord with Vedic chants, the boar which was the personification of yajna, roared and plunged into the waves:

“That Yajna-embodied one dived into that water, limitless in expanse and in depth, shattering it with his sharp hoofs, and in the depths of that water in Rasatala, He came across the earth (Bhu), the support of all beings, whom he had once sheltered in His abdomen at the time of deluge. While the Lord stood there in His glory lifting up the earth on His tusks from Rasatala, He was confronted by Hiranyaksha of irresistible power, armed with a mace in hand. Fierce like His own Sudarshana, the Lord slaughtered the Asura effortlessly as a lion an elephant...”

So fast, so quick and the incarnational work is over! Of course, the whole affair commands us to suspend our disbelief totally, but then, is the Purana nothing more than an Old Wives' Tale? It cannot be, for our ancients never wrote anything in vain and the Varaha incarnation in the *Bhagavata*, like the rest of our sacred legends, is a redaction of memories that go back to the Vedic times and beyond. Indeed, the Varaha

avatar was originally associated with Brahmana Prajapati. Later on the image was integrated with Vishnu's manifestations and carved images of Varaha became part of the Dashavatara series. A 12th century stone inscription from Ajmer refers to all the incarnations and speaks of Varaha:

“May Madhava who in his Boar incarnation, by the mighty thrust of his long cruel tusks delivered the earth in the shape of a muddy lump of clay and who extended the fixed order of religions and duty; the abode of intelligence and the habitat of the universe, and who is ever ready to destroy the mental agonies of his devotees, increase your welfare.”¹

Even when associated with Vishnu, there are references to two Varaha manifestations. Once he appeared out of Brahma's nostril as a white boar and saved the Earth that had been devastated badly. The Lord manifested as the dark boar when Hiranyaksha violated Earth Goddess. Does this tangle refer to the vicissitudes of a society that was going through the phases of civilisational change, when the deliverer appeared and set things right? The reference to the Varaha as the Sacrificial Boar (Yajna Varaha) in the *Bhagavata* has to be noted. The idea is already set forth in elaboration in the *Vishnu Purana*. The hymn of the sages praising the Varaha after the destruction of Hiranyaksha in the *Bhagavata* personify Him as the Vedic sacrifice. His limbs are enumerated as the various things needed for performing a sacrifice like the ladle, ghee and the sacrificial grass. But more than all these external rites, the manifestation indicated man's ability to perform the yajna of the inner sacrifice through mantric syllables and meditation that leads him from mind to the planes above:

“Salutations to Thee who art manifest as all Mantras, all the celestials, all the ingredients of worship—nay, as the entire system of sacrifices and forms of worship. Salutations to Thee who art that state of enlightened consciousness attained through renunciation, devotion, concentration, etc., and the universal Teacher who confers that enlightenment.”

These are important pointers. Apparently, the story of Varaha rescuing the Earth Goddess from the depths of the ocean was a surface legend, embroidered by what was observed in nature (oceans, streams, rain, animals, trees) and then crystallised into the ritual of fire sacrifice. Again, the external sacrifice of offering herbs and ghee into the fire was also meant to reflect the internal sacrifice that man had to keep constantly in his vision. Sri Aurobindo speaks of these subtle changes that kept taking place millennia ago:

“This change was evidently due to a cultural development in these early peoples who became progressively more mentalised and less engrossed in the physical life as they advanced in civilisation and needed to read into their religion and their deities finer and subtler aspects which would support their more highly mentalised concepts and interests and find for them a true spiritual being or some celestial figure as their support and sanction.”²

Exploring the secret of the Veda, Sri Aurobindo has insightfully explained the

most popular ritual of the ancient times, the Yajna, a ritual that has continued to be practised till today:

“Our sacrifice is the offering of all our gains and works to the powers of the higher existence. The whole world is a dumb and helpless sacrifice in which the soul is bound as a victim self-offered to unseen Gods. The liberating Word must be found, the illuminating hymn must be framed in the heart and mind of man and his life must be turned into a conscious and voluntary offering in which the soul is no longer the victim, but the master of the sacrifice.”³

That would mean we are dealing with several worlds at a time, for the world of matter and life that we actually see does not exhaust the spaces of creation. Sri Aurobindo clarifies the Puranic cosmology that posits “a rising tier of earths and heavens”.

Principle	World
1. Pure Existence—Sat	World of the highest truth of being (Satyaloka)
2. Pure Consciousness—Chit	World of infinite Will or conscious force (Tapoloka)
3. Pure Bliss—Ananda	World of creative delight of existence (Janaloka)
4. Knowledge or Truth—Vijnana	World of the Vastness (Maharloka)
5. Mind	World of light (Swar)
6. Life (nervous being)	World of various becoming (Bhuvar)
7. Matter	The material world (Bhur) ⁴

The *Bhagavata* says that as soon as the Varaha appeared, the holy sages abiding in Jana, Tapa and Satya realms were delighted and began praising him. When the Lord destroyed the demon Hiranyaksha, the Rishis describe Varaha as verily the image of the Vedic sacrifice, for they know that this is an involution by the Supreme into the cosmos, going right into the deeps of Rasatala to bring up the material world, Bhur that had sunk there. The Purana calls upon us to drink in such nectar of the Lord’s doings so that the manifestation will not have been in vain, and we would raise ourselves to the higher regions achieved by the Rishis. This indeed is the tapasya which would help us come face to face with the Divine, affirms the Purana:

“To those who worship with intense and motiveless devotion, He reveals Himself of His own accord. There is no blessing higher than that. Except a beast of a man, who, having discrimination and a true sense of life’s values, would desist from consuming the nectar of the Lord’s doings, selected from ancient tradition, if he had but once drunk a little of it with the cup of his ears and come to know of its delectableness?”

Though the incarnation of Varaha and the death of Hiranyaksha are mentioned in brief terms, the *Bhagavata* then proceeds to spend several cantos on the origins of Hiranyaksha that had led to a crisis in civilisation. Diti had, due to a moment of incautious intemperance, become the mother of evil and even when still undelivered, her future children were generating enough fire to scorch the earth. The gods rushed to Brahma who assured them that despite all the activities of those who allow vulgarity and sin to enter their minds, the earth remained the best place where Dharma and Jnana can be achieved. Even gods have to be born on earth to cleanse themselves of accrued pride. Once the gatekeepers of Vishnu had been cursed by the Kumaras for being partial in allowing only certain people to enter the Lord's presence. Such is the power of the Yogamaya that the attendants of the Lord became His enemies! Our perception of evil and good must necessarily remain flawed in the absence of the total vision indicated by the Lord to the Kumaras:

“These attendants will soon be born in the species of Asuras, noted for their antagonism to Devas. There they will develop intense antagonism to Me, and as a consequence their mind will get concentrated on Me. They will then have communion with Me through confrontation, which will help them to come back to Me very quickly. Know that you happened to curse them, because I willed so.”

Our separative mentality has to be repeatedly told this truth that in essence there is no friend nor enemy. It is the work of the Yogamaya. The truth is, *īśā vāsyam idam sarvam*. Having said this, the Purana proceeds with the tale of Hiranyaksha. He was essentially a person in whom the body waxed without self-control and the mind was tuned to aggrandisement, while no fear of Dharma nor the illumination of Jnana found a place in his understanding. Nay, more. In the pride of his power, Hiranyaksha goes to Patala and insults the powerful Varuna no end. Varuna simply tells him that he has opted for peace and Hiranyaksha would find mettle more attractive to test his power in the Lord who takes incarnations on earth. Hiranyaksha's shoreless pride and fate draw him to Rasatala in search of the Lord and he now confronts the Cosmic Boar.

Once again there is the moment of confrontation between Night and Day, prelude to the next step upwards. It is the evil in man that appears good for the nonce, as the Purana describes Hiranyaksha golden all over, carrying the mace (*mahāgadām kāñcanacitradaśamī*), while the boar is not exactly pretty to look at and right now has risen from the slush of the lowest planes, carrying the earthen sphere on its tusks. The battle that follows is shot through with images that remind us how we are actually confronting the battle within man, as he strives to rise higher by defeating the enemies within him who give him a stiff fight:

“Just as a great Yogi can evade Yama, the great Lord side-stepped the stroke aimed at his chest ...

He aimed His blow at the enemy's right brow, but the master of mace warfare that he was, Hiranyaksha parried it with his own mace...

He possesses many hallucinogenic powers, He is overweening in pride, unprincipled and evil-minded ...”

The Lord seems to be playing this game, for after all the idea of creation is not destruction but a continuous transformation. This significance also percolates through when the Cosmic Boar carrying its Discus towers over Hiranyaksha while the gods and other divinities pray to Him to destroy the demon: “But little did they know that this cruel son of Diti confronting the Lord, was none but a principal attendant of His.” The fight between Hiranyaksha and Varaha is now described with great attention to detail, assuring us that the battle within is usually protracted, and is not completed in a single birth of ours. We enter the region of magical incantations as well. When the battle comes to an end with the destruction of the demon, Brahma and other divinities express their wonderment:

“He on whom the Yogis desiring salvation meditate continuously with concentration in solitude for overcoming the subtle body, which is rooted in ignorance,—by a kick of His foot, and seeing His face before him, has this Asura met with his death.”

The *Bhagavata*, of course, did not conclude the manifestation, for the sway of this avatar has been continuous. In literature, Varaha has an important space. The Varaha Book in Arulaladasar’s Tamil *Sri Mahabhagavatam* (16th century) speaks of the cosmic Purusha who has the fourteen worlds as his limbs. So does the version of Sevvaichooduvar, another Tamil poet of the 17th century. All the versions remember to note that Jaya and Vijaya, the attendants of Vishnu who were cursed by the Kumaras asked for the boon of never forgetting the Lord even in their earthly sojourn. As a result they remembered the Lord all the time, though as their enemy! This goes to show that the divine spark remains within man even in his earthly existence. It is for man to recognise this and help the spark grow into a full flame and not seek to put it out by his hatred and jealousy and self-destructive pride.

The Varaha manifestation has also been a favourite with bhakti poets who have revelled in referring to the various incarnations of the Lord. Nammalwar has an incandescent simile of Varaha rising with the earth in his *Tiruvaimozhi*, his two gleaming, curved tusks appearing as two pieces of moon:

My darling who is dear to Lakshmi!
 You lifted the earth by your tusks
 As a blue hill, seized by two crescents!
 Churner of the ocean blue! Shall I lose thee?⁵

Like the fish and the tortoise, the boar was a familiar part of the Indian’s life in his hunting areas. It was very strong and had great reserves of survival strength, which must have thrilled the adventurous spirit of the ancient Indian and invested the boar with divine origins. The Soronkshetra 100 kilometres northeast of Mathura is

pointed out as the place where Varaha picked up the earth on His tusks. Quite a few places in India (Srivilliputtur, for example) are known as Varaha Kshetra which means Varaha worship was widespread all over India at one time. The Empire of Vijayanagar had the Cosmic Boar as their seal. There are innumerable temples to Varaha even today and the Cosmic Boar is worshipped both as Bhu-Varaha (Earth Goddess-Cosmic Boar) and Lakshmi-Varaha.

The important place accorded to the Varaha avatar in the theology of Srivaishnavism can be traced back to the *Vishnu Purana* which was the major inspiration for the Alvars (3rd to 8th century A.D.). Later the Varaha Purana placed before the devout two verses which have since then become famous as the *Varaha charama shlokas* that give a firm assurance to man that the Supreme shall never desert the devotee. The assurance of guardianship given by Rama to Vibhishana and by Krishna to Arjuna are said to pale before the assurance given to the Earth Goddess by the Varaha. After being rescued, Mother Earth was worried about her children. It was but natural, for earthly life was full of the unknown and there were external and internal pressures upon man to drag him down to hell. Would it mean that those who become sick and helpless and perhaps lost their mental powers of envisioning and meditating upon the Lord be denied His presence for ever? The Varaha did not hesitate even for a moment but spoke out immediately:

*sthite manasi suvasthe śārīre sati yo nara:
dhātusāmye sthite smartā viśvarūpañca māmajam
tatasthe mriyamānam tu kāṣṭhapāṣāṇasannibham
aham smarāmi madbhaktam nayāmi paramām gatim*

“If a person when he is of clear mind and healthy body and has the three bodily humours in proper proportion meditates upon me who has the universe as the body and is not subject to birth, I shall remember my devotee in his last moments even if he is senseless as a block of wood or piece of stone and shall lead him to the highest plane.”⁶

The Varaha makes it clear that one must look towards an integral health, of the body, the vital movements (caused by humours like pitta, kapha and shleshma) and the mind, as he turns towards the life spiritual and meditates upon the Supreme. This verse also makes it clear that a man’s birth or status or religious upbringing do not have anything to do with his spiritual life. All that is needed is a body that is properly tuned to health so that the mind is not drawn to its pains and sicknesses. Freed from body-consciousness, the mind finds it easier to rise to higher planes of existence. And what shall this aspirant meditate upon?

The Cosmic Form, of course. The Supreme as the Created Universe. There is no circumference to this cosmic idea but the centre is everywhere, the all-pervading Divine is even now within the heart which is trying to meditate upon Him! Though

the Supreme is the entire creation, yet is he free from the waxing and waning associated with creation. He is *Aja*, birthless. Himself universal and one who does not suffer from the way of fate and the problem of suffering, the Supreme is yet so full of compassion and love towards his creation that he is easily reachable, by the aspirant's meditation. The Supreme is also a *sulabha*, one to whom we have easy access. Because of this affection for the earthlings, the Supreme is prepared to manifest as a mere boar and himself come forward to save the devotee. Explaining the second verse, the celebrated Manipravala commentator (14th century), Periaavachan Pillai writes:

“The Sastras say that one must remember the Supreme in the last moments to gain Moksha. Is it not against the Sastras if the Varaha says there is no need for remembrance in the last moments? Well, the former was for those who follow other pathways to god. But those for whom the Supreme is the Way and the Goal, the rule ceases to apply. The aspirant has to remember in the last moments, right? If he cannot, I shall remember him! I have to gain him, and so I have to remember him! It is the farmer who gains the crop that has to till the land. The crop does not till the land.”⁷

“I shall remember my devotee in his last moments.” The commentator dwells on each word in the verses with maternal fondness. For instance, the word *nayāmi* (I shall lead him) brings forth this loving outburst:

“When I lead my devotee to the supreme plane, I shall not have him brought in by others as the denizens of subtle planes do. Like a mother who carries her little baby wrapping it up in her garment, I shall cover him with the upper end of my garment myself and lead him forward. Even as the Lord took himself in the Pushpaka aerocar Sita who had been imprisoned in Lanka, I shall take him myself.”⁸

These words attributed to the Lord in His Varaha manifestation return to the fore quite often in Srivaishnava philosophy. Vedanta Desika (14th century) has also written a Manipravala commentary on the *Varaha charama shlokas*. His *Rahasya Sikhamani* says that the Puranas explain the significance of Vedic insights in a very big way. Desika accords a very high place to the *Varaha Purana* which is termed as Sattvika. It is unparalleled as the Purana is spoken by the Lord in his Varaha manifestation, an avatar which is seen verily as the Lord of Knowledge, *Jnana-p-piran*. One remembers the Vedic statement, *Amritam tu vidyā*, Knowledge confers immortality. The Lord of Knowledge conveys the Purana to the Earth Goddess; it is clearly the vision of the Supreme Consciousness bathing Matter with the knowledge-power that confers immortality upon the denizens of the earth. Desika grows ecstatic at the compassion of the Lord as Varaha who simply plunges into the primordial waters to save Matter and make it creative once again.

How many were the aeons of human experience on earth that inspired the Varaha Avatar? Or was it one of those intuitive leaps of human imagination that had slipped out of the leash of intellectual reasoning? Vain are the questions. The Cosmic Boar continues to be the reality and we are constantly refreshed by the avatar's presence and personality. To conclude with the hymn of the Rishis abiding in the realms of the

World of the highest truth of being, the World of conscious force and the world of creative delight of existence, reaching out to the triune experience of Sat-Chit-Ananda:

“O Lord! Who except Thou can even conceive such an idea as lifting up the earth sunk into Rasatala? But it is no matter of wonder in Thee who art the most unique among wonders in so far as Thou hast by Thy power created this universe which is unmistakably wondrous. We, the residents of Janaloka, Tapoloka and Satyaloka have been wetted and thereby purified by the very holy water drops that come from the tip of Thy mane, as Thou shakest off the water on Thy Veda-constituted body in all directions.”

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

References

1. See Manisha Mukhopadhyay, *Brahmanical Mythology in Sanskrit Inscriptions* (1981), p. 70.
2. *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* (1985), p. 3.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
5. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*

Does Brindavan exist anywhere else than on earth?

In the world of the gods there is an ideal and harmonious Brindavan of which the earthly Brindavan is but a deformation and a caricature.

Those who are developed inwardly, either in their senses or in their minds, perceive these realities which are invisible (to the ordinary man) and receive their inspiration from them.

So the writer or writers of the Bhagavat were certainly in contact with a whole inner world that is well and truly real and existent, where they saw and experienced everything they have described or revealed.

The Mother

(On Thoughts and Aphorisms, CWM, Vol 10, pp. 60-61)

MONSIEUR AND MADAME FRANÇOIS MARTIN IN PONDICHERRY

(Continued from the issue of July 2004)

IV

MADAME RECEIVES AN UNUSUAL GUEST

THERE was always some activity at the port in those days, for ships from France would arrive every two or three months carrying cargo, provisions and arms, and bringing people including soldiers who were so very important for the running of the place, besieged as it was with unexpected intrusions or even assaults.

In September 1687, the ship *Saint Louis* was anchored here at the bay and the usual unloading was going on, when suddenly there appeared most unexpectedly at the factory gate quite a good-looking gentleman in his forties. He was a Frenchman. He wanted to see the governor and was seeking asylum here for a short while. A doctor by profession, Monsieur Saint-Jacques explained, he had been in the service of the Mogul emperor Aurangzeb for the past decade or so and after many a supplication had managed to get an answer to his appeal. He was granted a two-year leave on the grounds of having to visit his ailing mother in France. So, the arrangements were made for him to go to Surat. "After a gruelling enough journey on horseback and by carriage, from one town to another, I found that the ship I was to sail in would leave only two days later. I suddenly panicked. I was obsessed by the idea that Aurangzeb would call me back. Back to the routine of court life at Agra. No, not again! I said to myself, and jumped into the first vessel leaving Surat that day. It so happened that it was coming here to Pondicherry. It didn't matter; somehow I had to put more distance between me and Aurangzeb." After that introduction, he received a warm welcome from the Governor and his wife and became their guest.

As days went by, all the friends and close associates of his hosts were certainly impressed by his first-hand knowledge of the Mogul court, and all the decorum in the show of its wealth and power. He would surely have had a professional word or two with Mr. Lauvergne, the doctor in the service of the Company, and Mr. Petit-Bois, the surgeon. The Capuchin fathers and the Sunday church must have helped him remember his country after a long time and brought back memories of his earlier life in France.

During the hot summer months that followed, his hosts would escort him to the terrace of their residence and spend a few hours enjoying the cool breeze of the evenings after sunset. Talking about France and the unrest there, Madame Martin recalled having heard about the revocation of the Edict of Nantes just before she had left the country in 1685, a couple of years before. But always their conversation

would invariably turn to the emperor, his palaces at Agra and Delhi. It was said that at his accession to the throne, after the death of Shah Jehan in 1658, an inventory was made of all the gold coins, precious stones, brocades, porcelain, manuscripts and of course, arms and gunpowder. First-hand accounts affirmed that the emperor had in his possession gems worth millions, not only diamonds, emeralds and pearls but also other precious stones; his library had four thousand volumes of manuscripts, all so richly bound that their value was estimated up to 6 million gold coins. Mother and daughter must have wondered how so much wealth could be displayed in one place alone and remain so well protected.

They were always amused to hear about the number of bows and genuflexions that were demanded from everyone who entered the royal audience chamber or went out from there. Whoever they were, princes or other high-ranking officials these gestures were supposed to show that they were as dust compared to him who occupied the throne! Only then was their well-being ensured. Everything depended on the emperor's good grace. The subjects had to prostrate themselves on the floor while taking leave. They would then walk backwards placing their hand on the ground while their eyes had to be directed downwards; the other hand had to remain on the stomach. The hand on the floor would be brought up to touch the forehead: this had to be repeated at least thrice while retreating. This gesture was supposed to assure the emperor that his subjects would remember that they had to depend on him for their daily bread!

Saint-Jacques must have demonstrated the action to his hosts, quite to the hilarious amusement of the French officers, and told them about all the fastidious ways by which the doctor had to gain audience with the emperor Aurangzeb, his patient! But whatever that might be, to all the foreign traders, the administration, as in the city of Surat, appeared to be very well organised in India. Commenting on the Mogul empire, Sri Aurobindo says, "The Mogul Empire was a great and magnificent construction and an immense amount of political genius and talent was employed in its creation and maintenance. It was as splendid, powerful and beneficent and, it may be added, in spite of Aurangzeb's fanatical zeal, infinitely more liberal and tolerant in religion than any mediaeval or contemporary European kingdom or empire and India under its rule stood high in military and political strength, economic opulence and the brilliance of its art and culture." (*CWSA*, Vol. 20, p. 443)

In fact, the imperial craftsmen trained people who found employment with the Rajas and the nobles, for all of them were not required by the Mogul government. "In this way," says Jadunath Sarkar, "their skill was transplanted all over the country. The most notable instance of this diffusion of talent and elevation of the cultural level... is supplied by the schools of Mogul painters and musicians." Its 'economic opulence' was evident and visible in the slim-pillared halls and the beautiful arches that Indo-Saracenic architecture created, giving a fresh and artistic look to the places where they had been built. In marble or sandstone, the Indian craftsmen outdid their

Persian counterparts and the country can be proud of the legacy of the Mogul Empire on the subcontinent.

Another day, he told them about the emperor's outings. From the palace into the country, he was accompanied by more than ten thousand men! It was a huge caravan, almost like an army. There were a hundred elephants in front, well-caparisoned in velvet or brocades, with two riders on each one, the 'mahout' or the driver, and the other carrying a huge gold and white banner. The emperor himself was part of this *avant-garde* so to say, but in the middle of the procession. He was seen sometimes on an elephant, seated on a cushioned bench inside a sumptuously decorated wooden tower. Occasionally, instead of the elephant he would be riding his own favourite animal, a magnificent white stallion from Persia. At the rear came five or six hundred camels or elephants carrying provisions, people and other things according to the purpose of the outing.

About the ostentatious display of wealth, nothing could beat another very impressive ceremony held at the court: the eighteen-day-long obeisance and greeting which the emperor received every year on his birthday. All the gifts in kind and gold coins received added to the treasury more than 30 million precious stones and gems annually. The elephants and bridled horses went to fill the palace stables. Earlier, there was a custom of weighing the sovereign with gold and precious stones, brocades and silk; and the entourage was expected to show sorrow and concern if the weight was less, and rejoice if it was more than the previous year. But this was discontinued by Aurangzeb who wanted to convey that he was practising a religious life that called for restraint and self-abnegation.

Madame Martin marvelled at what wealth and power could do to a man – a monarch who they knew was a conqueror, who had annexed Golconda and Bijapur so ruthlessly and come so close to their own quieter territories here in the south! She must have tried sometimes to think of the festivities and celebrations in Paris, at the court of Louis XIV. Nothing in France could stand beside this singular display of riches and pompous living. All her faith in the greatness and unsurpassable grandeur of Versailles might have been shattered. But after having travelled almost half-way round the globe, by land and by sea, it was time for her to learn that the ways of people in the world were so inexplicably different from one region to another, that one could not compare or judge by mere external appearances. Sitting here in Pondicherry, her mind widened. Her unusual guest, Saint-Jacques, certainly remained quite unaware of the effect of his stories. Her own attitude towards their place in Pondicherry was clear: to serve by her husband's side the people she had come to know. It was for her the best way to live in the name of the country they were expected to represent here in India.

(To be continued)

AMITA SEN

Notes

1. Louis XIV and Aurangzeb were contemporaries and knew about each other's existence. Louis XIV, king of France, 1660-1715. Aurangzeb, Mogul emperor, 1658-1707.
2. It was only in February 1688 that Saint-Jacques left Pondicherry by the boat *L'Oiseau*, after having spent eight memorable months in India among French people after ten years at the court of Aurangzeb in Delhi or Agra as a doctor on duty.
3. Christian missionaries came into India with each trading company—the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English, the French and the Danes. All sorts of reasons prompted Indians to get converted to the Christian faith; but mostly poverty and lack of medical care. Several of the missionaries were held in great esteem for their saintly life and their constant benevolence. Like sadhus and fakirs, they were the type of people Indians respected.
4. Akbar—enjoyed discussing religion with the missionaries and with every type of religious body, for, that was the question he wanted to solve for the sake of harmony among his subjects, Hindus and Muslims alike, and created from his own conclusions a new religion which would combine the best of all that people preached in the world around him.
 Jahangir—as a prince he was so close to the Portuguese missionaries that they had thought he might get converted: but for reasons of his own he drifted away from them. Later, as emperor (1605), he agreed upon a reconciliation with the Jesuit fathers and allowed them to preach in the Mogul territories as before.
 Shah Jehan—chased away Portuguese traders from Hooghly as their priests were imposing conversion on his subjects there.
 Aurangzeb—tried to spread Islam in such a way that it would override the other two religions.

Thou thinkest the ascetic in his cave or on his mountaintop a stone and a do-nothing? What dost thou know? He may be filling the world with the mighty currents of his will & changing it by the pressure of his soul-state.

*

The Theosophists are wrong in their circumstances but right in the essential. If the French Revolution took place, it was because a soul on the Indian snows dreamed of God as freedom, brotherhood and equality.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 460)

ON THE YOGA-VASHISHTHA

My enlightened curiosity was roused to read the *Yoga-Vashishtha* when I came across Sri Aurobindo's remark: "I have not myself read the *Yoga-Vāśiṣṭha*, but from what I have read about it, it must be a book written by somebody with a remarkable occult knowledge." It is widely read in the original Sanskrit as well as in the vernacular translations by the seekers of self-knowledge throughout India. It is the Bible of those who seek for Peace and Liberation, as the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas and the *Bhagavata* are for the devotees and the *Bhagavadgita* for men of action. Thousands of men and women from the lowest to the highest grade of culture find solace in the study of this wonderful work. In grandeur it may be compared to the great Himalayas which, being situated on the earth, are within the reach of all, yet whose lofty peaks baffle the attempts of the most earnest expedition. It is really one of the wonders that the mind of India has produced in literature.

Swami Rama Tirtha, a great Vedantist himself, said in one of his American lectures: "One of the greatest books, and the most wonderful according to me ever written under the sun, is *Yoga-Vashishtha* which nobody on earth can read without realising God-Consciousness." According to the late Sri Bhagavan Das, Pandit Vrindavana Sarasvata of Benares who passed away in the year 1905 had read through this great work 165 times and the work consists of 64,000 lines, i.e., 32,000 slokas. Condensed editions are available and they contain, the least of them, 6000 slokas. The saying about it, among the Vedantins, is that it is a work of Siddhavastha, i.e., for the philosopher-yogi, who having mastered the theory, is passing on to the practice of it, while the other well-known works, even the *Gita*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Brahmasutras*, are works of the Sadhanavastha, i.e., for those who are yet trying to master the theory. All agree that, by the study of this work alone, even the most passionate and the worldly-minded will become dispassionate and will gradually realise peace within. Having learnt the method of liberation expounded in this work, even a child comes to realise the Self. It leads one to the highest bliss, God-Consciousness and Liberation even while living this life.

The vision of Vashishtha, as it is simply called, is propounded in the form of a dialogue between the Master, Guru, and Yogi Vashishtha and the human disciple Rama who is also the Divine, the Avatar among the Avatars. Rama asks question after question to the Guru, seeking for revelations of aspect after aspect of the Infinite. The answers of the Guru are from his own concentrated explorations and scalings of every level of the Vast. In this work we have all the Yogas and all the Paths and all the goals powerfully vibrating in the Great Utterance.

The work might be considered by some, to be intended for the chosen few who have the intellectual and spiritual development capable of discerning the grand truths expounded by its different narratives and stories. But in the words of the book itself, it is intended neither for those worldly-minded who wallow in this phenomenal world

of sorrow and ignorance indifferent to spiritual truths, nor for those highly evolved souls who have realised the Truth or are well-advanced towards discovering the Ultimate Reality. It is written for the benefit of those who have become indifferent to the lures of this evanescent worldly life and aspire for the realisation of Truth or Reality, here and now. “It induces inevitably contemplation upon, consecration to and communion with THAT. The call is to go beyond knowings and be the Light, beyond enjoyings and be the Bliss. The discerning reader has the necessary spring-board and launching-pad to lift him to land in ‘Sunbelts of knowledge and moonbelts of delight’. The Sadhaka has only to join in the greatest adventure of Consciousness and Joy.”

C. SUBBIAN

(Source Book: *The Vision and the Way of Vashishtha*, Indian Heritage Trust, Madras, 1993)

If the word vāsanā is used in the original [Yoga Vāsiṣṭha], it does not mean “desire”. It means usually the idea or mental feeling rising from the citta, imaginations, impressions, memories etc., impressions of liking and disliking, of pain and pleasure. What Vasistha wants to say is that while the ideas, impressions, impulsions, that lead to action in an ordinary man rise from the citta, those that rise in the Jivanmukta come straight from the sattva—from the essential consciousness of the being—in other words they are not mental but spiritual formations. As one might say, instead of citta-vṛtti they are sattvapraṇā, direct indications from the inner being of what is to be thought, felt or done. When the citta is no longer active and the mind silent—which happens when the mukti comes and no one can be Jivanmukta without that, then what remains and perceives and does things is felt as an essential consciousness, the consciousness of the true self or true being.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 333)

TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of July 2004)

Rodogune: Tradition and Experiment

SRI AUROBINDO remakes Sophocles and Shakespeare in a new kind of experiment for a new age, where playwrights have just begun questioning the effectiveness of prose on the stage. The date of composition was February, 1906, when Sri Aurobindo was leaving for Calcutta after his stay in Baroda. Although *Rodogune* becomes a successful poetic play by largely avoiding the problems of modern verse drama, the play's style and pattern confirm the playwright's belief in retaining the old tragic form with a kind of modernisation of the ancient and the Elizabethan speech styles.

The name of an apparently passive woman in the title, especially when there is a tragic hero in Antiochus, has been a surprise. And it is exactly the point of Sri Aurobindo's newness as a tragic dramatist. For there is an evolution of consciousness in the hero (Antiochus) and the anti-hero (Timocles), which would not have taken place so quickly without the influence of *Rodogune* on their lives. The story is a simple tragedy. Cleopatra's twin sons, Antiochus and Timocles, return to Syria after the death of the king, their step-father. Cleopatra wrongfully crowns the junior twin, Timocles, because Antiochus is bold and straightforward, like Cordelia and Edgar in *King Lear*, and refuses to speak that "glib and oily art to speak and purpose not." Both brothers love *Rodogune*, who chooses Antiochus with an absolute one-pointedness. Phayllus, a new variation of Iago, and his sister Cleone, side with Timocles. When Antiochus returns to Syria to save his country by joining hands with Timocles, Phayllus completes the disaster by killing Antiochus with a view to winning *Rodogune* for Timocles. *Rodogune* gives up her life on the dead body of Antiochus, thus frustrating Timocles and Phayllus. Timocles recovers his sanity and orders the slaughter of Phayllus and the banishment of Cleone. Now, it is just emptiness and void for Timocles.

What then are the signs of Sri Aurobindo's creative experiment in a world dominated by the consciousness of Oedipus and Othello? The character of *Rodogune* itself is an original creation. The rose in the play stands for intensity, passion and delight, as the harlot Cleone identifies herself with that enchanting flower. *Rodogune*'s image grows in contrast with the enchantress, Cleone. "A floating lily in moonlight was her sister," Eunice hints at her low-voltage charm in Act I, Scene 1. Sri Aurobindo gives us the highlights of her physical charm through Eunice, who is cousin to the twins and companion of Cleopatra. In Act II, Scene 2, Eunice refers to her 'blushes', 'liquid love-filled eyes', 'frightened lashes', 'tall dainty grace', 'large eyes' and 'vague faint pallor just like twilit ivory.' Timocles, who lives in the vital, has also been impressed by the dignified charm. His images for *Rodogune*—'pale goddess', 'strange

holiness', 'deep-hearted miracle', 'glorious eyes'—are in harmony with Eunice's, but spoken through the lower vital to flatter her. Rodogune detects this lower vital vibration in Timocles and expresses exactly that to Eunice a little later:

...With such wild passion burning under his lids
I never thought to see in human eyes.

Apart from having a kind of physical charm, which the poet-playwright might have held in high esteem, Rodogune is a liberated woman in the true sense. She dislikes flattery even as a slave to Cleopatra. She has a keen eye on the law of life. When the old king is dying, Rodogune becomes a seer of life:

... None regard his end;
His flatterers whisper round him, his no more;
His almost widow smiles. Better would men,
Could they foresee their ending, understand
The need of mercy. (Act I, Scene 1)

Her words spoken later in the same scene "our own offences/Too heavy a load for us to bear" echo Sri Aurobindo's concept of fate as the product of our own action. Rodogune prefers love to the throne by choosing the deprived candidate, Antiochus, and sticks to him with an honest pride and with an unadulterous love defying the order of Cleopatra:

God gave my heart and mind; they are not hers
To force into this vile adultery.
I am a Parthian princess, of a race
Who choose one lord and cleave to him for ever
Through death, through fire, through swords, in hell, in heaven.
(Act III, Scene 2)

Was Sri Aurobindo already thinking of the great woman who chased a dark figure beyond the human shores because he was taking away her husband, her truth, from her? Unlike Tagore's, Sri Aurobindo's dramatic characters are always evolving through contrary principles. Timocles constantly swings from bad to good and from good to bad and then finally realises how he has ruined the possibility of his own happiness. When he criticises Antiochus in the following words,—he has obstructed his desire—he sees himself in his own rhetoric:

A despot's sensual longing for a slave,
Carnal, imperial, harsh, without respect,
The hunger of the vital self, not raised,
Refined, uplifted to the yearning heart. (*Ibid.*)

Sri Aurobindo seems to be telling us objectively: we are what we see. But then, except for Rodogune, no character is his extreme favourite. Man is a multiple being. The dramatist indicates through Antiochus' speeches how pride lurks behind nobility and how a Timon is going to be trapped by his own awareness of nobility. He has that characteristic arrogance of Oedipus, though not when he stands before Rodogune. When the Eremite says in Act III, Scene 3 that he never shall be king, Sri Aurobindo recreates Oedipus for a modern audience; it is as if an aspiring politician were standing helpless before a soothsayer:

Who art thou, speak,
Who barr'st with such ill-omened words my way
Discouraging new-born victory? What thou know'st,
Declare! Curb not thy speech. I have a mind
Stronger than omens.

The greater realism of Sri Aurobindo's plays—a realism that relates him to Shakespeare, and not to Tagore—lies in his ability to see man as a multiple personality. Timocles, the Casanova, whom Rodogune calls an 'inconstant month (Act II, Scene 2), cannot wholly forget his brother's affection for him. He has also seen the evil in Phayllus, 'I know you love me but your thoughts are evil' (Act V, Scene 1), but he is unable to come out of the spell till the death of Rodogune. Even Cleone sings of the value of youth in Act I, Scene 1:

Youth, youth! for we shall have upon the throne
No grey beard longer, but some glorious boy
Made for delight with whom we shall be young
For ever.

Rodogune is a permanent redeeming factor in the play. Antiochus is mellowed by her company and subdues his ego in favour of a true love for his country. He discovers his larger self in Act IV, Scene 4 through his love for Rodogune. To indicate the change in him, Sri Aurobindo alludes to the pre-death speeches of Cleopatra in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. "Yes, I have godlike stirrings in me". This is just his Shakespeariana for a new age. Sri Aurobindo's allusions to Shakespeare are signs of his creative power. The sensitive reader will see how he is keeping alive the tradition as an individual genius.

(To be continued)

GOUTAM GHOSAL

(Note: All quotations from *Rodogune*, are from *Collected Plays and Short Stories*: SABCL, Vol. 6)

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of July 2004)

SRI AUROBINDO considered *Savitri* as his main work and every day he allotted one and a half hours of his precious time for its composition. This was in the late forties when the tempo of work had speeded up considerably. In the letters on *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo has written: “*Savitri* was originally written many years ago before the Mother came, as a narrative poem in two parts, Part I Earth and Part II Beyond (these two parts are still extant in the scheme) each of four books—or rather Part II consisted of three books and an epilogue. Twelve books to an epic is a classical superstition, but the new *Savitri* may extend to ten books—if much is added in the final version it may be even twelve. The first book has been lengthening and lengthening out till it must be over 2000 lines, but I shall break up the original first four into five, I think—in fact I have already started doing so. These first five will be, as I conceive them now, the Book of Birth, the Book of Quest, the Book of Love, the Book of Fate, the Book of Death. As for the second Part, I have not touched it yet. There was no climbing of planes there in the first version—rather *Savitri* moved through the worlds of Night, of Twilight, of Day—all of course in a spiritual sense—and ended by calling down the power of the Highest Worlds of Sachchidananda. I had no idea of what the supramental World could be like at that time, so it could not enter into the scheme. As for expressing the supramental inspiration, that is a matter of the future.”¹

Savitri is written in pentametric blank verse running almost to twenty-four thousand lines. Divided into twelve Books as is the tradition for an epic, it has forty-eight Cantos. Part I consisting of the first twenty-four Cantos and an epilogue was published about twelve weeks before Sri Aurobindo’s passing away, in September 1950; Parts II and III, as a single Volume, appeared in 1951.

In one of his letters Sri Aurobindo has written: “I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level. Moreover I was particular—if part seemed to me to come from any lower levels I was not satisfied to leave it because it was good poetry. All had to be as far as possible of the same mint. In fact *Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one’s own yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative.”²

A. B. Purani writes: “As *Savitri* is a symbol it might be helpful to understand the place of symbols in life and literature. One has only to turn to the most ancient scriptures of the world like the Veda and the Bible to find that symbols have been used profusely by men from the earliest times to convey their meaning. To men in those times everything seemed symbolic. Mr. H. W. Garrod is right when he says, ‘Once upon a time the world was fresh, to speak was to be a poet, to name objects an

inspiration; and metaphor dropped from the inventive mouths like some natural exudation of the vivified senses.' Before man began to think he perceived with his soul."³

Sri Aurobindo himself wrote the following on the symbolism of the tale of Satyavan and Savitri: "The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in the *Mahabharata* as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save; Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumatsena, Lord of the Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory. Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life."⁴

The legend of *Savitri* is an old one, even older in age than the *Ramayana* since in this first epic of India Sita makes mention of Savitri and says to Rama "Know me as flawlessly faithful to you ever as Savitri was to Satyavan, the son of Dyumatsena."

The famous legend as it has come down to us is as beautiful in its simplicity as it is pregnant in its implications. Princess Savitri, the only daughter of king Aswapati, wants to marry Satyavan, son of king Dyumatsena, who having lost his kingdom has been forced to live in a forest, a blind exile. But the sage Narada foretells that Satyavan is fated to expire within a year, whereupon Savitri reaffirms her pledge to Satyavan saying that her die is cast since she can choose no other for her consort. So the marriage takes place and Savitri leaves her palace and luxury to do her duty by her solitary husband and his helpless parents in the forest. The fateful day, however, cannot be stayed and Satyavan dies resting his head on the lap of Savitri. Yama, the Lord of Death, then comes to carry back with him Satyavan's life but Savitri, refusing to admit defeat to Death, follows him. A dialogue, or rather altercation, ensues on the way between the frail victim of Fate and the mighty, all-powerful Lord of Destiny till, in the end, Savitri prevails upon the dread Dispenser of Doom to reverse the verdict of Time: Satyavan is at last restored to her. This is the story. Sri Aurobindo has metamorphosed it into what may be fittingly called a marvellous epic, luminous with the message of immortality. In short, it is as follows:

The advent of Savitri cannot be an accident. The earth has to aspire for her Descent. So Aswapati has to pave the way through his Lordly aspiration—Aswapati, the "colonist from immortality" and the treasurer of superhuman dreams, whose "soul

lived as eternity's delegate". (*Savitri*, Book I, Canto III) But the heart of flame of this doughty aspirant cannot rest content with a mere realisation. So, when he meets the World-Mother face to face, the first question he asks her is:

How long shall our spirits battle with the Night
And bear defeat and the brute yoke of Death,
We who are vessels of a deathless Force
And builders of the godhead of the race?

(Book III, Canto IV, p. 341)

He cannot help asking such challenging questions of the Great Mother because his mighty heart finds no consolation in the current philosophy that a human being must accept his limitations. So he asks:

Or if it is thy work I do below
Amid the error and waste of human life
In the vague light of man's half-conscious mind,
Why breaks not in some distant gleam of thee?
Ever the centuries and millenniums pass....
All we have done is ever still to do.
All breaks and all renews and is the same.

(Book III, Canto IV, pp. 341-342)

About *Savitri* the Mother has said:

Savitri
the supreme revelation
of Sri Aurobindo's
vision

and also

- 1) The daily record of the spiritual experiences of the individual who has written.
- 2) A complete system of yoga which can serve as a guide for those who want to follow the integral sadhana.
- 3) The yoga of the Earth in its ascension towards the Divine.
- 4) The experiences of the Divine Mother in her effort to adapt herself to the body she has taken and the ignorance and the falsity of the earth upon which she has incarnated.⁵

This was the Mother's message for an exhibition of paintings, 'Meditations on Savitri':⁶

The importance of
Savitri is immense
Its subject is universal—
Its revelation is prophetic
The time spent in its
atmosphere is not wasted.
Take all the time necessary
to see this exhibition. It
will be a happy compensation
for the feverish haste men
put now in all they do.

10-2-67.

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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2. *Ibid.*, pp. 727-28.
3. "Savitri"—*An Approach and a Study* by A. B. Purani, p. 9.
4. *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 265.
5. *Words of the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 13, p. 24.
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MADANLAL—AN AUROVILIAN TRIBUTE

[Madanlal Himmatsingka passed away on 30th July, 2004, at Bangalore after a brief illness. He was 88.]

No more will he now be seen at the Banyan Tree near Matrimandir in his wheelchair. That frail body has fallen. But the pioneering service it rendered to the building of Matrimandir, to the Mother's divine mission, to the cause of Auroville Land Fund is woven in the fibre of the new creation on earth undertaken by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Very early in his life at Pondicherry, Madanlal realised that among the services he could render to the Mother's work, one was to be a channel of the financial power to the projects undertaken by Her. Even the Mother, in some of her correspondence with him, endorsed and encouraged him in this understanding. And he remained steadfast to this aspect of his work throughout his life.

Publishing books of the Mother and the Master, and fund-raising for Matrimandir among his wide circle of contacts were, to my knowledge, his main work during the last two decades of his life, and in both he made a great difference by his presence. The land cause of Auroville entered a little late in his fields of concern. "If Matrimandir is the soul of Auroville then the land is the body"—this logic of the Land Fund came home to him and I was glad when once he himself argued it out to me! He had such a standing among his contacts that often just one phone call from him to somebody in India or USA—and the person called would send a cheque for a significant amount for the work to get going.

His commitment was unconditional. I recall an incident. About a decade back, he and a few of his friends had opened a Bank Account in Pondicherry in the name of Matrimandir for some specific reasons. Dr. Karan Singh himself, as the then Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, had endorsed the move. But there was an uproar from many in Auroville. Doubts were cast on their intentions. Finally, he and his friends understood the situation and gave up the move. But in no manner did this incident stand in the way of his commitment to the Matrimandir and Auroville.

It was this commitment and enthusiasm and what may be called a 'disinterested interest' on his and his friends' part that led me to write more than once in my communications to late Ambapremi Shah of Vadodara (Baroda)—another dedicated and eminent worker and fund-raiser from Gujarat who was routing all contributions for the Land Fund via Madanlal—that if there were a 100 Madanlals and a 100 Ambapremis around, the work of the Land Fund would go much faster and usher in complete success.

Of course, on his part, Madanlal, like many other friends of Auroville, used to derive a deep sense of fulfilment by serving Matrimandir and Auroville without actually being a recognised part of the enterprise: "I am not even an Aurovilian," he

once lightly remarked to me with a twinkle in his eyes in the course of a brief conversation in the context of a particularly impressive support he had been able to muster for Matrimandir then.

It can thus be said without exaggeration that Madanlal was a servant of God. But his aspiration was to be more than that: it was, to use a phrase from Sri Aurobindo's *Thoughts and Aphorisms*, to be "God's slave". "Divine realisation—that is not happening..."—he once opened his heart to me in the wide, open balcony of his house in Pondicherry. I wish I could have known earlier and sent him the following quote from a compilation from *The Life Divine* that I came across just recently.

"It is true that the conquest of the spirit supposes the execution in one life or a few lives of a process that in the ordinary course of Nature would involve a slow and uncertain procedure of centuries or even of millenniums..."

Also worth recalling in this context is the Mother's observation, mentioned by M. P. Pandit in one of his speeches, that simply by being in the Ashram atmosphere, people develop in one life what would take 7 or 8 lives elsewhere.

Will the work of Matrimandir and the Land Fund and other projects suffer now that Madanlal is no more? I do not think so. We at Auroville only have to keep intact the vision of a unique universal township—what I call the "Earth-Queen", and go on putting a comprehensive and, as far as possible, enlightened energy, and all the help, including financial, will follow sooner or later. For, it seems, if the general stage of humanity is not yet able to realise Auroville in its ideals, it has at least reached a stage where it can understand and appreciate and assist in the material progress of Auroville. And that—a completed Matrimandir, a glorious Auroville—will be our real tribute to friends like Madanlal.

ARYADEEP

How can one know if one's way of using money is in accordance with the divine Will?

One must first know what the divine Will is. But there is a surer way—to surrender money for the divine work, if one is not sure oneself. "Divinely" means at the service of the Divine—it means not to use money for one's own satisfaction but to place it at the Divine's service.

3 May 1951

The Mother

(Questions and Answers 1950-51, CWM, Vol. 4, p. 375)

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

GETTING 'INITIATED': MICHAEL MIOVIC'S JOURNEY TO SACRED INDIA

Initiation: Spiritual Insights on Life, Art and Psychology by Michael Miovic; Hyderabad, Sri Aurobindo Society, 2004.

MICHAEL MIOVIC'S engrossing personal account is an important contribution to the genre of travelogue as spiritual pilgrimage. Indeed, the book goes beyond a single category. It is at once spiritual autobiography, travel writing, art/cultural criticism and future studies, all effortlessly integrated into an organic whole.

Michael Miovic, M.D. attended medical school at the University of California, San Diego and trained in general adult psychiatry at the Harvard Longwood Program, Boston. He completed a fellowship in psychosocial oncology, Boston and has been working as a psychiatrist there. He combines innovatively psychotherapy along with flower remedies and spiritual practices so as to create a more integral method of psychopharmacology. He is devoted to the concept of integral health and Consciousness Studies.

On the face of it, Miovic's book follows the beaten track of young and well-off Americans who leave their shores, travel to Europe, and inevitably find themselves in the Orient for "discovering" themselves. After all, Allen Ginsberg and the *flower children* of the sixties in America were the trendsetters! The hippie culture followed the alluring path of psychedelic experiments, what Aldous Huxley described as a gateway to the "doors of perception". The Beatles' protest merged with the cry of the anti-war peaceniks of the Vietnam era. The life of the spirit got blurred with the life of hedonistic pleasure. America's mainstream corporate culture became a universal *bête noire*, uniformly reviled as decadent!

Miovic, the son of an American Congressman, chooses not to be the American success story by following in the footsteps of his father. Unlike his sixties' predecessors, his journey to India is preceded by a knowledge of the discipline required for exploring Eastern mysticism or spirituality. He packs his bag and decides to spend ten days each in three Ashrams in South India: The Ramana Maharishi Ashram at Thiruvanna-malai, the Sri Satya Sai Baba Ashram at Puttaparthi and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry. He has a profound spiritual experience of the sacred hills of Thiruvannamalai; he is not enamoured of Sai Baba and is finally drawn permanently to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at Pondicherry.

The unusual aspect of Miovic's account is that he is attracted to the sacred no less than to the mundane. He is deeply struck by the mystical power of the hills at Thiruvannamalai, even as he is held captive by the magnetic pull of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. At the same time, he feels curiously drawn to the eccentricities of his

fellow travellers: the honeymoon couple, the husband who gives more attention to his pet topic, dog psychology, rather than his bride. Similarly, Miovic is amused by the plain and curious folk *vis-à-vis* the genuine seeker of knowledge. Consider for instance his epiphanic experience in the hills of Arunachala at the Ramana Maharishi Ashram:

“Later that evening, when I stepped out onto the open rooftop after my shower, the night air felt cool and the breeze even cooler on my wet skin. I looked out into the darkness towards the mountain: it was silhouetted against the slightly lucent black sky. Suddenly I felt that the mountain was radiating a tremendous power. I went back inside briefly to throw on some clothes and returned with a chair and sat out under the starless sky to contemplate the mysterious phenomenon. The mountain was a giant magnet that was drawing me both toward the hill and into myself. Yet it was a completely new sensation for me, almost supra-physical in comparison to the heavy vibrations of Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s samadhi. Though I could feel the hill’s pull in my body, the essence of that transcendent perception hailed from beyond time and space and form and vibrations. The mountain was Consciousness itself, pure and resplendent, throbbing eternally in the middle of its own centreless field. I bathed in this invisible midnight light for who knows how long. When I was too tired to sit up and concentrate any longer, I returned to my room and fell immediately into a deep sleep.” (p. 31)

Miovic writes in an equally engaging manner, tongue in cheek and with a welcome sense of levity about his fellow travellers:

“As we stood in line waiting, I brought up the topic of dogs with Kartik... I hadn’t said more than a few words on the subject before Deval groaned in dismay. She informed me that Kartik was an inveterate dog lover and that if I got him started on that topic, I would hear no end of dogs. That, of course, only piqued my interest further and I forged ahead. I was pleasantly surprised to find in Kartik a talented dog psychologist...” (p. 12)

It is only appropriate that Miovic’s gripping narrative of spiritual quest also brings in a wide gamut of intellectual, aesthetic and cultural experience, all related to a deeper world-view. He speaks of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, George Harrison, the Beatles, Claude Monet, and Paul Cezanne. There are insightful essays on art criticism, integral psychology, short stories and humour, the “true story of Ebenezer, the bird who wanted to walk”, Zen and the art of psychoanalysis and so on. There are reflections on Hollywood, on India, and travel with Swami Ananta of Pondicherry to Greece. Clearly Miovic’s canvas is wide and eclectic. Invariably, he shows an original approach. He has clarity of vision as well as a rich understanding of India and her variegated cultures.

For the Aurobindonians, the book *Initiation* will no doubt have a special appeal. It affirms the central truth of the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and would therefore interest those who lead a life of spiritual consecration. Throughout the book,

there is empathy with and understanding of worldly life, even while there is a pronounced aspiration for a spiritual one. His wife Madhavi Ravela, for instance, is a perfect companion to Miovic, who can lend completeness to his experience. Not for him, therefore, the world of physical renunciation!

Michael Miovic's book represents an endless search for the meaning of life. One can do no better, finally, than to quote three stanzas from his poem that sum up the nature of his quest:

Our thoughts are not ours
 We live in the house of God:
 Sacred the air we breathe,
 Sacred the dust we've trod.

Our dreams, our long arms,
 They reach to lives we cannot see:
 Sacred our moon-tossed fleeting hours
 And sacred our company

Thoughts are deeds,
 Mighty steeds
 That ring throughout the spheres:
 Sacred is silence and sacred prayer,
 Sacred our station here.

Michael Miovic has written a fine story of spiritual initiation. It is a book well composed and well produced. The Sri Aurobindo Society deserves congratulations for undertaking its publication. It is a welcome addition to the book-shelf of all those who are attracted to the life of the Spirit.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY