

MOTHER INDIA

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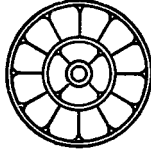
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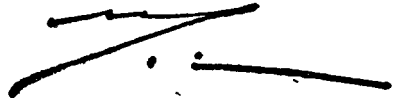


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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Vol. XXXV

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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail."

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AWARDS

At the 21st All India Printers' Conference held in January 1983 at New Delhi, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press won four Awards for excellence in Printing.

1. First Prize (Books, Letter Press)
Briefe über den Yoga-Band 3 (German).
2. Second Prize (Book, Offset)
Sri Aurobindo—His Life Unique (No First Prize to any book).
3. Certificate of Merit (Diary, Offset)
Quotation Diary 1982.
4. First Prize (Visiting Card, Silk Screen).

MOVING FORWARD OR BACKWARD

A TALK OF THE MOTHER

Sweet Mother, can it happen that though a person does not move forward very much he doesn't move backward?

I HAVE only said that one cannot remain still. You say, "does not move forward much"—one may go forward just a very little. And that is enough for not moving backward. But if one is not very careful all the time, as one is made up of a lot of pieces, if he doesn't have the habit of dragging along those parts which lag behind, he may advance on one side and go backward on another. That happens. And then the sum total is not very, very satisfactory.

In ordinary life, with ordinary people, this happens all the time. For instance, take someone who is studying, working, working—a scientist making discoveries. He progresses in his studies, he knows more and more. But as he does not take any care of his inner life or private life or outward life, he may become more and more backward or unconscious or even full of nasty defects; even though he progresses from the scientific point of view, as a man he may become an absolutely regrettable being. That's quite a frequent occurrence. And for oneself, if one does not take good care, one may have a part which is progressing and another that's going backward. If one does not keep a close watch, if one does not control one's outer movements, if one does not take a special care not to allow the vital to go according to its own fancy, well, he will suddenly realise that he has formed very bad habits and is following a very nasty road though the mental part of the being was full of aspiration and progressing in knowledge and even in the spiritual life. If one does not pay attention, things slide very easily into a hole: one takes a false step, then slips and suddenly bumps against the bottom of the hole. Then one asks oneself, "But how did this come about? What happened?" Simply a false step: you did not take care, you allowed that part of the being to draw you into its own field, because you did not pull it out of its way, did not compel it to follow you, it now drags you back instead.

If one wants to lead a spiritual life, one must not be three-fourths asleep. It is necessary to be wide awake and very attentive, otherwise you are like a little boat upon a river or a great sea, with terrible currents, and if you are not alert, if you do not pay close heed to these currents, if you relax, relax your vigilance, all of a sudden you find that you are at the other end from where you wanted to go! You are carried away, just like that quite naturally. "Why, yes, I wanted to go there and I find myself here!"

That's how it is.

In ordinary life this happens all the time. Only you know, in ordinary life one says, "it is circumstances, it is fate, it's my bad luck, it is their fault," or else, "I have no luck." That is very, very convenient. One veils everything and expects... yes,

one has happy moments and then bad ones, and finally—ah, well, finally one falls into a hole, for everybody tumbles over, and expects to, sooner or later. So, one does not worry, or worries all the time—which comes to the same thing. That is, one is unconscious, one lives unconsciously and puts all the blame for what happens on others and on the circumstances but never tells oneself: “Why! it is my own fault.” ...It needs a sufficiently vast consciousness to begin. Even among those who profess to be conscious, there are not many who see clearly enough to become aware that all that happens to them comes from what they are and from nothing else. They always say, “He is wrong; circumstances are unfavourable; oh! why was that done?”—If you were not what you are, it would not happen in this way. It would happen differently.

7 April 1954

(Collected Works of the Mother, Vol. 6, “Questions and Answers”, 1954, pp. 95-7)

FLOWERING

O, ACCEPT my self-surrender,
The candle of joys, the incense of sorrows,
My nights and days burning as camphor.

All that is pure and sacred,
All that is beautiful and scented,
Reflected in my heart's mirror,
All at Thy Feet I offer.

In each breath I drank poison and nectar,
Won and lost in countless wars.
The memory of past encounters
Imprinted on the heart and senses
I offer to Thee for Thy action.

In the shelter of Thy Bliss,
May rest my battered ship.
In the arbour of Thy arms,
My soul may flower at last.

SHYAM KUMARI

CONSCIOUS SACRIFICE

GUIDANCE FROM SRI AUROBINDO

THIS... is the demand made on us, that we should turn our whole life into a conscious sacrifice. Every moment and every movement of our being is to be resolved into a continuous and devoted self-giving to the Eternal. All our actions, not less the smallest and most ordinary and trifling than the greatest and most uncommon and noble, must live in the single consciousness of an inner and outer movement dedicated to Something that is beyond us and greater than our ego. No matter what the gift and to whom it is presented by us, there must be a consciousness in the act that we are presenting it to the one divine Being in all beings. Our commonest and most grossly material actions must assume this sublimated character; when we eat, we should be conscious that we are giving our food to the Presence in us; it must be a sacred offering in a temple and the sense of a mere physical need or self-gratification must pass away from us. In any great labour, in any high discipline, in any difficult or noble enterprise, whether undertaken for our selves, for others or for the race, it will no longer be possible to stop short at the idea of the race, of our selves or of others. The thing we are doing must be consciously offered as a sacrifice of works, not to these, but either through them or directly to the One Godhead; the divine Inhabitant who was hidden by these figures must be no longer hidden but ever present to our soul, our mind, our sense. The workings and results of our acts must be put in the hands of that One in the feeling that that Presence is the Infinite and Most High by whom alone our labour and our aspiration are possible. For in his being all takes place; for him all labour and aspiration are taken from us by Nature and offered on his altar. Even in those things in which Nature is herself very plainly the worker and we only the witnesses of her working and its containers and supporters, there should be the same constant memory and insistent consciousness of a work and of its divine Master. Our very inspiration and respiration, our very heart-beats can and must be made conscious in us as the living rhythm of the universal sacrifice.

...the emergence of the secret psychic being in us as the leader of the sacrifice is of the utmost importance; for this inmost being alone can bring with it the full power of the spirit in the act, the soul in the symbol. It alone can assure, even while the spiritual consciousness is incomplete, the perennial freshness and sincerity and beauty of the symbol and prevent it from becoming a dead form or a corrupted and corrupting magic; it alone can preserve for the act its power with its significance. All the other members of our being, mind, life-force, physical or body consciousness are too much under the control of the Ignorance to be a sure instrumentation and much less can they be a guide or the source of an unerring impulse. Always the greater part of the motive and action of these powers clings to the old law, the deceiving tablets, the cherished inferior movements of Nature and they meet with reluctance, alarm or revolt or obstructing inertia the voices and the forces that call and impel

us to exceed and transform ourselves into a greater being and a wider Nature. In their major part the response is either a resistance or a qualified or temporising acquiescence; for even if they follow the call, they yet tend—when not consciously, then by automatic habit—to bring into the spiritual action their own natural disabilities and errors. At every moment they are moved to take egoistic advantage of the psychic and spiritual influences and can be detected using the power, joy or light these bring into us for a lower life-motive. Afterwards too, even when the seeker has opened to the Divine Love transcendental, universal or immanent, yet if he tries to put it into life, he meets the power of obscuration and perversion of these lower Nature-forces. Always they draw away towards pitfalls, pour into that higher intensity their diminishing elements, seek to capture the descending Power for themselves and their interests and degrade it into an aggrandised mental, vital or physical instrumentation for desire and ego. Instead of a Divine Love creator for a new heaven and a new earth of Truth and Light, they would hold it here prisoner as a tremendous sanction and glorifying force of sublimation to gild the mud of the old earth and colour with its rose and sapphire the old turbid unreal skies of sentimentalising vital imagination and mental idealised chimera. If that falsification is permitted, the higher Light and Power and Bliss withdraw, there is a fall back to a lower status; or else the realisation remains tied to an insecure half-way and mixture or is covered and even submerged by an inferior exaltation that is not the true Ananda. It is for this reason that the Divine Love which is at the heart of all creation and the most powerful of all redeeming and creative forces has yet been the least frontally present in earthly life, the least successfully redemptive, the least creative. Human nature has been unable to bear it in its purity for the very reason that it is the most powerful, pure, rare and intense of all the divine energies; what little could be seized has been corrupted at once into a vital pietistic ardour, a defenceless religious or ethical sentimentalism, a sensuous or even sensual erotic mysticism of the roseate-coloured mind or passionately turbid life-impulse and with these simulations compensated its inability to house the Mystic Flame that could rebuild the world with its tongues of sacrifice. It is only the inmost psychic being unveiled and emerging in its full power that can lead the pilgrim sacrifice unscathed through these ambushes and pitfalls; at each moment it catches, exposes, repels the mind's and the life's falsehoods, seizes hold on the truth of the Divine Love and Ananda and separates it from the excitement of the mind's ardours and the blind enthusiasm of the misleading life-force. But all things that are true at their core in mind and life and the physical being it extricates and takes with it in the journey till they stand on the heights, new in spirit and sublime in figure.

BARENESS OF EXPRESSION IN POETRY

A SHORT DISCUSSION WITH SRI AUROBINDO

AMAL: In the *Savitri* passage—

A cosmic vision looked at things through light:
Atomic now the shapes that loomed so large.
Illusion lost her aggrandising lens:
The body and the life no more were all,
The mind itself was only an outer court,
His soul the tongue of an unmeasured fire—

perhaps you could slightly raise the fourth line, which is rather bare? (14.11.1936)

SRI AUROBINDO: Don't care to—it says precisely what I wanted to convey and I don't see how I can say it otherwise without diminishing or exaggerating the significance.

AMAL: In the corrected passage—

A cosmic vision looked at things through light:
Illusion lost her aggrandising lens
And from her failing hand her measures fell:
Atomic were her shapes that loomed so large.
The living form seemed now a wandering shell;
In the enormous spaces of the Self
Earth was one room in his million-mansioned house,
The mind a many-frescoed outer court,
His soul the tongue of an unmeasured fire—

I am very glad you have absolutely transfigured out of existence the old

The body and the life no more were all—

a line which, when I had fallen foul of it, you had refused to change, tenderly defending it on the ground that it had said exactly what you had wanted to say. True, sir, but in what a bald way it said it—and without the least justification for not growing imaginative hair! (21.5.1937)

SRI AUROBINDO: I still consider the line a very good one and it did perfectly express what I wanted to say—as for baldness, an occasionally bare and straightforward line without any trailing of luminous robes is not an improper element. E.g.,

“This was the day when Satyavan must die”, which I would not remove from its position even if you were to give me the crown and income of the Kavi Samrat for doing it. If I have changed here, it is because the alterations all around it made the line no longer in harmony with its immediate environment.

AMAL: It is not difficult to appreciate three kinds of baldnesses in poetry: “The bald top of an eminence”—

It was the hour before the Gods awake—

a poignant force of simple suggestion—

This was the day when Satyavan must die—

and a technical device to enhance the effect of a subsequent flight and give the mind a clear hold on the winged vision—

All in her pointed to a nobler kind.

But your

The body and the life no more were all,

although “a very good line” in itself, seemed to be in its context baldness for the sake of baldness. (22.5.1937)

SRI AUROBINDO: Not at all. It was bareness for expression’s sake which is a different matter.

AMAL: In any case, it did not appear to justify itself completely: if it had been so very “juste” you would have scorned the Kavi Samrat’s crown and income resolutely for its sake also, rather than remove it altogether. The very fact that in the final version it has no place shows that it was some sort of interloper, expressing only for the time-being what you wanted to say. Perhaps this is an unfair argument, because I had taken a dislike to the line even before knowing that the whole context required to be altered, but coming events may have cast their shadows before and created that aversion. Nothing is impossible for a follower of your yoga—*trikāla-dṛiṣṭi*¹ is a mere trifle. (22.5.1937)

SRI AUROBINDO: It was “juste” for expressing what I had to say in a certain context. The context being entirely changed in its sense, bearing and atmosphere, it was no longer *juste* in that place. Its being an interloper in a new house does not show that it was an interloper in an old one. The colours and the spaces being

¹ Vision of the three times — past, present, future.

heightened and widened this tint which was appropriate and needed in the old design could not remain in the new one. These things are a question of design; a line has to be viewed not only in its own separate value but with a view to its just place in the whole.

TRANSIT LOUNGE

HERE the speakers are mute,
 It is silence that perturbs
 The anxious passengers
 Awaiting another chartered flight
 To regions beyond mind's sight.

This is a transit lounge,
 An interspace between lives,
 An interphase where mingle
 Purple depths and blue skies.
 This is the time when the present breaks all fences
 And recedes to a point where meet
 The past and future and stranger tenses.
 The inner crew is getting ready,
 Hands held aloft to recharge turn inwards
 And beams of light hum down the finger tips
 To open inner chambers and bathe and dress,
 Equip and gather members of the crew.

Soon they will hurry down
 Clean and illumined corridors,
 And we will be off,
 Each in his own craft.

AT THE FEET OF THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

RECOLLECTIONS BY SAHANA

(Continued from the issue of February 21, 1983)

MYSELF: I am not allowing myself to be overjoyed at what is going on within, for I have seen that if I do so the good movements get lost in the outer expressions. I am trying to effect a control over them so that they may get a chance to grow instead of being spent in outward-going movements.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, that is the best. If one can establish a basis of unalterable peace and equality—that is always the best foundation for spiritual progress.

19.5.34

MYSELF: I am getting more and more conscious, by your compassion, of the source of the desire to criticise or find fault with others or speak ill of them, what forces act behind these tendencies and why one indulges in them. Mother, there are so many sides to see and your light is bringing them out!

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the petty ego in each that likes to discover and talk about the “real or unreal” defects of others—and it does not matter whether they are real or unreal, the ego has no right to judge them, because it has not the right view or the right spirit. It is only the calm disinterested dispassionate all-compassionate and all-loving Spirit that can judge and see rightly the strength and weakness in each being.

16.6.34

MYSELF: I am trying to turn my mind inward. The effort is sometimes enjoyable, sometimes dry. This creates a sort of tension. At times, the effort becomes very difficult, at others quite easy. Today I noticed with surprise that a deep devotion was welling up towards you and the feeling, the perception, is changing everything. What appeared to be dry and difficult was changing to an easy and encouraging matter of joy.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is by so doing that finally the rejection of these things becomes a habit. And they must be rejected for that is now the field of sadhana and this ground must be cleared for it to progress.

16.7.34

MYSELF: Mother mine, here is the account of last month. You will see that I took ten rupees' advance last month. May I take another ten rupees extra from Amrita, as I have bought some very good cheese for Sri Aurobindo's sandwiches? I have signed my name and not yet paid the money. When I see anything especially good or nice anywhere I feel like buying it then and there for you and can't remember about the money question. Though you have given me permission, can I

go on like this? I feel I am too extravagant perhaps. What I have taken in advance I have kept back. May I take extra this time as I don't think I shall be able to deduct the sum any more.

This is only a business letter.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is as you like. But why spend like that? You should make a rule not to exceed the means you have—so that you will train yourself to control the habit of too easy spending. 1.9.34

MYSELF: Sweet Mother, Sri Aurobindo, I don't know what to write today! I am so moved, flooded with deep gratitude for what you have granted me! Why on earth do all these movements come and cover up this beautiful and really genuine feeling? I wish I could keep up this sweet feeling and not trouble you with all these silly things any more.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the small habits of the lower vital being which gather all their strength to resist correction and try to occupy the consciousness. When they come you must learn to detach your inner consciousness from them entirely so that even when they strongly come they will not be able to occupy the consciousness or get any assent.

Be sure that all our help will be with you.

6.9.34

MYSELF: Sweet Mother, I have become conscious of another movement now. When I am in a very good condition, that is to say when I feel intensely the upward movement in me, I see also that another movement (of the lower vital) pushes me downward. Formerly I was not conscious of the latter movement, I used to think it was a movement of joy but the other day, after meeting you, I experienced the significance of the flower: "sweetness of the mind, filled with beautiful thoughts turned exclusively to the Divine." I was absolutely filled with your thought and simply thrilled with an intense joy. While this upward movement was going on so intensely I felt a strong impulse to go to the market to buy cheese for Sri Aurobindo's sandwiches, and in fact I was carried away by this impulse, but as soon as I came back I felt that it was not out of a true movement of joy that I had yielded but from a movement that had pushed towards self-deception by bringing in a reason that seemed highly satisfactory; then the impulse of enjoying oneself in a sort of social way also comes, that is to say: go and chat or eat or drink with someone with whom one has an affinity. Before, I was not conscious of these two movements together, I used to take it as an expression of joy and nothing else. May I know whether I have understood or interpreted the thing correctly? If not, kindly clear my mind.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, it is quite correct. It is this mixture that has always stood in the way. Now that you have seen it, it must be farther separated and thrown away.

13.9.34

MYSELF: Mother, I still have one thing to ask you to know clearly. In our love, I mean in spite of its mixture, is there no true element? Why do I feel so happy to see you? Why does all my being become so happy, so joyous whenever I happen to see or meet you? And why, after coming back from you, is the whole day filled with you alone? Is this vital love?

SRI AUROBINDO: There is no harm in vital love provided it is purified from all insincerity (as for example self-importance etc.) and from all demand. To feel joy on seeing the Mother is all right, but to demand it as a right or to be upset or in revolt or *abhiman* when it is not given, to be jealous of others who get it—all that is demand and creates an impurity which spoils both the joy and the love.

It is by the purification of the vital that the true love (spiritual and psychic in nature, but also mental, vital and in a way physical in its extension) can grow and become complete.

13.9.34

MYSELF: Beloved Mother, since last Thursday an intense silence and deep peace has descended on me, and it is getting more and more intensified. I am also very careful this time to keep what has descended on me. This silence and peace has given me a turning towards inwardness. In all my work and movements I find I remain in my inner self. Sometimes I feel so strongly like sitting for meditation that I can neither speak nor keep my eyes open; the meditation comes of itself.

SRI AUROBINDO: It is very good. The peace and silence must settle deep in, so deep that whatever comes from outside can only pass over the surface without troubling the settled calm within. It is good also that the meditation comes of itself—it means the Yoga Force is beginning to take up the sadhana.

18.9.34

MYSELF: Mother dear, you are revealing so much to me from within myself! So many things are showing themselves in the consciousness like a cinema! Occasionally, the physical wants to be lazy, unwilling and obstinate—but by your Grace the psychic being will not allow it at any cost; it makes the physical do its will. When such darkness comes like a wave, the part that used to be disturbed gets ready to respond, but the Helper from behind exposes the movement and places it before my consciousness so that I can see that I have already become detached, there is no link with it. “It has come from somewhere, let it pass”—this attitude prevails and I remain completely untouched. I watch all these movements and how I react to them. My feeling towards you gives great joy and satisfaction. All hurry-scurry, all impatience etc. seem to have drowned in the wideness of peace. But one part is still there which seeks some room to indulge in its vagaries and is happy to work hard to satisfy them. I want to draw your attention to this aspect. Another thing I notice nowadays: whenever something seems impossible to me, I try to ignore this ‘I’ and open my inner being towards your light so that a descent may take place from it. I feel such a movement within and wish to concentrate on it. In other words as aspiration rises to invoke something above that will give me what I am lacking. Is it all

right? At every step it makes me realise that my petty capacity can do nothing. So long as I feel any power as mine, how puny it looks!

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the right fundamental consciousness that you have now got. The *tamas* and other movements of the lower universal Nature are bound to try to come in, but if one has the calm of the inner being which makes them felt as something external to the being and the light of the psychic which instantly exposes and rejects them, then that is to have the true consciousness which keeps one safe while the more positive transformation is preparing or taking place.

That transformation comes by the descent of the Force, Light, Knowledge, Ananda etc. from above. So you are right in your feeling that you should open with শান্ত সমাহিত¹ aspiration or invocation for the descent of the Light from above. Only it must be an aspiration in this calm and wideness, not disturbing it in the least—and you must be prepared for the result being not immediate—it may be rapid, but also it may take some time.

25.10.34

(To be continued)

¹ Quiet calmness.

THE STORY OF A SOUL

BY HUTA

(Continued from the issue of February 21, 1983)

The Mother's Message

This is the
interesting story of
how a being discovered
the Divine Life



20

THE new month, October began with a lovely card showing a flower—Pot Marigold—underneath which the Mother had written “Perseverance” and these lines too:

“This month will begin with a big hope and end in a big victory, worked out by the Grace always present near you, along with my love and blessings.”

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In the afternoon she went to the Prosperity Room to distribute flowers—Sweet Marjoram—to the Ashramites. They also received their requirements for the month, which were distributed by the people in charge of the “Prosperity”. I had nothing to take except flowers and a sunny smile from the Mother.

In the evening was her French class. When I went to her, she reminded me to go to the Meditation Hall upstairs in the Ashram the next day, as previously arranged.

That night I kept myself awake till a late hour—musing over the big victory the Mother had mentioned earlier that morning. I thought: “The Mother always writes about victory—but I am still in the same consciousness.”

On the morning that followed, I saw the Mother. After we had exchanged flowers and smiles, she showed me her two beautiful carved cupboards which are just opposite to her high-backed chair. They are full of *objets d’art*, old and new, from all over the world, offered to her by numerous people. She smiled dreamily and said:

“Many years back I myself cleaned these cupboards just once or twice. After that nobody has done so. Now I want you to clean them. You must be very very careful and conscious while handling and cleaning the things which are so delicate and precious. Also, each thing must be put back precisely in its own place after being cleaned.”

At once I thought to myself: “Good Lord! What a job! Once I have taken out all the things in order to clean the cupboards, how am I expected to remember from where the particular things were taken, and put them exactly in their own places? Moreover, in case anything is broken by me then what am I to do?”

I became nervous, but all the same I replied with a faint smile: “Yes Mother, as you please. Kindly give me your Force.”

A sudden smile kindled in her fine eyes. She pressed my hands and went into a trance for a moment or two. Then she caressed my hands and spoke:

“Everything will be all right.”

Suddenly I remembered what a Saint had once said: “The most beautiful word which man can say to his God is the little word ‘Yes’.”

The same night I tried to reassure myself that I would do the work which the Mother had given me, and that I should not worry at the moment because the day had not yet been fixed by her and so it was okay.

The next morning she wrote to me on a lovely card depicting bunches of red and white roses:

“Everything is arranged and you can begin your work from *this morning itself at 10 o’clock*. Champaklal will open the cupboard for you and give you a

table for placing the objects. As we said yesterday, you will do half a shelf at a time, putting all back at once when you have cleaned, so that nothing will remain outside the cupboard. I feel quite confident that you shall do this work quite well—and all my love, blessings and help will constantly be with you—in the full Presence of the Grace.”

It took my breath away. I did not really expect that I would have to do this work so soon, because she had never mentioned it when I had seen her the previous day.

I entered the Meditation Hall from the corridor between it and Sri Aurobindo's room. The cupboard on my left was open, a table was placed nearby with dusters on it. I was all alone in the room. Everything was hushed except the fast beating of my heart. No sooner had I run my finger softly over a fragile object than a cold shiver passed through me. I wanted to quit the room without anybody noticing me—but all the same I sat on the raised threshold and took a long breath to steady my nerves. Finally I got up and took out all the things from the upper shelf and placed them on the table. I was still hesitant before I actually started to clean.

I took one of the lovely vases and once again sat on the step to clean it. After a few seconds I sensed that I was not alone—I lifted my eyes from the object and saw the Mother standing near me, smiling beautifully. I got up abruptly—the vase was still in my hand. She at once said:

“Oh! Oh! be careful, my child.”

And with a swift smile she left the room in a swirl of her silken gown. It took me a second or two to compose myself, and once more I got absorbed in my work. I was impressed most by two things—a specimen of an Egyptian mummy and a small ancient box studded with precious stones. As a matter of fact all the things were extraordinary. I gradually found some more courage to go through the work for that day. After I had left, the Mother went to see whether I had put back all the things in order. The next morning she wrote:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my sweet Huta, who is doing her work so well and carefully.

“My love and blessings along with the Presence of the Grace are always with you.”

During that time, early in the morning I used to go for a swim in the sea. One day I was dashed by a huge wave, and as a consequence I got a terrible ear-ache. Somebody told me to jump up and down in order to get the water out of the ear. I did so and the pain became worse. I could not sleep for several nights—I was miserable. The Mother's doctor, Dr. Sanyal, treated me for more than a month ac-

ording to her decision. The most difficult thing he asked me to do was not to do what I really loved: swimming.

I did not wish to leave the work of cleaning the cupboards because each day was wonderful in spite of the wretched ear-ache. My ears were securely plugged with cotton wool. When the Mother came in to see the work and inquire about my ear it was difficult for me to catch her words, so I answered something quite off the point, and she laughed merrily. Then I realised that we each talked a different language!

Many a time she peeped in to see how I was and how I worked. She also pointed out quite a number of things and told me from where they had come. There was a piece of transparent yellow stone—petrified lava—and a dead lizard could be seen clearly within it. The Mother told me that somebody had presented it to her. Once there was a volcanic eruption somewhere and all the animals and humans were killed. This specimen was one of the strange results.

As I have mentioned before, I had an aversion to lizards. So, even though the reptile here was dead and safe, it was a problem for me to clean the stone. I felt that no matter how repelled I was, I must clean it, otherwise I would fail to prove myself sincere in the work.

I was so excited to type the Mother's letters on my new typewriter, which my brother Paroobhai had brought for me from Africa.

The Mother wrote to me on 8th October 1956:

“For the letters what you did was quite good and you can continue with the blue ink. You need not type the beginning as it is always the same. But the rest you will copy.

“I shall try to see you for a minute this morning.

“My love and blessings along with the constant Presence of the Grace are always with you.”

When I went to the Meditation Hall upstairs to do my work, the Mother entered it with a few white roses in her hand. She gave them to me. After seeing how I got on with my work she nodded happily. Her compassionate inquiry about my aching ear touched me.

One day elapsed in the same rut. Now it was Tuesday. I went to the Mother in the evening in her room at the Playground. We meditated together for some-time. When I came out of the room, there were some people waiting for the interview with the Mother.

Later in the evening when march-past and concentration were over there was distribution. During that time the fine music of a great composer was played, which soothed my nerves.

The following morning the Mother sent a folded card—one side depicting a bird, the other side bearing these words:

“Bonjour to my sweet Huta, to my dear little child.

“All my love is with you, my blessings never leave you and the Divine’s Grace is constantly present helping and protecting you.”

*

Instead of cleaning half a shelf of the cupboard at a time, I cleaned the whole—so my work came to an end earlier than expected. Now arrived the day of cleaning the other cupboard on the right side. It was Thursday the 11th—Durga-Ashtami day—the Mother went downstairs to distribute a Message. For, now the Puja days began. After receiving the Message, I went upstairs to resume my work. I could not wait to read the Message, which ran:

“Self-surrender to the divine and infinite Mother, however difficult, remains our only effective means and our sole abiding refuge,—self-surrender to her means that our nature must be an instrument in her hands, the soul a child in the arms of the Mother.”

Sri Aurobindo

I was engrossed in my work—one last Chinese bowl was left to be placed in the cupboard, but somehow it could not be adjusted properly in its right place. I tried to do so in many ways but to no avail. I was confused and stood still for a moment or two, when suddenly I felt that somebody was standing behind me. I spun round and lo! there stood the Mother with the glimmer of a smile. She looked very beautiful in a lovely red sari and a precious glittering crown of red rubies. I was dazzled by her brilliant eyes for a second, because what I saw was not our Mother but *Durga Herself*. When she embraced me and kissed me on my cheeks, I felt the warmth of her infinite strength and sweet love. Without a word she put the bowl in its proper place and slowly went to her room, leaving a trail of the exquisite perfume which she wore. I was spellbound and unsure whether she had really been with me one instant earlier. Ah! I felt as if the bowl had been waiting for her touch and my soul must have waited too! A true happiness I had never known before flooded my being. Tears of joy sparkled on the ends of my lashes. I wiped them and quietly left the room. My work was over.

The next morning she sent me a card showing a vase with pretty flowers—Phlox—together with these words:

“Here is ‘skill in work’ which you deserve so well. Indeed you did your cleaning work as well as could be.”

I did not really expect her acknowledgment. So many times I had observed that the Mother never failed to appreciate even a small thing done for her. This is one of the virtues she taught me.

The Mother could have asked anybody to clean the cupboards. Then, I thought, there must have been a deeper meaning in her action and vision when she had asked me to do so. Perhaps it was because she wanted my hands to be steady and full of consciousness and to handle most fragile things. She also wanted my mind to be concentrated, stable and keen.

It was the Vijaya Dashami day—the Mother was to go downstairs to give a Message. That day she wrote to me on a card:

“Debu¹ will come to you this morning at 11.30 (after the blessings) to show you how to put the strings on your sitar.

“À tout à l’heure.

“My love and blessings and the constant Presence of the Grace never leave you.”

The Message of the day was:

“O soul, my soul, we have created Heaven,
 Within we have found the kingdom here of God,
 His fortress built in a loud ignorant world.
 Our life is entrenched between two rivers of Light,
 We have turned space into a gulf of peace
 And made the body a capitol of bliss.
 What more, what more, if more must still be done?”
 In the slow process of the evolving spirit,
 In the brief stade between a death and birth
 A first perfection’s stage is reached at last;
 Out of the wood and stone of our nature’s stuff
 A temple is shaped where the high gods could live.
 Even if the struggling world is left outside
 One man’s perfection still can save the world.
 There is won a new proximity to the skies,
 A first betrothal of the Earth and Heaven,
 A deep concordat between Truth and Life:
 A camp of God is pitched in human time.

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She sent me yet another card accompanied by these lines:

“Debu told me that your sitar has a very pretty sound and that you can learn to play well. I am glad for it.

¹ A sadhak.

“My love and blessings along with the constant Presence of the Grace never leave you.”

Indeed, I used to play the sitar before I came to the Ashram. At the same time I also learnt vocal Indian Classical music for two years or so. Unfortunately I did not get a chance to finish the full course in 1950. One of the well-known musicians, who had come to give our examination, insisted on my continuing to learn music. For, he thought, I had a good voice and fair prospects of success. My teachers had the same feeling.

At that time I had a contact with Acharaya Kakasaheb Kalelkar. He too wrote to me in one of his letters to continue music. He was a wonderful person. I have come to know that he had visited the Ashram many years earlier and the Mother had liked him.

At once my memory flew back to what the Mother had written to me in one of her letters of the previous year:

“From your childhood something in you was aspiring for a great realisation—and if you failed in the various worldly things you tried, it is because you were meant for a higher realisation, that of the Spirit....”

Now I laugh to myself—if I had become a professional singer, I would not have been here!

In Golconde, we were not supposed to play any music but I got special permission to do so. Now and again I played the sitar, but I felt that there was something else which was in store for me.

*

On 16th October the Mother sent me a card indicating lovely flowers—*Gladiolus*—and these words:

“These pretty branches of ‘receptivity’ with all my love and blessings that never leave you as well as the constant Presence of the Grace.”

It was quite understandable that the Mother wished me to be receptive to her Force, because without It nothing can be fulfilled and achieved.

The Mother wrote in the book *Words of the Mother* about receptivity:

“You may have noticed in the different parts of your being, when something comes and you do not receive it, it produces a stiffening—something hardens in the vital, in the mind or in the body. There is a clenching and this tension hurts—the first thing to do then, by a force of will, is to relax this clenching ...you must learn how to ‘let go’.... This process of relaxation of tensions may

be differently applied in the mind, in the vital, or in the body, but logically it is the same thing. You can enlarge your consciousness as vast as the earth and even the universe. When you do that you become truly receptive.”

*

Laljibhai used to come to visit the Ashram more often than before. Now he was here and stayed in Golconde. We took our meals together. The Mother sent me more ‘Prasad’. But certain things I had to eat alone according to her wish.

It amused me to see Laljibhai working at the stove—making tea and toast in the evening. I had never seen him work like that before. He wanted to help me. It was kind of him.

A big house—formerly called the Gospel House—was finally purchased by my family. The Mother’s Will was fulfilled. Many years before, when some Ashramites had lived there, she had visited the house frequently. The Mother meditated often in my apartment. Sri Aurobindo used to be served mangoes gathered from the trees which grew in the compound of the house. He was very fond of mango-chutney! In one of the rooms of my apartment, food had been cooked for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Indeed my apartment is surcharged with the Mother’s Force by her constant visits to the place. I am fortunate to feel her Presence there all the time.

Around this time, Laljibhai had some talks with the Mother about building a sugar factory in Pondicherry.

On the 17th I received a card showing a branch of flowers—*Nasturtium*. Underneath the picture were the Mother’s words: “Promise of realisation”, and these lines:

“It is on *Monday the 22nd* that I shall go to your new house a little before 4 o’clock—I shall ask Udar¹ to come also—and we shall see how to arrange it nicely.

“All my love and blessings along with the constant Presence of the Grace never leave you even for a moment.”

I had finished decorating all the idols and arranging them in a big glass cupboard. I have mentioned earlier that the Mother had wanted to see all the images together in her stores. She wrote:

“If everything goes as expected I shall go to the Stores Thursday the 25th at 11 o’clock in the morning.

“My love and blessings along with the constant Presence of the Grace never leave you, not for an instant even.”

¹ A sadhak.

That evening, after a short meditation, I asked the Mother how it was possible to meditate when there was too much noise. She laughed tenderly and answered:

“Even when there is too much noise, you can go within your true self. You should throw out all thoughts and isolate yourself from exterior things and create the divine atmosphere around you. Then naturally you are safe from noise and disturbance.

“You see, I always take rest by entering into my true self—no matter what noise is going on. An occultist—my teacher—told me that one can meditate even on the battlefield where there is bombardment and shells fall.

“Here, no doubt, I am putting my Force around everybody. So all can remain protected and it is easy to meditate nicely and everyone is safe and untouched by the outer things.

“Yes, of course, it needs lots of practice. Once, twice, ten times—you must go on trying—also, learn how to enter into your true self. After a while you can surely become an expert.”

I told the Mother boldly that I would surely meditate the way she had indicated. I saw an amused sparkle in her eyes. She gave a mischievous smile.

That very night I sat erect, with closed eyes and tried to meditate. Unhappily, the first thing I was made aware of was an endless series of thoughts that went on and on through my brain as if someone had switched on a tape-recorder and forgotten to turn it off! I was entangled in them. Then suddenly I became conscious of outside noise—so in spite of stuffing my ears with cotton-wool, I could concentrate on nothing else but the clamour. Finally, I noticed that mosquitoes were biting me. I became bored, exhausted and touchy. I forgot all about entering into the true self. Eventually, I gave up and went to bed in a black mood.

The following evening, I related to the Mother what had happened. At first she listened to me seriously, resting her cheek on one hand. Then she burst into laughter. My face was a study in perplexity! When I went home I sat in my arm-chair and called myself all kinds of a fool for having committed such a blunder. That night I did not try to meditate at all.

It is a fact that if one wants to learn the spiritual truths in order to attain the goal—the Divine—one has to learn so many things from various sources of the Divine’s creation, such as human beings, animals, birds, trees, plants, flowers, etc., etc....

It is said that the god Dattatreya had acquired twenty-four gurus in order to reach perfection and to remain in bliss and in truth-awareness. One of the gurus was an archer who was so absorbed in making bows and arrows that he did not even notice what happened nearby. Later he was asked whether he had seen a king pass by just then with great pomp. He answered that he had not seen the king, neither had he heard the noise of the procession. For, he had focused his entire attention on his work.

M. Théon was perfectly right when he told the Mother that one could meditate on the battlefield. Sri Aurobindo too has said the same thing.

The Mother wrote to me on a beautiful card:

“This afternoon at $\frac{1}{4}$ to 4 (3.45) I shall come to ‘Huta’s House’ because such will be its name henceforth.

“With my love and blessings along with the constant Presence of the Grace.”

She came at the appointed time with a few people, and went straight upstairs. Laljibhai too was there. The Mother herself decided upon all the arrangements. She said that I must have a green bathroom like hers. Then suddenly I went very close to her and whispered: “Mother, why all these luxuries for me? I don’t really need them.” She smiled charmingly and whispered back:

“It does not matter. This is my house and you are only the guardian here....”

I kept quiet because no words came forth to express my gratitude. But she learnt from my eyes all that my soul wanted to convey.

Indeed, the Mother did so much more than I could ever deserve, and her Force still goes on doing it. Here I recall vividly what she told me once:

“You are my adopted child—I have adopted you, and like to take care of you.”

Tears of relief and happiness welled up in my eyes. I was quite aware that material things and outer comforts would never bring me everlasting peace and happiness and that I could only obtain these when I realised the Supreme. I expressed my feeling to the Mother and thanked her once again for taking so much care of me.

The next morning, she answered:

“I have read your very nice letter and listened to your sincere prayer. The Grace *always* grants the sincere prayers—so be quite sure that you will reach your goal.

“I am happy to take care of you and do it always with all my love and blessings.”

Now the work of renovating my apartment started.

*

It was Thursday, a fine sunny morning. I was in the Stores, giving the final touches to the idols, and waiting for the Mother.

She came on time—11 o'clock—accompanied by Dyuman, Champaklal, Pavitra, Nolini and Amrita. When she saw all the images assembled together I marked the pleasure in her bright eyes. She admired them a great deal, and while holding my hands she raised her blue-grey eyes to everyone standing about her, and passed many good remarks about the idols. I fail to recollect them. I can only remember my embarrassment and the feeling of a blush like a warm wave rising to my cheeks. She looked at me with an appreciative twinkle in her eyes and gave to all present one of her sweetest smiles that made her face most adorable and lovely. Then with slow footsteps she left the Stores.

Before her French lesson, I saw her in her Playground room. She expressed once again her joy at having seen all the idols together.

The next morning she wrote:

“I have explained to Jayanti about the steps for arranging the idols in the ‘temple’. He will come to the Stores to take all the necessary measurements for the steps to be prepared.

“My love and blessings along with the constant Presence of the Grace are always with you.”

She sent me another card:

“Bonjour to my dear little child, to my sweet Huta,

“With all my confidence in the work she is doing so thoroughly and carefully”.

The Mother never stopped praising my work.

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INTEGRAL INDIAN SPIRITUALITY

A LETTER

THE reply you have given to your critic on the subject of "Hindu monotheism" is masterly, with its pertinent and pointed quotations from Sri Aurobindo whose name the critic had brought in. Your reply also throws into relief Sri Aurobindo's unfailing insight into the many-sidedness of spiritual truth. His standpoint may be summarised in one of your quotations: "The monotheism of the Veda includes in itself the monistic, pantheistic and even polytheistic views of the cosmos and is by no means the trenchant and simple creed of modern Theism. It is only by a violent struggle with the text that we can force on it a less complex aspect" (*On the Veda*, 1956 edition, pp. 37-38). I am glad you are so familiar with Sri Aurobindo's treatment of the issues at stake.

More correctly I should say his treatment in general and in most particulars. For, I am afraid you leave it somewhat hazy in a certain important matter. You are excellent in your dealing with, on the one hand, modern Humanism with its rational, tolerant and progressive yet essentially materialistic approach in the midst of all its ethics and aesthetics and, on the other, Christian and Islamist monotheisms of the orthodox type, each with its deity completely other than world and creature, its exclusive revelation through a single historic figure, its superior attitude towards benighted "heathens" or "kafirs" and its missionary drive to convert them. But I feel that a tiny "blind spot" in your vision of ultimate realities has been active in the sketch you present of India's spirituality. You see it as founded on a higher kind of Humanism. This Humanism does not bother about theologies nor concentrates on unique messengers nor gets inflamed by the one and only Faith. It concerns itself with our own concrete existence but looks beyond our material being to probe hidden recesses in us and to experience by means of "mystical methods" the illimitable divinity that we secretly are and that assumes various forms of celestial Powers. In your eyes, "The starting-point of Hindu sages and seers is not God but man."

I remember a story that has come down from Greek and Roman reporters of affairs Indian. Socrates is said to have met an Indian sage. The latter asked Socrates what his work was. Socrates said, "To understand man." The visiting sage laughed and exclaimed, "How can you understand man before understanding God?"

No doubt, "God" in India has a meaning different from the one put into the word by orthodox Christians and Islamists. As you observe with your eye on Buddhism and Jainism, "There are strains in Hindu spirituality which have no use for God." As you make it clear, what these "strains" denied was "God as a creator and controller of the cosmos". Such a God vanished even from Shankara's Advaita in the final reckoning—a deity standing apart from man in some aspect or other and leaving a foundation, however little, for dualism. But all Indian spirituality asserts an Infinite, an Eternal, a Permanent, an Immutable, a One without a second as the

ultimate Real—and this Real, as envisaged in all the basic revelations or discoveries of Hindu spirituality, namely, the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita, is not only *Tat* or *Sat* but also *Sa*, a “He” no less than an “It”, the “Existent” as well as “Existence”, both Ishwara and Brahman-Atman. Thus “God” in a supreme Personal sense has always been there, whether in the forefront or in the background. So I think it is not accurate to declare: “It is only in Shaivism and Vaishnavism and the later-day sects of *bhakti* that we come across the notion of God.”

Of course, you go on to say: “But this God again is nothing like the God of Christianity or the *Allah* of Islam. Shiva and Vishnu grow directly out of the Vedic and the Upanishadic pantheon, they are Gods invested with the attributes of all other Gods, and represent all Gods turn by turn as well as at the same time.” This statement brings out the universality of Indian theism as contrasted to the narrowness of traditional Christianity’s God or conventional Islam’s Allah. What it misses to render explicit is that Shiva and Vishnu are not only inclusive of each other and all other Gods but also constitute finally the *one* supreme yet *multifariously* manifesting Deity who is at the same time Himself in full glory and, in a subdued or concealed or unfolding form, the universe and the universe-enviored individual. This is the import of Hindu monotheism—and that monotheism is as old as the Rigveda which speaks of the highest Purusha under the symbolism of the one ultimate *Vrishan* or *Vrishabha*, the eternal Bull whose creative aspect is the eternal or “unslayable Cow”, *Aditi*, the limitless Mother of the Great Gods: Varuna, Mitra, Aryaman, Bhaga, Surya-Savitri, etc. Here we have the Divine as Super-Person and not merely as Being, Consciousness (or, as Sri Aurobindo formulates it, Consciousness-Force) and Bliss.

Indian spirituality is not fully visioned without the Divine as Super-Person. What prevents Buddhism and Jainism from being wholly or integrally Hindu is their lack of Hinduism’s Parameshwara, Purushottama. Even Shankara’s Adwaita, though strong in the positive affirmation of what Buddhism somewhat negatively knows, is yet from the viewpoint of Hindu Integralism insufficient not only because it takes away the basis of world-value with its doctrine of World-Illusion, *Maya*, but also because by overlooking the Super-Person it leaves human personality hanging in the void. The Hindu seeker, asking the question “Who am I?”, can never through Shankara’s Adwaita hope to compass the archetype, the fundamental truth, of his own self as person, as conscious individual: the Divine Super-man fulfilling the seeker’s man-hood proper in its mental-vital-physical crystallisation.

The Divine as Super-Person does not appear to be well-focused in your comprehension or experience of the Sanatana Dharma, the “Eternal Religion”. You have a profound sense of Sri Krishna and yet his role as the deific Super-Person seems absent from your general spiritual awareness. You regard him as the highest form thrown up by the human psyche, an example *par excellence* of spiritual realisation arrived at by man posing to himself the query “Who am I?” But Sri Krishna, of neither the Chhandogya Upanishad nor the Mahabharata-story, of neither the Gita

nor the Puranic legend, is merely such a figure. The Chhandogya makes him realise the Supreme by a direct luminous leap, as it were, on a slight prompting by Rishi Ghora. There is no introspective quest to speak of. In the Bharata War he is known by a few as the Incarnate Divine and not just a human being deeply searching himself. The Gita presents him as the Purushottama, the *purna* Avatar, whose "Me" as an object of personal bhakti is on a level with the Ishwara of Karmayoga and the Brahman-Atman of Jnanayoga. In the Puranic legend he is the Master of the world-play (*lila*), the Lord and Lover who has assumed a human shape to manifest his own superhuman *Anandamaya* beauty, his super-humanity, so to say. Unless you see Sri Krishna in this light you are looking at him from no more than an enlightened and spiritualised rationalistic standpoint, an intensified version of modern Humanism with a surface-psychology transformingly touched by a spiritual philosophy based on the Sanatana Dharma but not steeped in its illumined depths. Unless you accept Sri Krishna as the Divine Super-Person embodied on earth you shut out a very important shade of the splendid spectrum of eternal verities that is Sanatana Dharma. And once you accept him in this way your entire outlook on spiritual history will undergo a change in certain significant respects.

For one thing, you will accept the Hindu panorama of a succession of Avatars and the possibility of Avatarhood even today. For another, you will alter somewhat your picture of man the seeker. At present you depict him as being able by himself to probe and disclose his own depths and heights and consequently as being the starting-point of all the realisations Indian spirituality has attained. There is no room left for an action from the other side—a reaching out or reaching down of the divine Super-Person to lay bare those heights and depths or at least to help man the seeker to find them. In actual spiritual experience, man is not only the seeker: he is also the sought. Religion in its essence is both man's search for God and God's search for man. An intimate basic relationship exists between the Here and the Beyond in all spiritual endeavour. Hindu spirituality does not commence with man just sitting down and diving into himself and reaching the end in *Shivo'ham* ("I am Shiva") or *Aham brahmosmi* ("I am Brahman"). It has been told beforehand that there is a Paramatman for the Atman to ascend into, a Purushottama for the Purusha to perceive as his final truth. And it has also been told that there are what you term "mystic methods". These methods do not get "employed", as you seem to suggest, automatically by the seeker trying to put into practice the formula "Know thyself". What Hindu spirituality does is to tread in the footsteps of spiritual geniuses who have given the assurance of "mystic methods" and of the grand goal to be reached in one or another aspect of its many-sided unity. Great religions are not founded by Tom, Dick and Harry saying to themselves, "*ko'ham*, Who am I?". They are founded by a few exceptional individuals who lay down modes of yoga and sadhana in a general fashion in the light of their own rare experiences, their uncommon discoveries. And those experiences and discoveries have occurred for them by a special Grace of illumination coming from the Beyond to meet the inward and upward drive of their

“intuitive genius” (to use a term of yours). What the few exceptional individuals have founded is carried on by other less gifted but still inspired individuals to help those who are touched somewhere in their beings by the honeyed fire-tongue of Agni, the In-dweller of the secret cave in man’s heart. This is the background of the Indian tradition of Guru-vada, the sitting at the feet of the Master. The very word “Upanishad” connotes “sitting inwardly” that is, proceeding towards one’s inner being by entering the intimate circle of the teacher who has realised his inmost. And the extant Upanishads bear ample testimony to the spiritual Ashrams growing up around the Gurus. In India the Guru is traditionally worshipped as Bhagavan, he is the Divine humanly represented. Always there is either a direct divine guidance or an indirect Guru-channelled one.

The sense of God in the Indian meaning of the term is a prerequisite of Indian spirituality. Without a hint of this sense, bringing about at least a glint of faith, there can be no spiritual process. The scriptures do not put before us a blank, urging us to plunge into it—except that a seeming Nothing that is secretly the All may be set up as the goal. Again and again we are provided with ranges of vision summing up in wonderful language the Mystery that has been explored by the seers and we are told: “This is the thing thou seekest.” Just because the seers did not bother—as you phrase it—“about mere metaphysics” and went onward “without anchoring their boats to one scholastic shore or another”, we cannot declare that they had no previous revelations to go by. No doubt, many seers made new disclosures or brought into frontal focus what had been a shining background before, but none of them sat down in a state of rationalistic agnosticism and simply “started their search with the eminently empirical formula of ‘know thyself’ (atmanam viddhi)”. I doubt if in India the formula of “know thyself” is purely “empirical”. In the word “atman”, the object of knowledge, the Self of selves, is already implied and assumed as a legacy from past seerhood. And what seerhood at the very beginning obtained was, as I have said, the consequence of a response from Beyond to the straining from Here for something shadowed forth in the outer consciousness from hidden dimensions. The essential “mystic methods” employed were not devised by the rishis: many elaborations were certainly made but originally the modes of inner inquiry were the results of a happy conjunction between the human consciousness and the divine Presence in its two forms—

The unknown Self above who is the goal,
The unseen Self within who is the guide.

The accurate locution for the basis of the Hindu spiritual adventure is not a new kind of Humanism but an immemorial sort of Superhumanism, in which *tapasya* and *kripa*, the human person’s inner probing and the Divine Super-Person’s grace meet and mingle. Epigrammatically we may aver à la Sri Aurobindo: “He who chooses the Infinite has been chosen by the Infinite.”

A glance at the history of the religio-spiritual mind will help to support my contention. It was not by peering into himself that ancient man originally arrived at the notion of the numinous. Sri Aurobindo¹ has well described the state of affairs: "Man's first and primitive idea of the Divine can only come through his vision of external Nature and the sense of a superior Power or Powers concealed behind her phenomena veiled in the heaven and earth, father and mother of our being, in the sun and moon and stars, its lights and regulators, in dawn and day and night and rain and wind and storm, the oceans and the rivers and the forests, all the circumstances and forces of her scene of action, all that vast and mysterious surrounding life of which we are a part and in which the natural heart and mind of the human creature feel instinctively through whatever bright or dark or confused figures that there is here some divine Multitude or else mighty Infinite, one, manifold and mysterious, which takes these forms and manifests itself in these motions." Then Sri Aurobindo brings in the earliest religious testament known to India and links it to that early outlook on the universe: "The Vedic religion took this natural sense and feeling of the physical man; it used the conceptions to which they gave birth, and it sought to lead him through them to the psychic and spiritual truths of his own being and the being of the cosmos." There was an outward side and an inward one to the Vedic religion, but, in both, the movement of the consciousness was by invocation, adoration, propitiation, devotion, self-dedication. When this movement was not content with an external prayer and worship and the practice of a ritual but was turned into an internal intensity of aspiration towards the more-than-human Powers and Personalities imagined or intuited behind Nature and the one universal Power and Personality divined at the back of the Gods and Goddesses at various play, certain deeper layers of the being were stirred and mystic experiences took place and mystic methods were found in order to repeat and enhance them and instal more and more the deific presences within the human mind and life-force and, by awakening some subtlest entity in the recesses of the yearning heart, share increasingly the *Satyam, Ritam, Brihat*—the Truth, the Right, the Vast—which was felt to be the highest home of the deific presences and the supreme Reality of which they were the diverse instruments and expressions.

Man's peering into himself to find his own innermost divine essence has come by a prior and initial recognition of Gods and Goddesses and an ultimate divinity who is a Super-Person. That is what the history of religion and spirituality lays bare to us in India. Everywhere else too is the same fact. What I have called a Superhumanism is the path of man's progressing soul. Only, this path has been narrow and partial in creeds like Christianity and Islam whereas in Hinduism it is wide and varied and comprehensive and not confined to the experience of a transcendent God in separation from the God who is cosmic and individual and in one particular transcendent aspect which raises in the ignorant consciousness the bigot, the fanatic,

¹ *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (The Sri Aurobindo Library Inc., New York, 1953 p. 160.)

the persecutor and often gives rise to the sad phenomenon that monotheism in religion is imperialism in politics.

I should like to point out that your rejection of the Christian or Islamist God need not entail the rejection of an almighty God creating (of course in the Indian sense of "loosing forth") the cosmos and controlling it, again in the Indian sense which is not of a gross manipulation of everything but of a subtle turning of it to his own unfolding purpose in a universe started by him from the opposite pole to his divinity. This pole the Rigveda called "the ocean of darkness enwrapped within darkness" and Sri Aurobindo terms the Inconscient, within which all is buried in order to be gradually and evolutionarily manifested. The Aurobindonian aim is ultimately a Divine Life achieved in terms seemingly impossible and therefore in their transformation a richness beyond compare. Without an almighty God at hidden work, a universe like ours with its brute insensate beginning and its painful obstructed development chockful of conflicts and chequered with intrusions from Titanic and Demonic other-worlds would be an unbearable monstrosity holding out no hope for redemption and rendering all our finest dreams and urges—our "Hindu" aspirations, as you would designate them—a futile phantasmagoria of delusive colour and treacherous tune. Only by

A wide unshaken look on time's unrest

founded on the faith that

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we may

and by a constant application of the master-key, face to face with all events, to unlock in our lives the power of this divinity—the master-key of the injunction "Remember and offer"—we can move forward with a smile, for then

Ever we hear in the heart of the peril a flute go before us.

Yes, the flute of Sri Krishna the secret omnipotence and omnipresence who not only manifested thousands of years ago but also promised to manifest again and again on earth and who calls us both within towards our own Godhood and draws us without to remake the world according to Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future.

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K. D. SETHNA

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE SURAT CONGRESS (1907)

(Continued from the issue of February 21, 1983)

Authors's Note

Keeping the ethics of historical writing in mind, this article has used both the names Sri Aurobindo and Aurobindo. The material of the paper was mostly collected from the Sri Aurobindo Library, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

ON 28 December 1907, recoiling from the trauma of a chaotic experience, the split Congress met separately. In the afternoon the Moderates first met as a convention. Pherozshah Mehta spoke first. Surendranath followed. He said:

“We are about to enter upon what might be regarded as a new stage in the development of this great Congress Movement. The king is dead, long live the king. The Congress is dead, long live the Congress, and I am perfectly certain that with the constitution reviving, resuscitating and reincarnating our views and our aspirations, the Congress will have entered upon a stage of usefulness fraught with the most momentous results to the fortunes of this country.”²²

Lajpat Rai taking a conciliatory attitude spoke:

“I wish it had not been necessary for me to associate myself with the proposal today and we had gone on with our proceedings in the ordinary manner. But as misfortune will have it that was not destined to be, and today we, at any rate, express the fact that notwithstanding all our misfortunes we are determined to continue our work. We are, therefore, going to prove to the world that with all our internal quarrels we have agreed to serve the country by helping the Congress under whose banner we have been battling for the past twenty-two years.”²³

Dr. Rashbehari Ghose in his address pointed out the two fundamental articles of the moderate creed:

“That the attainment by India of self-government similar to that enjoyed by the self-governing members of the empire and participation of her in the rights and responsibilities of the Empire on equal terms with those members is the goal of our political aspiration.

“That the advance towards this goal is to be by strictly constitutional means

bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration and by promoting national unity, fostering public spirit and improving the condition of the masses."²⁴

Then Gokhale moved a resolution for formation of a committee to frame a new constitution for the Congress. This was adopted and the committee met immediately at Mehta's residence. In the afternoon the regular conference was also held. The resolution which could not be passed the day before was passed. In an emotional presidential address Surendranath Banerjee pointed out that there could not be any difference between Boycott and Swadeshi as one was impossible without the other. He further pointed out that by Swaraj he meant colonial self-government. He appealed for unity in the name of the motherland. He conceded that unity of opinion was impossible but urged for unity in action.²⁵ Thus ended the Congress for one camp.

On the same day the nationalists held their conference under the Presidentship of Aurobindo. Nevinson who attended it describes the scene: "Grave and silent, I think without saying a single word, Mr. Aurobindo Ghose took the chair, and sat unmoved, with far-off eyes, as one who gazes at futurity. In clear, short sentences, without eloquence or passion, Mr. Tilak spoke till the stars shone out and someone kindled a lantern at his side."²⁶

To form a conclusion on the twin aspect of the episode in view of Sri Aurobindo's statement it is necessary to reassess the Congress Programme and rebuild the role of Aurobindo from the above account.

To reassess the Congress Programme one must ask: How wide was the gulf between the two camps on ideology and methods? The differences were real and substantial even though the Calcutta Resolutions were ultimately maintained. The Calcutta resolution on Swaraj had stipulated the status of self-governing British colonies, meaning thereby Canada and Australia. The draft resolution at Surat merely said self-government as enjoyed by other members of the empire which included even Burma.²⁷ However, the Calcutta resolution was maintained due to heavy criticism by the press and others; but the original draft resolution was never withdrawn. Similarly, while the Calcutta resolution had called for boycott of foreign goods even at the cost of some sacrifice, the Surat resolution toned it down by merely saying: 'to promote boycott against foreign goods wherever possible only.'²⁸ Further, the Calcutta resolution had given a blanket support to boycott in Bengal as legitimate. This naturally included boycott of the English government and its institutions. The Surat resolution supported the boycott of foreign goods only.²⁹ Similarly, on national education the Calcutta resolution called for a new system of education under nationalist control for promoting the cause of the nation. The Surat resolution did not speak of national control over education.³⁰ As to the methods for arriving at these ends the moderates declared clearly that they stood by constitutional means alone, they did not intend to break any law. There can be little doubt as to the moderates'

failure to gauge the preparedness of the nation to suffer for the cause. They could not tune themselves to the changing time.

However, no water-tight ideological lines can be drawn. Different people meant different things by Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education. To Surendranath the only aim of boycott "was to call the attention of the British public to Bengal's great grievance (the partition) and, when the partition was modified and the grievance was removed, the boycott was to cease."³¹

Lajpat Rai thought differently:

"Admitting that Englishmen at home have the power to set matters right, how are you to force their attention to the state of things in India except by directly threatening their pockets? The British people are not a spiritual people.... It will be like throwing pearls before swine to appeal to them in the name of higher morality or justice or on ethical grounds. They are a self-reliant and haughty people, who can appreciate self-respect and self-reliance even in their opponents."³²

To Tilak and Aurobindo boycott had double implications. From a material point of view it was to be an economic pressure on Manchester producing a chain reaction on the Indian government. From a spiritual point of view it meant dispelling the Maya or illusion of British power and a necessary sacrifice for Swaraj. Similarly, by Swaraj Tilak and Aurobindo aspired for complete independence. Though the cause was dear to Tilak, as a realist and as a shrewd politician he was prepared to accept even a lower status. Eventually when he joined the Home Rule Movement he was satisfied with independence within the Empire. But he never joined the main Congress till the Surat clauses were amended. Sri Aurobindo was unequivocal on the issue. But he was also prepared to accept the Cripps proposal later. Though publicly Tilak and Aurobindo did not contribute to violent and radical ideas, both maintained a direct contact with the secret organisations and even guided them. Bepin Pal could not sympathise with such bodies and his difference with the Yugantar group led to his disassociation from the 'Bande Mataram'. Similarly, by National Education Aurobindo meant supplantation of the English system of education while many of his colleagues had a limited end of supplementing merely the official education.³³

Even among the moderates the stands varied. Surendranath never failed to feel the pulse of Bengal; as noted earlier he would not distinguish between Boycott and Swadeshi. Many had no opposition to Swadeshi but opposed boycott, considering it to be negative. Some localised boycott to Bengal while others limited it to foreign goods. Thus among the moderates Pherozshah Mehta stood to the far left, Gokhale stood at the centre, while Surendranath stood to the right. Similarly, among the extremists Aurobindo stood to the far left, Tilak stood at the centre and Lajpat Rai to the right. Thus when the split came Lajpat Rai joined the moderates rather reluctantly. Surendranath immediately after the split tried to bring back Aurobindo into the fold. In spite of such liquid stands the fundamental difference remained. The

moderates still depended on the Britishers for realising the cherished goals, the extremists believed in self-help and mass-movement. As to the legality of Tilak's insistence to address the conference Sitaramayya observes:

"It is impossible to say that technically he was not correct. It is, however, easy to be wise after the event and when feelings run high even great men may, and do, lose their balance."³⁴

The most unfortunate part of the whole episode was that both the sides used the same deplorable method of swamping the Congress with their own men. If the moderates had hired Mohamedan hooligans as Tilak complained, the whole chaos was also a typical Mahratta ruse. Both parties instead of trying to convince the other tried to impose their points of view. The nationalists wanted to capture the organisation while the moderates were determined to keep the extremists out of the fold.

Coming to the other facet of the episode one would ask; "Did Aurobindo play a vital role as he claims? Have the historians failed to recognise his role?"

Recounting from the above narrative we may repeat that Aurobindo's voice was one of the earliest critical voices on the Congress. Aurobindo was undoubtedly the leader of the Bengal extremists at Surat as Pal was then in jail and as Brahama-bandhab was dead. The 'Jugantar' group was the most active group in Bengal and Aurobindo stood at its head. Aurobindo was the soul of the extremists at the Midnapore district Congress Conference one month before the Surat episode. It was almost a dress rehearsal for Aurobindo and his group. It was memorable in the sense that here the moderates and extremists came to open clash for the first time. The striking similarity of both the episodes is a pointer to the role of Aurobindo who was present in both. His role in giving the Bengal movement its extremist trend has been amply brought out by Arun Chandra Guha's *Sri Aurobindo and Yugantara*. Thus Aurobindo's claim that he gave the Bengal movement its extremist trend is well qualified. His role in Surat was no less active. On 24 December two days before the Surat Congress he presided over the first closed-door meeting of the extremist group. On 26 December he accompanied Tilak to Surendranath for dissolving the crisis. Barin, his brother and lieutenant, one of the wreckers at Surat, describes the breaking:

"On the shoulders of each (of us) rode a ghost of Siva, the destroyer of Daksha's sacrifice. All were fired with an iconoclastic zeal, crazy for the new, drunk with the freshly tasted wine of power."³⁵

On 28 December when the extremists met as a separate Congress it was Aurobindo who presided over the meeting. After the event he along with Tilak toured many parts of Maharashtra and Madras. Taking his whole role as an organiser and thinker of the nationalist movement one can hardly suggest that he was playing the game as merely designed by Tilak. His role has hardly been recognised. Sita-

ramayya mentions Aurobindo's name just once in his work. He is mentioned neither in the Alipore bomb case nor even in the Surat Congress. This is poor justice for the man who was the first President of a parallel Congress. Ambika Charan Majumdar's *National Evolution*, though more charitable, fails to do full justice. It can be fairly conceded that Sri Aurobindo's role in the Surat Congress has not received the attention it deserves.

To conclude: it is necessary to judge the impact of the event. Immediately it appeared that Curzon's life-long desire to see the Congress to a peaceful demise was almost near. Repression followed; the Alipore bomb case drove the firebrand Aurobindo to jail with all his major compatriots. Tilak was deported for an article on the same issue. The new spirit was fainting on the horizon. The partition was, however, withdrawn. This lull did not last long. Ripples were replaced by waves.

(Concluded)

SUSMITA PRASAD PANI

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³¹ Tripathy, A. *The Extremist Challenge*, p. 108.
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³³ Pal, Bepin: *Character Sketches*: see pp. 79 to 95.
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HIS MIND OF KNOWLEDGE

AGNI entered the bridal chamber of the third night and conquered lust,
Then by knowing the births became the sire of the soul in Matter;
Past the scarlet of dreams galloped thunder-like the mighty Breath,
As though some strange greenery stretched far in the sleep of the seed;
Soon we reached the vast ether pulsating even in the protoplasm,
And, beyond thought, brilliant like rainbow-hues soared the overhead worlds;
Indra offered his prayer to the bright daughter of the Himalayas,
And a growing infinity of silence gathered in the sense of sound;
Behold the Fourfold above with only his left hind leg dangling in the holocaust,
It is the splendour of the burning sun's gold that flows into creation;
The Eye of Heaven has opened in that eternal calm of the rock,
And therefore Agni returns not appalled by the Inconceivable;
The Wind-God pervaded the spaces of the atom and of the star,
Then by the power of inspiration death was linked to immortality;
In the hour of dawn a skyful of swans swooped down on rapture's wings,
And a rush of revelation filled the self of the boundless zero;
We invoked Agni and he demanded the boon of the high sacrifice,
Then from the ruby of the heart leaped up the splendid will-to-be;
We invoked Vayu and he demanded the Horse of the strength of God,
Therefore it is through the nostrils of the Supreme that Life breathes,
We invoked Indra and he gave his thousand-pearled necklace to the Great One,
And in an outburst of Light streamed earthward the shining herds;
We invoked the original Word quivering in the luminous substance,
And his Mind of Knowledge kindled ecstasies of the unborn Day.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

THE MYSTIC PATH OF A SUFI

MOST Sufis favour the theory that the word 'Sufi' is derived from 'safa' (purity) and that the Sufi is one of the elect who have become purified from all worldly defilements. Others would connect it with 'saff' (rank) as though the Sufi was spiritually in the first rank in virtue of his communion with God; or with 'suffa' (bench) referring the origin of Sufism to the Ahl al-suffa (people of the bench), a title given to certain Muslims in the early days of Islam who had no house or lodging and therefore used to take shelter on the covered bench outside a mosque built by the Prophet at Madina. Abu Nasi al Sarraj declares that in his opinion (which, naturally, is not based on philosophical grounds) the word 'sufi' is derived from 'suf' (wool), 'for the woollen raiment is the habit of the prophets and the badge of the saints' as appears in many traditions and narratives. Noldeke cites a number of passages showing that in the first two centuries of Islam garments of coarse wool were worn by the common people and specially by those who followed an ascetic way of life. The words 'labisa 'l-suf' ('he clad himself in wool') occur frequently in the early literature and signify that the person to whom they are applied has renounced the world and become an ascetic; at a later period, when asceticism passed into mysticism, 'labisa 'l-suf' generally means 'he became a sufi'. In Persian too the ascetic is often called 'pashminapush', i.e. 'wearing a woollen garment'. The old Muslim ascetics who clothed themselves in wool borrowed this practice from Christian hermits or monks.

The beginnings of mysticism in Islam take us back to the great ascetic movement which arose largely under Christian influence during the 7th century A.D. This is reflected in biographical works containing notices of eminent sufis which include the names of many of those early ascetics. The movement, though extreme in certain directions, was mainly orthodox. It was characterised by intense religious exaltation, an overwhelming consciousness of human frailty, a boundless fear of God and utter submission to His will. There was no organized monastic life, though some ascetics wandered to and fro accompanied by a few friends or held prayer-meetings in which they studied the Quran and discussed their spiritual experiences. Basra seems to have been the centre of an anti-ritualistic party who laid stress on the higher aspects of asceticism, regarding it as essentially an inward feeling, whereas the Syrians were more concerned with its external forms. Examination of what is involved in the first article of the Muslim creed—the command to associate nothing with Allah—gradually led to the view that true asceticism is incompatible with any selfish desire, even with the desire to undergo the utmost privations and austerities for the sake of winning paradise, and that it must culminate in disinterested love for God.

Thus the old asceticism rooted in fanatical exaggeration of religious observances, gave way to a doctrine which in the end threatened to make all observances unnecessary. But this consequence did not show itself immediately. The Sufis of the 2nd century were usually orthodox and law-abiding. They cultivated poverty, self-

abasement, resignation. If they loved God, they feared Him more, and on the whole their mysticism lacked positive qualities as well as distinctive theories. They stand mid-way between asceticism (zuhd) and theosophy, or gnosis (marifat). The word that best describes their attitude is 'quietism' (rida).

During the 3rd century Sufism enters decisively on a new course. The ascetic and quietistic spirit, though still strong, is overpowered by speculative and pantheistic tendencies which had hitherto remained in the background but now assert themselves with increasing boldness. Notwithstanding the dominant and vital part which these tendencies play in the future development of Sufism, it is a mistake to identify their triumph with the origin of Sufism. Nor is it less a mistake to describe them as foreign elements which flowed into Sufism from outside and rapidly transformed it, so that all at once it became different in kind. The germs of Sufi pantheism are to be found in the Quran:

XXVIII 88, "Everything is perishing (halik) except the face (reality) of Allah"; IV 26f, "Everyone on the earth is passing away (fani), but the glorious and honoured face of thy Lord abideth for ever"; and II 109, "Wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of Allah."

Certainly the Muslim mystics might have arrived independently at the conclusion that Allah is the only real being.

It is conceivable that this notion may have come into Islam from outside; on the other hand, speculation on the doctrine of the divine unity appears sufficient to account for its development and indeed for its origin. Had there been more gods than one, says the Quran, the heavens and the earth would have come to grief; but if any attempt be made to define the word "god" metaphysically, speculation quickly leads to something like the truly existing or necessarily existing; even with Homer the difference between God and man is that the former is eternal, the latter transient. The relation between God and matter immediately suggests questions: is matter independent of God or not? The former supposition leads to polytheism, the latter only is consistent with real monotheism. If, then, God is not outside matter, He must in a way be identical with matter; and the most thoughtful of Sufis, accepting this conclusion, based on it a series of inferences as unlike the original doctrines of Islam as any that could have evolved.

Theoretically there is no reason why the Sufis should not have reached their pantheistic goal in such a fashion as this, and probably they often did, although in most cases it was a truth grasped intuitively from mystical experience rather than the result of philosophical reflection. But, in seeking to explain how they advanced from quietism to pantheism, we cannot proceed on the assumption that they were wholly impervious to non-Islamic ideas. The influence of Christianity, Neo-platonism and Buddhism is an undeniable fact. It was in the air and inevitably made itself felt. Of its extent and importance we have ample evidence, although the materials at our disposal seldom enable us to trace it out in detail.

In short the new Sufism of the third century, like Sufism in every period of its

history, is the product of diverse forces working together—speculative developments of the Muhammedan monotheistic idea, Christian asceticism and mysticism, Gnosticism, Greek and Indian philosophies.

Until recently the problem has been attacked on the wrong lines. Many former investigators held the view that this great movement, which drew its life and strength from all classes and races in the Muslim empire, could be adequately explained by pointing to one definite source (e.g., the Vedanta or Neo-platonism) or by formulating theories which are at best half-truths (e.g., Sufism was a reaction of the Aryan mind against a Semitic religion forcibly imposed on it). It is now recognised that instead of searching in vain after a single cause we should endeavour to study the various influences by which the Sufi doctrine was moulded, to place them in due order and connection, and to distinguish as far as possible what is contributed by each. These influences constitute the environment in which the doctrine developed, and among them are to be reckoned all political, social, and intellectual conditions which favoured the growth of mysticism, such as the devastating civil wars of the Umayyad period, the sceptical and rationalistic currents that ran strongly in the early 'Abbasid' age and particularly the bitter sectarianism and barren dogmatism of the 'ulama'.

The older Sufis had sought to bring every word, act and thought of their lives into harmony with the divine will—an ideal which expressed their conception of Allah as a transcendent personality, 'the Lord of created beings', and which they attained by means of asceticism. This theory and practice naturally produced (1) the doctrine of divine love which is the highest positive form of quietism, and (2) ecstasy which is frequently a result either involuntary or intentional of ascetic exercises. Although the early Sufis were more or less orthodox, their relation to Islam being not unlike that of the mediaeval Spanish mystics to the Roman Catholic Church, a religion of love and ecstasy was bound to come into conflict with Islam sooner or later. Rabia declared that she had no fear of hell or hope of paradise, and that she could not love the Prophet because her love of God absorbed her so entirely that neither love nor hate of any other thing remained in her heart. The barrier between Allah and His creatures was gradually broken down. The definition of divine unity (tauḥid) became pantheistic; the unique personality of Allah, far above and beyond human reach, was transformed into the one real Being (al-Ḥaqq) revealed in all created things, the mystic's true self which he finds by losing his individual consciousness in ecstatic self-abandonment.

The historical circumstances of its origin justify the statement that it was at least partially derived from sources outside of Islam. Méry indeed seems to go too far when he calls it 'Greek' and connects it specifically with the writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, though it may well have been influenced both by them and by the so-called "Theology of Aristotle", a Neo-Platonic treatise of which an Arabic version appeared before the end of 3rd century. What makes the influence of Hellenism certain is the fact that in Western Asia and Egypt the Sufi theosophy arose on a soil long saturated with Hellenistic culture, while some of its leading exponents were

non-Arab Muslims belonging to the subject nationalities.

Let us now consider the methods whereby a reconciliation was effected between Sufism and Islam.

The Quran contains few passages from which it can fairly be argued that Muhammad had in him something of the mystic, but the book as a whole is no better than the Pentateuch to form the basis of a system of mysticism. Nevertheless the Sufis adopting the Shiite principle of allegorical interpretation (*tawil*) were able to prove to their own satisfaction that every verse and word of the sacred text hides treasures of meaning which God reveals to the elect—meanings which flash upon the inward eye in moments of rapt meditation. So much being granted one can imagine that it was easy to show Quranic authority for any mystical doctrine whatsoever and to maintain that Sufism was really the esoteric teaching of the Prophet communicated by him to his son-in-law, Ali 'b Abi Talib. From the same principle it follows that the Sufi interpretation of Islam admits an endless variety of divergent and even contradictory beliefs and practices all of which 'ex hypothesi' are equally valid in kind, though not in degree, since the meanings of the Quran are infinite and reveal themselves to each mystic in proportion to the spiritual capacity with which he is endowed. Hence the Sufis are not a sect, and there is no uniform body of doctrine constituting what is called 'Sufism'. The many-sidedness of the term is exemplified by the innumerable attempts made to define it.

Similarly the attitude of the Sufis towards Muhammadan religious law depends on a subjective criterion. Some punctiliously fulfilled their ritual obligations, while at the same time they recognized that forms of worship have only a relative value in comparison with 'the works of heart', or are altogether worthless except as symbols of spiritual realities. To make the pilgrimage, e.g., is to journey away from sin; to put on the pilgrim's garb (*ihram*) is to cast off with one's every-day clothes all sensual thoughts and feelings. This is a well-known doctrine of the Ismailis from whom the Sufis seem to have borrowed it. Others are antinomian, whether they be free-thinking and free-living dervishes, genuine mystics like the Malamatis described by Hujwiri whose fear of men's praise caused them deliberately to act in such a way as to incur reprobation, or gnostics supremely indifferent to the shadow-shows of religion and morality in a phantom world. Many Sufis, however, insist that normally at any rate perfect realization of Truth (*haqiqat*)—i.e., the consummation of the mystical life—is not only compatible with observance of the Law (*shariat*) but includes it as an aspect of the whole.

The Sufis regarded themselves as a peculiarly favoured class possessing an esoteric knowledge of the Quran and the apostolic traditions, and using the technical expressions which no ordinary Muslim could understand. This fostered a feeling of brotherhood and it was not long before traces of organization began to appear. Eminent mystics gathered round them groups of disciples (small at first) for private instructions and in course of time became recognised teachers, heads of mystical schools, and abbots presiding over convents where Sufis were trained. It was

generally held that for those entering on the religious life a teacher was indispensable. A self-trained mystic who had not passed through the discipline prescribed by a spiritual director (Shaikh, Pir, Murshid) was looked upon with suspicion. The authority of the Shaikhs was absolute.

The first year is devoted to service of the people (i.e., the Sufis), the second year to service of God and the third year to watching over his own heart. He can serve the people only when he places himself in the rank of servants and all others in the rank of masters, i.e., he must regard all without exception as being better than himself and must deem it his duty to serve all alive. And he can serve God only when he cuts off all his selfish interests relating either to the present or the future life, and worships God for God's sake alone. And he can watch over his heart, only when his thoughts are collected and every care is dismissed, so that in communion with God he guards his heart from the assaults of heedlessness.

On taking the vow of initiation, the novice was invested by his Shaikh with the 'khirqua' or 'muraqqu', a garment made of pieces of cloth stitched together, which in later times superseded the woollen dress worn by the original Sufis. This ceremony marked his admission to the Sufi brotherhood. Occasionally a Sufi might be invested with the 'khirquas' by different Shaikhs as happened to Abu Said Ibn Abi-l-Khair. The veneration which the Shaikhs inspired in their disciples is well-known. Dhu-l-Nun went so far as to say that the true disciple should be more obedient to his master than to God Himself. The rule, method and religious practice inculcated by the Shaikh and followed by the disciple constitute the Path (tariqa). Accordingly, the Path has no fixed and uniform character; its details are determined by the individuality of the teacher. The 'tariqas' of the dervish orders exemplify this divergence. Broadly speaking, the Path corresponds to the *via purgativa* of mediaeval Christian mysticism. Hunger, solitude, and silence are the chief weapons employed in the war against 'the flesh' (nafs). The ascetic and ethical discipline is divided into a progressive series of 'stations' (makamat) which the learner must traverse, making himself perfect in every one of them before advancing to the next. They vary in number and order, but the first place is usually occupied by 'repentance' or 'conversion' (tauba), i.e., turning away from sin towards God. The moral ideal of the Sufis is unselfishness, whether it take the form of renouncing worldly possessions and desires; sincerity in word and deed without regard for the good opinions of others; patience, humility, charity or trust in God and single-hearted devotion to His will. These are the fruits of the Path, but its true end is attained by means of exercises in spiritual meditation and recollection which predispose and prepare the disciple for ecstatic experiences. It may be that he will never reach the end; ecstasy is an incalculable gift of divine grace and cannot be extorted. But the Sufis had a method of their own for producing the state of mind in which 'revelation' of the unseen was most likely to occur. They called it 'dhikr' (recollection), set the highest value upon it and deemed it the corner-stone of practical religion. The simplest form of 'dhikr' is the continual repetition of the name of Allah or of some

short litany, accompanied with intense concentration on the thought of God. Concentration might be assisted by other means, such as flagellation and holding the breath until the sense of personality gradually disappeared in a state of trance.

The first stage of 'dhikr' is to forget the self, and the last stage is the effacement of the thinker in the act of thought, without consciousness of thought, and such absorption in the object of the thought as precludes a return to the subject thereof. Concerted performances of 'dhikr', with music and dancing, were introduced at an early date, and their demoralising effect on neophytes is noted by Hujwir. Such prayer-services, as is well known, play an important part in the ritual of the dervish orders.

A general view of Sufi psychology so far as it bears on the ecstatic life may be obtained from Qushairi or from the more systematic treatment of the subject by Ghazali in the second half of his 'ihya'.

There are four terms which taken together comprise the sensual, spiritual and intellectual nature of man : (1) 'nafs', the appetitive soul; (2) 'ruh', the spirit; (3) 'qulb', the heart; (4) 'aql', the intelligence. The 'nafs', being the seat of the passions is wholly evil; its mortification by means of asceticism is the Sufi's holy war (jihad). The 'qulb' and the 'ruh' (to which Qushairi adds the 'sirr', the inmost ground of the 'qulb') are the proper organs of the mystical life and are not clearly distinguished from one another. 'Qulb' as used by Sufis does not signify the heart of flesh, but 'a transcendental subtlety' or non-material essence whereby the realities of all things are perceived and reflected as in a mirror. Hence the phrase *oculus cordis* has equivalents in Arabic, Persian and Turkish. But the power of the heart to perceive and reflect spiritual realities depends on its purity. It is veiled in greater or lesser degree by sensuous impressions—sin, egoism, book-learning, traditional faith, etc. ; and, in proportion as these veils are removed, its vision of reality becomes more perfect. God alone can purify it, but the need for co-operation with the act of divine grace is asserted by those Sufis who follow the Path and attach particular importance to the methods of recollection (dhikr) and meditation (muraqabat), by which the heart is purged of everything except the thought of God. The stations (maqamat) of the Path, which belong to the mystic's practical religion, are subordinate to the states (ahwal), which belong to his inner life. The term 'state' (hal) denotes a mood of feeling, a spiritual disposition or experience which God causes to pass over the heart; it is not subject to human control, but comes and goes as God wills; usually it is transient, but it may abide permanently. The classification of 'ahwal' in pairs of opposites—e.g., hope and fear, expansion and contraction, presence and absence—answers to psychological facts familiar to students of mysticism. Passively yielding to the divine influences which swing him to and fro in an ascending scale, the Sufi is 'the son of his time', dominated by the 'state' in which he finds himself at the moment, oblivious of the past and without thought of the future. The highest 'states' are elastic, and the term 'hal' is often synonymous with ecstasy, though it had not this special sense originally.

Here we come back to the point at issue between Sufism and Islam. Through ecstasy the Sufi reaches the plane of the Truth (*haqiqat*) where he is one with God. The person thus enraptured (*majdhub*) is saint (*wali*); no further testimony is required since the doctrine that a saint who violates the Law is thereby shown to be an impostor applies only when the ecstatic fit has subsided. And in any case, it was argued, a divinely inspired man must not be judged by appearances; his knowledge of unseen things may justify him in doing what religion and morality condemn: the story of Moses and Khadir illustrates this. Ecstasy not being confined to one sex, the Sufi legend includes a long roll of women, to whom a separate section is sometimes allotted in standard hagiographical works. Muslim saints, their miracles (*karamat*) are described not as wrought by them, but as granted or manifested to them; and while the higher Sufism declares that 'reliance on miracles hinders the elect from penetrating to the inmost shrine of the Truth' and that 'the greatest miracle is the substitution of a good quality for a bad one' the popular 'wali' cannot, even if he wishes, avoid the reputation of being gifted with powers which Muslims call 'extraordinary' or Europeans 'supernatural'. The saints form an invisible hierarchy by which the order of the world is maintained. At their head stands the 'qutb' (axis), under him inferior grades of sanctity—'nuqaba', 'antat', 'abrar' 'abdal', etc.—the numbers of each class increasing in proportion to its distance from the 'qutb'. Probably this idea was taken over by the Sufis from Shiites and Ismailis.

The Sufi theory of ecstasy recognizes two aspects of the experience of oneness with God. These aspects are symbolized by such negative terms as 'fana' (passing away from individuality), 'sukr' (intoxication) with their positive counterparts 'baqa' (abiding in God), 'wajd' (finding God) and 'sahw' (sobriety). In the controversy which arose as to the relative values of the ecstatic state and the subsequent return to consciousness it is easy to discern the same motives as ranged Sufis on opposite sides in regard to the question: Were they antinomian or not? From the standpoint of pure Sufism there is nothing beyond the supreme negation of self, when 'the mortal disappears' and religion no longer exists; but logic compels those Sufis who are more than nominal Muslims to set the life in God against and above the death to self, and to find the highest mystical experience in the state of conscious clairvoyance which succeeds the moment of ecstasy.

The full circle of deification must comprehend both the inward and outward aspects of Deity—the One and the Many, the Truth and Law. It is not enough to escape from all that is creaturely without entering into the eternal life of God the creator as manifested in His works. To abide in God (*baqa*) after having passed away from selfhood (*fana*) is the mark of the Perfect Man, who not only journeys to God, i.e., passes from plurality to unity, but, in and with God, i.e., continuing in the unitive state, he returns with God to the phenomenal world from which he set out, and manifests unity in plurality. In this descent he brings down and displays the Truth to mankind while fulfilling the duties of the religious law.

Such a compromise could not restore the balance effectually. The Sufis might

do homage to the Law, but they ranked it below the Truth and even below the Path. And if the Truth is above the Law, yet not in contradiction with it, the view was plausible that when a man has attained to the Truth, all his acts and words are holy and in harmony with the spirit of Law, however they may seem to clash with its letter. Still a *via media* had to be secured even at the price of illogical concessions on both sides.

In A. D. 1045, Qushairi published his famous 'Epistle on Sufism' (*Risala-fi-ilm-attasawwaf*) recalling to his fellow-mystics how in the past times great Sufis spoke and behaved as good Muslims and set an example of piety which their unworthy successors had almost forgotten. That these protests were not made in vain was due above all to Ghazali. He fused the traditional and the mystical elements into one mass. His work was lasting because it took shape not so much from the force of his mind as under the pressure of a searching spiritual experience: he had worked out and solved the problem in himself before he gave the results in books. Fifty years after the appearance of Qushairi's 'Risala' Ghazali resigned the professorship of Theology and Canon Law which he held in the Nizamiya College at Bagdad and went into retirement as a Sufi. He has told us in pages as fascinating as Newman's 'Apologia' how his studies and meditations at last made his conversion inevitable, through what struggles he shed off philosophy, scholasticism, and legalism and gained the certainty that the central truth of religion lies in the inner life of the soul. By frankly accepting the inner life of a true Sufi Ghazali gave a new meaning to Islam and an assured place within its fold to many earnestly religious men and women whom the formalists would have driven out if they could. Henceforth Islam is in large measure a mystical faith. But Ghazali always remained a Muslim in two essential points: (1) his reverence for the religious law, (2) his view of the nature of God. He shut the door against pantheism by insisting on the dogma that the Divine Being is personal, unique, distinct from all other beings. In so far as the human soul has these attributes, it is capable of knowing God; but it can never be identified with God. Our knowledge of God depends on His will to make Himself known through revelation to prophets and saints whom He created. This left Allah spiritualized and brought near to men's hearts, but still Allah, not the All in One. It may be said that Ghazali belongs to Islam rather than to Islamic mysticism, and that, in so far as he is not a pantheist, he is not a typical Sufi. This seems true. On the other hand while the Sufis who are pantheists often use the language implying belief in a personal God, such belief is by no means inconsistent with the full theory of 'fana' or at least may be combined with it.

KAMAL GUPTA

(From an old issue of *Srinwantu*)

SOME SCIENTIFIC PEEPS INTO THE PAST

Continental Drift

ABOUT 245 million years ago, the earth's geography was very different from the present. There was a single supercontinent, Pangea, surrounded on all sides by water. The landmasses that today comprise North and South America were jammed against Europe. Asia was to the north of Europe; Africa to the south. India, at that time, did not form a part of Asia. It was sandwiched between Africa in the west, Australia in the east and Antarctica in the south. China was a gigantic island in mid-Pacific.

About 110 million years ago, during the cretaceous period of earth's geological evolution, the supercontinent had already broken up. North of the equator, west to east, lay the continents of North America, Europe and Asia. South of the equator, the landmasses of South America, Africa and India had separated from one another but their southern tips were still connected to Antarctica. Australia, however, had already broken off.

Thirty-six million years ago, during the oligocene epoch, all the continents had gone adrift and India was a continent in its own right. It had moved northwards, up to the equator and Asia was moving southwards and was at approximately the same latitude as Europe. It was only during the pleistocene period, from 1.7 million to 20,000 years ago, that the continents reshaped and relocated themselves approximately to the present positions.

Age of Earth, Life, Man

Most of these dramatic, if leisurely, land movements occurred long before man made his appearance on this planet. He arrived somewhat less than 3 million years ago while earth had been in existence for some 4,600 million years. The oldest fossils known to us, belonging to microbes, are believed to be 3,200 million years old. Through these years, across the continents, various species had sprung from one another, multiplied and divided, fought against unfriendly environments, either dying in consequence or mutating, adapting and surviving.

Origin of Earthly Life-forms

Two puzzling facets of living organisms on this planet have got two molecular biologists, Nobel Laureate Francis Crick and Leslie Ogden of the Salk Institute in California, wondering whether earthly life-forms may not have originated in some other part of the universe before evolving here.

Living organisms depend on a rare element, molybdenum, for some of their essential functions. The scientists argue that this dependence would not have arisen except on a planet where molybdenum happened to be more common than on earth.

The second point is that all forms of life on earth have a single genetic code inscribed on a molecule known as DNA. Had life originated here it would have sprung in different places at different times and developed different genetic codes. Most scientists agree that our extraterrestrial origin is a distinct possibility.

Age of Fossils

Paleontologists are now using genetic know-how in determining the epoch in which certain fossils lived. They use the process of amino-acid dating which is proving more accurate than the radio carbon process previously in use. Amino acids are the building blocks of all life forms. They exist in two forms, the "left-handed" DNA and the "right-handed" RNA, each a mirror image of the other. They exist in equal quantities in living bodies. After death the "left-hand" variety changes slowly but at a fixed rate into the "right-hand" type. From the quantity of "right-hand" amino acid found in a dead organism it is possible to determine how long ago it lived.

New Outlook on Dinosaurs

Dinosaurs, which roamed the earth from 225 to 65 million years ago, were till recently thought to be huge, sluggish, solitary, cold-blooded creatures—ancestors of today's lizards and crocodiles—which spent most of their time in tropical swamps and lakes. Fresh information extracted from fossils demonstrates most of these beliefs to be false. Most of them were huge but hardly lonely—they travelled mostly in herds and could develop considerable speed in their movements—and, unlike present-day lizards and crocodiles, they were warm-blooded. Most surprising of all, their descendants are believed to be birds.

Racial Differences

Our ancestors' anxiety to fit in with their environment has been responsible for the numerous racial differences present in the man of our time. Genetics, however, has proved that there is no truth in the concept of an overall racial superiority. The racial differences are superficial. "Differences in only a few genes can be enough to distinguish one species from another," says Nigel Calder, a British researcher. "Yet a brother and a sister will have many thousands of unlike genes. In that sense, a brother and a sister differ genetically more than the human species differs from chimpanzees."

(Extracts from an article by Luis S.R. Vas in the *Times of India*, May 8, 1977, p. 11, to which our acknowledgments are due.)

EUROPE 1974

TRAVELOGUE

(44)

"ITALY is Nature's darling," rhapsodised many a great person and even ordinary tourists who had eyes to see. There were others who came out with their taunts and vaunts. Wrote Coleridge:

O what scores are sick of home
Agog for Paris and for Rome!
Nay, ever contented to abide
You should prefer your own fire-side.

Lord Burleigh's opinion is: "Suffer not thy sons to cross the Alps." Macaulay asks: "The great question about going 'Abroad' is, is it worth the trouble getting there?" Dr. Johnson put a stop to all these vaunts and taunts by declaring categorically: "One who has not been to Italy suffers a sense of inferiority." And Seneca had something very nice to say about travel in general: "The world belongs to him who has seen it. But he that would make his travel delightful must first make himself delightful." Called the peninsula of peninsulas, Italy's shores and lakes and hills are a paradise for any tourist. The climate is delightfully Mediterranean in the south, and bracingly temperate in the north.

While touring Europe far and wide I had the impression that the Teutonic races looked down upon Italy as a queer place and upon the Italians as a whimsical people. In what way Italy could be scoffed at I do not know. I suppose like any other country or people Italy and the Italians have their good and bad points. This reminded me of a comment by Sir Joshua Reynolds. He said he had once strolled in the Vatican Art Gallery for hours and so did a group of students. These young men all the time took down notes from their Antiquary and never at any point looked at the pictures. Those who disparage Italy must have something in them akin to the nature of the students. People unaccustomed to Italian ways may very well be utterly perplexed when the taxi-driver, or the man at the Cambio, fails to make them understand the value of a soldo or a dinar or a lira. He could possibly throw up his hands in the air and cry, "O mamma mia" and you in a "momentino" get "furioso" and all your love for Italy vanishes.

Even if we leave out Ancient Rome, Italy's achievement seems to be inferior in no way to those of the other nations of Europe. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and the subsequent years occurrences and facts and figures draw our admiration. Chaucer visited Italy. Spenser, it seems, was very much influenced by Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* when writing his *Faerie Queene*. Shakespeare was simply

full of Italy. He has mentioned Venice fifty-two times alone, not to speak of other Italian cities. Gibbon admired Italy, and its achievements overwhelmed him. Goethe, described as the most oppressively handsome man, was very much in love with Italy. One of his most famous books is *Roman Elegies*. Shelley, Byron, Keats, the Brownings, when they were forced to flee their country, all took shelter in Italy. Queen Christina abdicated to be able to live in sunny Italy. It is Italy that has given to the world Leonardo, Michelangelo, Dante and other celebrities. Amerigo Vespucci, after whom the New World is named, was an Italian.

As for places, Bologna used to be the greatest University for Law, and students flocked to it from all parts of Europe. At Bologna we hear for the first time of a lady lecturer. Novella Calderini lectured in Law from behind the screen lest the men should become distracted by her beauty. Padua was the centre of Medical Studies and scientific researches. Galileo taught there for eighteen years and he had two thousand students attending his lectures. Here he made his first telescope and, finally with a lens magnifying thirty-two times, enabled man's eyes to glimpse for the first time the Milky Way and the moons of Jupiter.

The great aristocratic families of Italy protected and patronised art and learning. Cosimo II, Grand Duke of Tuscany, protected Galileo from the persecution of the Roman Catholic Church, and appointed Galileo "Chief Mathematician to the Grand Duke". In gratitude Galileo named the four moons of Jupiter *Stellae Medicae* after the family name of Cosimo which was Medici. The barometer too was invented in Florence.

In more recent years there was Alessandro Volta who discovered electricity. Marconi discovered wireless telegraphy. In Cremona one can still see the workshop of Antonio Stradivarius as we can still see the workshop of Cellini at Florence. There never was a master who could make a violin better than he and no one since has surpassed him. Even now the great Maestro's formula is followed. He had, it seems, made one thousand one hundred and sixteen violins, violas and violincellos. Today there are some six hundred Stradivariuses in Europe each one bearing a name given by the great master. There is one at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and its name is Messiah. Recently a Stradivarius was sold in London for 24,000 pounds sterling.

Amazing still is the story of Giovanni Belzoni who went out to have an adventure among the tombs and Pyramids of Egypt. It was he who lifted out of sand the colossal granite bust of Rameses II that we see at the British Museum. He was the first man to excavate the temple of Abu Simbel. Abu Simbel is now a world-known name and everyone remembers how it was dismembered piece by piece and reconstructed high above the rocks so that the water's high level caused by the Aswan Dam could not harm the temple. Belzoni, an Italian, was the first European to penetrate into the funerary chamber of the Great Pyramid. This is just a short list of Italy's achievements.

And if you like sports, Lecca is the place in Italy where the International Motor Races are held. Rome was the host to a recent Olympiad. If you like good food, Ita-

lian cuisine is inferior to none. What about risotto milanese (a kind of *Italian Biriani*) and cioccolata, and, of course, ice-cream which is the world's best? Gorgonzola cheese is world-famous though not liked by all.

If people could crack jokes on the Italians, they too have some of their own. They would advise, "If you go to England act and behave in a way diametrically opposite to what you would do at home, you will never be wrong." Sentries in London amuse Italians. The latter laugh and say, "They would march even when no one is looking; that could never happen in Italy."

(To be continued)

CHAUNDONA & SANAT K. BANERJI

BURNT COTTON WOOL

AN OLD HOUSEHOLD REMEDY

SINCE my early childhood I have known that burnt cotton wool is an excellent remedy for all kinds of cuts, bruises and wounds.

My brothers and myself fell down any number of times when playing, and hurt ourselves. But as soon as my mamma knew of our accidents she would come to us quickly with a wad of cotton wool, a match box and a strip of white cloth for a bandage.

She made us sit on a stool or chair and told us to stop groaning or crying. Then she took a lump of cotton wool and set it on fire with the help of a match-stick. While it was burning, she wiped with some dry cotton wool the injured spots. Water was not used unless absolutely necessary, in which case the wound was allowed to get quite dry afterwards.

Once the cotton wool was completely burnt she pressed it gently over the wound or bruise. All bleeding and pain completely stopped and the healing seemed to commence.

In those days we did not have the bandages we have today. So a clean white cloth was torn and a bandage made. This was gently wrapped over the wound and we were told to forget all about it. A few hours later it was removed and to our delight we found that the wound had almost healed. If not, then a little more of burnt cotton wool was applied.

I have tried this remedy on many friends, even in our Ashram, and several animals too, in Bombay, without a single failure.

If the wound is a serious one, and the cotton wool needs to be kept in place, a few pieces of adhesive plaster can be put over the burnt cotton wool.

Many years ago when I was in Bombay I had a tumour in the middle of my chest. It became very painful. My family doctor advised me to go to the Tata Memorial Hospital and get it examined. But I refused to go and sent a telegram to the Mother instead. She must have given me the inner strength to operate upon it myself when I was alone. A deep and nasty wound was the result. But I covered it up with burnt cotton wool. Within a few days I was all right.

This remedy was so well known in my time that I did not need to say anything about it to people. But I have found that the younger generation has no idea of it. That is why I am writing this article. May it help all to recover from injuries without pain or any other discomfort. But one must always remember to avoid using water to clean the wound beforehand. If water is indispensable, then let the wound dry thoroughly before the burnt cotton wool is applied.

LALITA

WOODEN BABES OF THE WORTHLESS KING

A FOLKTALE FROM PONDICHERRY

SEVERAL centuries ago lived a king. He was very kind to his subjects and everyone in his kingdom loved him. He showed mercy even to his enemies and they turned out to be good and loyal friends. During his reign hunger and poverty were unknown in his kingdom. Everyone in the land was happy. But what about the king?

He was married to a young and beautiful princess. Half-a-dozen years whizzed past. But the queen proved barren. At the request of his faithful subjects and other well-wishers he married again—this time his wife's sister. She too bore him no children. So in the happy land the only unhappy man was the king.

He was so worried that he sometimes blabbered in his sleep, "Will my kingdom go without an heir? Am I the end of my dynasty?"

His subjects insisted that the king should marry once again and try his luck with a third wife. But the king had his own second thoughts. "Who can guarantee that the third wife will be a fertile woman?"

Years passed. The king lost hope. Sad and disappointed he resorted to hunting wild animals in the deep forest. The adventurous game temporarily made him forget his worries.

One evening when he was returning from his hunting expedition, he happened to pass through a hamlet. All on a sudden an agonizing cry attracted his attention.

He saw a young girl holding her abdomen with both her hands and shouting at the top of her voice: "You rogue! You thug! How dare you hit my belly that has a fertile womb good enough to bear two brave sons and a beautiful daughter? Am I the one to be played pranks with? Get lost, get lost, lest I wring your neck."

The urchin who playfully catapulted a small stone took to his heels, throwing his catapult in the air.

The king looked at the angry young girl. She was beautiful even in her anger and could not be above 16.

He had not a wink of sleep that night. The words of the angry young girl "...a fertile womb good enough to bear two brave sons and a beautiful daughter" rang in his ears without a stop. He patiently awaited the arrival of dawn.

He sent his envoys to the hamlet to find out who that girl was and to enquire into her family background.

On an auspicious day of the same week, the king went into the hamlet and stood before the hut of a cobbler. He was flanked by several maid-servants who carried big plates full of tasty fruits, sarees made of costly silk and a heap of priceless stones.

The cobbler was taken aback. He threw himself at the feet of the king and refused to get up till the king revealed the cause of his presence.

The king smiled and said: "I would like to marry your only daughter. Will you please say 'Yes'?"

The cobbler got up. Folding his hands against his fluttering heart, he blinked at the king. He pinched his arm to ascertain whether it was a vision or a waking dream. He wanted to speak but his throat muscles refused to obey him.

The cobbler's daughter became the third queen.

As she had prophesied, she proved to be fertile. Soon she became pregnant.

The king jumped for joy. His subjects were very happy. But his first two wives became jealous of the pregnant queen. The situation instilled fear into their hearts and they adopted cunning devices to kill the child in the womb. But all their efforts by luck or fluke failed in one way or another.

Months rolled on quickly. The pregnant queen was confined to a room in the palace with an efficient midwife. As predicted by the palace-physician and astrologer, she gave birth to triplets—two sons and a daughter. But before the mother could hear the cry of the new borns or know their sex, the midwife clamped a bunch of green herbs on her face and the tired and exhausted young mother fell unconscious.

The midwife as advised earlier opened a secret door and allowed the two barren queens to enter stealthily. They gave a little bag of gold coins and three baby dolls made of wood to the midwife. In turn they took away the live babes into the forest and left them to the mercy of wild animals.

When the young mother came back to her senses the midwife showed her the wooden babes and said amidst crocodile tears: "What a curse! Look at these three wooden babes you gave birth to a few minutes ago. How eager is the king in his chamber awaiting good news! Oh, what shall we say to him?"

The young queen was shocked to see the wooden babes and could not believe her eyes.

Soon the king heard the bad news. There was no limit to his sorrow. He consulted the court astrologer. A casket full of precious stones which he had got as a bribe from the conspiring queens made him speak thus: "Your Majesty! Some curse must have fallen on the young mother. It is better to make her a captive in the dungeon for some time to come. And doubtless the wooden babes portend disaster to our land."

The foolish king obeyed the words of the astrologer. He again became gloomy and sad. To forget his worries he took to hunting once more.

In the forest lived a good witch. She came out of her cave once in a while to gather roots and fruits. She happened to see the three deserted babes. She took pity on them and carried them into her cave.

With the help of her magic mirror that showed the past and future of every being in this world, she was able to find out their birth and parentage and the reason for their presence in the forest. She wanted to inform the king but something forbade her to do so and she said to herself: "Let the time ripen. If I send them to the king now, the barren she-wolves in human shape will butcher these innocent babes."

From that day the witch became their guardian. She showered motherly love upon them and taught them to speak. Five years ran past and they grew up to be fine children.

Their mother was still in the dungeon. No one had mercy on her and the king almost forgot her.

One afternoon, the king after a few hours of chasing a deer became very tired. He came to a stream at the centre of the forest to quench his thirst and take rest on its bank.

He was surprised to see three children playing on the bank of the stream, that too in the loneliness of the dangerous forest. He walked closer to them. They were two handsome boys and a beautiful girl. What astounded him was that they resembled one another.

These charming children brought a smile to the king's face. He smiled for the first time after many years.

But the moment the children sighted a stranger in the forest they took to their heels. They told their witch-mother the presence of a stranger near the stream.

The witch looked into the magic mirror. It showed the gullible foolish king wandering in the forest.

"Oh! He is the king of this land. Don't be frightened of him. He is also a human being like you and me," said the witch to the children who had seen none but the witch-mother.

On the morning of the next day, the witch made three wooden baby dolls and gave one to each child and instructed them thus: "Children dear! The king will come to see you all again today. Go and play near the stream and when you see the king coming near you, place these wooden babes on your laps and sing:

'Oh, wooden babes of the worthless king!
Awake! Awake!'

And when the king asks you any question, leave these wooden babes with him and come back running to me. He will certainly follow you."

The witch's anticipation proved correct. The king came to the bank with anxiety. His face brightened up when he saw the children. He stood beneath a bushy tree and watched them play.

The children too saw the king. They placed the wooden babes on their laps and sang:

"Oh, wooden babes of the worthless king!
Awake! Awake!"

The king was shocked. He couldn't believe his ears. "What do they mean? What do they mean by 'wooden babes of the worthless king'?" He tore at his hair and went nearer the children.

The chubby cheeks, the innocent faces and the way the children lisped the two-lined song brought a cheer to his face. He smiled at them. They too responded.

"My dear children! Where are your parents? Why are you playing in this dangerous forest?" the king asked.

But before he could close his lips, the three children started running towards the cave, leaving the three wooden babes behind.

"Stop! I'll not harm you. Do not run. Here are your dolls." The king shouted at the top of his voice. But the children took no heed of what he said.

The king collected the three wooden babes and swiftly followed them. When he reached the cave, the witch stood at the entrance. "Come in, your Majesty. I'm honoured by your visit to this cave," welcomed the witch.

"Who are you? What are you doing in this lonely forest?" asked the king.

"I am a witch, your Majesty, driven out of the land by your ministers many years ago. It was because I prophesied that the royal wives of the king would be barren."

"True. You prophesied right. Tell me who these charming children are."

"I found them as sucklings in this forest, five years ago."

"I see! But these innocent little creatures sang a beautiful song:

'Oh, wooden babes of the worthless king!
Awake! Awake!'

You must have taught them the song. What does it mean?"

"Your Majesty! It refers to a worthless king who was foolish enough to believe that his wife gave birth to wooden babes. He was so stupid that he didn't take any step to probe into the heart of the matter. Above all he threw his dear wife into a dungeon."

"This sounds like my story," the king ruminated. "It's my third wife who gave birth to three wooden babes. She is now in the dungeon. But you being a witch should be able to tell me the truth. Please do, I beg you."

"Certainly. I was waiting for the time to ripen. Your barren wives out of jealousy have cheated you, bribing the midwife first and later your court-astrologer. They threw the three new-born babes into the forest."

"Are these my children?" the king asked. Tear-drops trickled down his cheeks.

"Do you doubt it?"

"But how am I to believe you?"

The witch laughed like a volcano in action. "Take these children with you as royal guests to your palace. Arrange for a royal banquet. On a raised platform make the triplets sit. Call in your royal wives, including the one in the dungeon and ask them one by one to serve food to these children. Watch what happens. Use your brain. And you will know to whom these children were born," advised the good witch.

"Let me try. I'll arrange for the royal banquet and come here to invite you all." So saying he left the cave.

On the morning of the next day, the king came again in a palanquin and took with him the children and the good witch to his palace.

In the enormous hall of the palace, there was a big gathering. And when the king entered with the three children his two queens were taken aback. And when he made the children sit on the raised platform, specially made for them, their suspicions rose higher.

They consulted the court-astrologer standing near them. He told them in a hushed voice: "They must be the children of the king's third wife, whom you threw into the forest five years ago. I don't know what the king has in mind now."

Everyone took their respective seats and the servants came with bamboo baskets full of sweets and other eatables.

"To these children first," commanded the king. "Let my two queens serve them food."

The two barren queens, who didn't know what motherly affection or love was, went near the children, stared at them and showed hard faces. The very sight of the children irritated them. They served the sweets in an insulting way as if they disliked the children eating them.

The king was watching every movement of the two queens.

The frightened children kept mum. They refused to touch the sweets.

"My dear children, eat them. They are specially made for you," cajoled the king.

But the children looked down and shook their heads.

The king ordered his chief Minister to go to the dungeon and fetch the imprisoned mother who was supposed to have given birth to the wooden babes.

The command was quickly obeyed.

A lean and haggard-looking young woman appeared.

The astrologer and the two royal queens expected some calamity to take place. "Our lives are not safe," they thought in unison.

The shrivelled figure of the third wife brought tears to the eyes of the king. He spoke soft words to her in front of everyone. He then showed her the three children seated on the platform and asked her to serve them food.

She looked at them. The children too looked at her. The eyes of the mother brightened as if she was seeing a wonder for the first time. The faces of the children gleamed with joy.

She came nearer the children. They found love and affection in her eyes. And they smiled.

The mother took the sweets placed on the leaves and fed them into their mouths. And while the children opened their mouths to eat, a strange thing happened as the witch had predicted.

Milk from her breasts started jetting out towards the children and they started

drinking it. It continued to flow and they drank to their stomach's fill.

"Do you understand what this sight means?" the witch asked the king.

"Yes. It took five years for me to know the fact," said he, raising his eyebrows higher and higher at the wonderful sight he saw.

Then fury rose in him and he shouted: "These two barren queens shall remain in the dungeon for the rest of their lives for their evil deed. Chop off the hands of the midwife and cut out the tongue of the astrologer for cheating me."

A few seconds later, his anger cooling down, he affectionately told his third wife, now the sole queen:

"At last the wooden babes of the worthless king awoke."

Collected and translated by P. RAJA

SACRED BULL

AN instructive illustration of the way the scientific process really works was provided in a recent *Scientifically Speaking* programme on BBC Radio 4 (4 April 1979). Professor Subramaniam Chandrasekhar, now at Chicago and the Grand Old Man of astrophysics, reminisced about his relationship with the astronomical establishment of the 1930's in Cambridge and particularly with Sir Arthur Eddington, then the leading authority on the structure of stars. In the early 30's Chandrasekhar had developed theories which predicted that at a certain stage in a star's evolution, dependent on its parameters of mass, it was possible for its density to go to infinite values. This idea, which is a significant factor in recent advances in theoretical astrophysics—including "black hole" theory—was repugnant to Eddington, who thought it "so utterly wrong that he tried to modify the physics". He fully realised that "if you accepted the maximum mass for the white dwarfs, a star must become a black hole, but then he added, 'But this is a *reductio ad absurdum*... and there ought to be a law of nature against that.' " Chandrasekhar went on: "... for many years following that, the whole work was under a cloud and people never believed in it because of Eddington's authority," and he summed up the episode as "a shattering experience for me personally".

He gave an illuminating example of the establishment at work: at a meeting of the International Astronomical Union in Paris in 1934 "Eddington was president of the section on the constitution of stars. In his report [he] criticised my work and said it was all wrong... I sent a note to Russell [Secretary of the IAU] saying that I would like to reply, and he sent a note back saying that 'I prefer that you don't'... and so I didn't even have the chance to respond. Eddington's authority was so high that the influence of that work was largely lost to astronomy." But for Eddington's opposition, Chandrasekhar concluded, "a large amount of work which was done in the 60's could have been done in the 30's."

The interviewer, John Maddox, summed up: "One of the dangers in a pre-eminent centre of scholarship such as Cambridge in the 1930's is that the great men collectively reinforce each other in a snobbish disdain for innovations they haven't brought about themselves."

Plus ça change... ?

BRIAN MOORE

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