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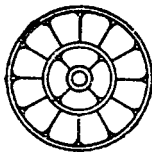
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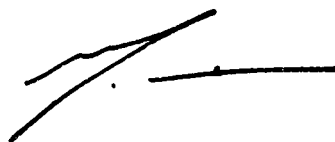
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth.
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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WORDS OF THE MOTHER

THERE is a difference between the will and this feeling of tension, effort, of counting only on oneself, having recourse to oneself alone which personal effort means; this kind of tension, of something very acute and at times very painful; you count only on yourself and you have the feeling that if you do not make an effort every minute, all will be lost. That is personal effort.

But the will is something altogether different. It is the capacity to concentrate on everything one does, do it as best one can and not stop doing it unless one receives a very precise intimation that it is finished. It is difficult to explain it to you. But suppose, for example, through a concurrence of circumstances, a work comes into your hands. Take an artist who has in one way or another got an inspiration and resolved to paint a picture. He knows very well that if he has no inspiration and is not sustained by forces other than his own, he will do nothing much. It will look more like a daub than a painting. He knows this. But it has been settled, the painting is to be done; there may be many reasons for that, but the painting has to be done. Then if he had the passive attitude, well, he would place his palette, his colours, his brushes, his canvas and then sit down in front of it and say to the Divine: "Now you are going to paint." But the Divine does not do things this way. The painter himself must take up everything and arrange everything, concentrate on his subject, find the forms, the colours that will express it and put his whole will for a more and more perfect execution. His will must be there all the time. But he has to keep the sense that he must be open to the inspiration, he will not forget that in spite of all his knowledge of the technique, in spite of the care he takes to arrange, organise and prepare his colours, his forms, his design, in spite of all that, if he has no inspiration, it will be one picture among a million others and it will not be very interesting. He does not forget. He attempts, he tries to see, to feel what he wants his painting to express and in what way it should be expressed. He has his colours, he has his brushes, he has his model, he has made his sketch which he will enlarge and make into a picture, he calls his inspiration. There are even some who manage to have a clear, precise vision of what is to be done. But then, day after day, hour after hour, they have this will to work, to study, to do with care all that must be done until they reproduce as perfectly as they can the first inspiration.... That person has worked for the Divine, in communion with Him, but not in a passive way, not with a passive surrender; it is with an active surrender, a dynamic will. The result generally is something very good. Well, the example of the painter is interesting, because a painter who is truly an artist is able to see what he is going to do, he is able to connect himself to the divine Power that is beyond all expression and inspires all expression. For the poet, the writer, it is the same thing and for all people who do something, it is the same.

If you tried that for your lessons, don't you think it would succeed?

Two days later the Mother took up the subject again in the "Friday Class"

If you said to yourself, my children, "We want to be as perfect instruments as possible to express the divine Will in the world", then for this instrument to be perfect, it must be cultivated, educated, trained. It must not be left like a shapeless piece of stone. When you want to build with a stone you chisel it; when you want to make a formless block into a beautiful diamond, you chisel it. Well, it is the same thing. When with your brain and body you want to make a beautiful instrument for the Divine, you must cultivate it, sharpen it, refine it, complete what is missing, perfect what is there.

For example, you go to your class. If you are not in a very good mood, you say, "Oh, how tedious it is going to be!" Supposing it is a professor who does not know how to entertain you (one can be a very good professor without knowing how to amuse you, for it is not always easy. . there are days when one does not like to be amusing), one would like to be somewhere else rather than at the school. Still, you go to your class, in that way, you go because you have to go, for if you go about according to your whims, you will never have control over yourself, it will be your whims that will control you, it won't be you who will control yourself. You go to your class. But then, on your way there, instead of saying, "Oh, how bored I am going to be, oh, dear! it is not going to be at all interesting", etc., if you say, "There is not a minute in life, there is not a circumstance in one's existence that cannot bring an opportunity for progress; what then is the progress that I am going to make today?... I offer all my little person to the Divine. I want it to be a good instrument for Him to express Himself, that I may be ready one day for the transformation. What am I going to do today? I am going to that class, it is a subject that does not enthuse me; but if I do not know how to take interest in this work, it is perhaps because there is something lacking in me, because somewhere in my brain some cells are missing. But then, if that is so, I am going to try to find out; I am going to listen properly, concentrate properly and above all drive away from my mind this kind of frivolity, this outward levity which makes me feel bored when there's something I do not grasp. Why do I get bored?... Because I do not progress." When one does not progress, one gets bored—old and young, everybody—because we are here upon earth to progress. If we do not progress every minute, well, it is indeed boring, monotonous; it is not always pleasant, it is far from being fine. "So I am going to find out today what progress I can make in this class; there is something I do not know and which I can learn."

If you want to learn, you can learn at every moment. As for me I have learnt even by listening to little children's chatter. Every moment something may happen; someone may say a word to you, even an idiot may say a word that opens you to something enabling you to make some progress. And then, if you

knew, how life becomes interesting! You can no longer get bored, that is gone, everything is interesting, everything is wonderful—because every minute you can learn, at each step make progress. For example, when you are in the street, instead of being simply there and not knowing what you are doing, if you look around, if you observe... I remember having been thus obliged to be in the street on a shopping errand or going to see someone or to purchase something, that's not important; indeed, it is not always pleasant to be in the street, but if you begin to observe and to see how this person walks, how that one moves, how this light plays upon that object, how this little bit of a tree there suddenly makes the landscape pretty, how hundreds of things shine... then every minute you can learn something. Not only can you learn, but I remember to have once had—I was just walking in the street—to have had a kind of illumination, because there was a woman walking in front of me and truly she knew how to walk. How lovely it was! Her movement was magnificent! I saw that and suddenly I saw the whole origin of Greek culture, how all these forms descend towards the world to express Beauty—simply because here was a woman who knew how to walk! You understand, this is how all things become interesting. And so, instead of going to the class and doing stupid things there (I hope none of you do that, I am sure all who come here to my class will never go and do stupid things at school, that it is exceptions that prove the rule; however, I know that unfortunately too many go there and do all the idiotic things one might invent), so, instead of that, if you could go to the class in order to make progress, every day a new little progress—even if it be the understanding why your professor bores you—it would be wonderful, for all of a sudden he will no longer be boring to you, all of a sudden you will discover that he is very interesting! It is like that. If you look at life in this way, life becomes something wonderful. That is the only way of making it interesting, because life upon earth is made to be a field for progress and if we progress to the maximum we draw the maximum benefit from our life upon earth. And then one feels happy. When one does the best one can, one is happy.

(Collected Works of the Mother, Vol 6, pp 47-51)

A NOTE BY SRI AUROBINDO TO NIRODBARAN

.... I AM inserting an attempt to put in English verse Jyoti's sonnet translated by Nolini. Not successful, but I tried it all the same. One has to compress too much and change too much to get it into the form of the English sonnet.

অসীম সৌন্দর্যময়ী অনাদি প্রতিভা
কালের ললাট-পটে আলিঙ্গন আঁকি'
তাবি মাঝে বেখে দিল অগোচর বিভা—
প্রথম লিপিকা-বক্ষে সৃজনের সাকী।
নিমেষ-বিদ্যুৎ সেথা মগ্ন নিশা হ'তে
মাধুরী-অঞ্জন-সিক্ত নিবালা নয়নে
হেবিল—তবণী এক বহিঃভবা স্রোতে
সুদূর-প্রভাতে যায় তপন-অয়নে।
চমকিল উষালোক, ছিন্ন হলো নিশা।
কোথা হ'তে নামে তবু প্রলয়ের মেঘ,
তমসায় মুছে গেল আলোকের দিশা।...
সহসা শিহবে উর্ধ্বে যাত্রাব আবেগ
বক্তৃস্নাত পুষ্প-যানে। সেইক্ষণে 'হাসি'
পূর্ণিমা ধবিল কবে সূর্য-ঝরা বাঁশী।

২-১-৩৭

A Beauty infinite, an unborn Power
On Time's vast forehead drew her mystic line;
An unseen Radiance filled the primal hour,—
First script, creation's early rapture-wine.
Lightning in Night the eternal moment wrote.
Her lone eyes bathed in hue of loveliness
Saw on a flaming stream a single boat
Follow through dawn some great Sun's orbit-trace.
The Dawn-world flashed—torn was the heart of Night:
Why came then Dawn here with her cloud and surge?
Darkness erased the hint of newborn Light,—
Till suddenly quivered above the pilgrim-urge,
Its flower-car washed blood-red, Smile of the Moon,
And, held in her hand, a Sun-flute's golden croon!

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

You have asked how lines 5 and 6 are to be interpreted in the following passage in *Savitri*, pp. 34-35:

This too the supreme Diplomat can use,
He makes our fall a means for greater rise.
For into the ignorant nature's gusty field,
Into the half-ordered chaos of mortal life
The formless Power, the Self of eternal light
Follow in the shadow of the spirit's descent;
The twin duality for ever one
Chooses its home mid the tumults of the sense.

You have quoted Madhav Pandit's *Readings in "Savitri"* as saying:

"In the very process of its descent from the heights of the Spirit, the Divine has followed and involved itself in the movement in two poises that are necessary for working out its intention in Creation.... This is the dual status taken by the Divine in the Creation—Soul and Nature, Purusha and Prakriti—in order to build it in the full figure of the Truth to be manifested."

Here it would appear that "the spirit's descent" is interpreted as the descent of the Spirit during the process of creation by the Divine and the "twin duality" to mean the dual status of Soul and Nature. You comment: "I beg to submit that in view of the lines that precede and follow the passage quoted, 'the spirit's descent' would mean the pulling down of the *individual* soul by the 'subconscious cords' or the 'dull gravitation' and the formless Power following in the shadow is the supreme Diplomat coming down in the wake of our fall—the *individual fall*—to convert it into a means for 'greater rise'. In other words, the whole passage relates to the happenings in an *individual mould* and cannot therefore refer, just in a couple of lines in the middle, to the *universal mould* or Creation. It is significant that Shri Pandit also, except for the lines under consideration, interprets the whole passage as relating to *Man* and not to creation in general. I shall be highly obliged if you will send your illumined comments to clarify the whole thing."

In my opinion, the passage refers only to the individual's rise and relapse in the course of his spiritual experience. The "descent" here is the opposite of the individual being's ascent, spoken of earlier, to the "heights" of "heavenlier states". And the "twin duality for ever one" does not refer to Purusha and Prakriti in the usual sense but to

The formless Power, the Self of eternal Light.

A reference to the original creation, the primal descent into the Inconscient, would be an anomaly, a sudden unprepared intrusion in this context. Also, the mention of “the twin duality” choosing its home amid “the tumults of the sense” would be pointless because “the tumults of the sense” are surely part of Prakriti. We can’t speak of Purusha and Prakriti descending into Prakriti itself! Again, the mention of “He” in the line just following our passage—

He comes unseen into our darker parts—

would be impossible to account for. In the ordinary Purusha-Prakriti universe of discourse it would signify Purusha alone. Where then would Prakriti be gone? Here “He” covers “the twin duality” and harks back to “the supreme Diplomat”. It is the supreme Diplomat who is “the twin duality”. We may equate this duality to Ishwara identical with his own Shakti. (1954)

*

As far as I know, it is indeed “a new feature”—the opening of the chakras by the Force from above, as in our Yoga, instead of the Kundalini rising from below to open them. The divine “overhead” Force will do the opening job far more safely, far more fruitfully. But I may add that quite an amount of creative spiritual development can take place—a good deal of psychicisation and spiritualisation can occur—without the chakras being felt opening in any concrete sense.

I remember two secrets of success in Yoga mentioned by Sri Aurobindo. One is to regard Yoga not as a part of life but as the whole of life. I understand this to mean that we do not just set aside certain hours of meditation or japa or whatever else but practise at all times remembering the Mother and offering our activities to her and preserving under all circumstances an inner poise, a sense of tranquil wideness in our being. The second secret is to surrender oneself to Her and appeal to Her to take up our defects and by her Force free us progressively from them. The core of this movement is devotion and love on our part, invoking and drawing her love and grace, instead of relying on our own supposed strength, our capacity of tapasya, of intense concentrated effort. But, as you rightly say, we must not believe that no effort is called for on our side. Some aspiration and rejection by us has to accompany our surrender. What is undesirable is a violent fight with our weaknesses. A patient persuasion of them to disappear is required, along with a quietly persistent cry from the heart to the Mother to intervene with her light and chase them away. If things do not happen soon, we must avoid depression like poison. The Mother is well aware that human weaknesses don’t vanish like morning mist. She expects us to keep confident and cheerful—confident because her power is limitless, and cheerful

because she is always with us.

As for the “overhead” force, we can’t say that it was never at work before in the history of Yoga. But we can say that there was no fully realised embodiment of it to channel it to us before the Avatarhood of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

(1993)

*

The “chronological puzzle” about the date of the great Shankara, over which many scholars have pondered, can be much simplified if we approach it through a less complicated time-problem: the date of Kumarila Bhatta, a notable contemporary of Shankara’s, with whom that eminent Adwaitin had a famous debate.

Kumarila Bhatta is known to have quoted in his *Tantravartika* a verse from Kalidasa’s *Abhijñāna Śakuntalam*: *Satām hi sandehapadeṣu vastuṣu pramāṇaṁ antaḥkaraṇapravṛttayah*. So he must be later than the great playwright whose time is invariably taken to be associated with a King Vikramaditya. Indian tradition puts him in the reign of the legendary founder of the Vikram Samvat of 57 B.C. Modern scholars mostly connect him with the third of the Imperial Guptas—Chandragupta II, titled Vikramaditya, who is generally dated to 380-414 A.D. R. C. Majumdar admits that there is no decisive reason why Kalidasa should be at the end of the fourth century A.D. rather than in the first century B.C. Thus we get a fixed span of about four hundred years within which or after which to place Kumarila Bhatta and hence Shankara.

On this view the frequent contention that Shankara who is said to have brought about the decline of Buddhism could not have come after the reign of Chandragupta II which historians acclaim as “the Golden Age of Hinduism” cannot stand. Besides, the Imperial Guptas, true to the typically tolerant spirit of the Hindu religion, are known to have partly patronised both the Buddhist and the Jain faiths. Perhaps we should give up the role popularly ascribed to Shankara as one who effectively uprooted Buddhism from India. It seems more true to hold that the tide of Muslim invasion submerged Buddhism. Such an opinion would untie our hands a good deal and what would be ruled out is the earliest date mentioned by some traditional-minded Indian scholars—509-508 B.C.—and just as radically any period preceding 367-368 B.C., the date given in *A Short History of Kashmir* by P. Gwashalal who observes that Gopaditya (the seventeenth king of Kashmir) built the temple of Shankara on the Takht-i-Suleiman hill in this year.

If we are to pass beyond the first century B.C. for Kalidasa, we would have to entertain the theory sometimes submitted that the Indian adventurer named by the Greek historians Sandrocottus, who was a contemporary of Alexander the Great and flourished as a king in the immediate post-Alexandrine epoch was not Chandragupta Maurya but Chandragupta I, founder of the Imperial Gupta

dynasty. Then Chandragupta II Vikramaditya would mount the throne around 260 B.C. and Shankara, along with Kumarila Bhatta, might have lived not long after that monarch's contemporary Kalidasa. This would extend Shankara's possible antiquity but it would still exclude any time before c. 260 B.C.

Whatever the historical framework we may adopt, the "chronological puzzle" would be comparatively simplified by our approach through Kumarila Bhatta in the sense that a too ancient Shankara would necessarily fade out.

(15 6.88)

*

I have just received your present for my birthday. There had to be a Herculean struggle with the tight cloth-wrapping and the wooden box before I could get on to the cardboard box and, opening it, face the beauty and wonder of a most elegant wristwatch. I can well believe that, as you say, you personally went to the bazaar and chose it, for it shows the true poetic taste or rather the authentic spiritual vision inspiring that taste. With the black dial and bright hour-points, the vision is of a deep mystery out of which twelve stars prick their way into our ken. Here is a symbolisation of varied multiple Time emerging from a single Secrecy beyond in which all count is lost and an unfathomable silence reigns. Looking at the chain, I might intuitively take that silence to be golden, carrying the possibility of an expressive unfoldment of supreme value.

By now the operation on your right eye for the cataract must have been successfully over. Do drop me a line whenever convenient. I am sure an intra-ocular lens has been implanted. I wish such a technique had been available when my cataracts were removed; then my "beauty" might not have been spoiled by these focussing appurtenances from outside! But I must remember that they suggest the wisdom of God if some philosophers of the Middle Ages are to be believed. For surely in anticipation of the need of specs God created the bridge of the human nose! The pantheist thinker Spinoza may have been particularly struck with this wisdom, for he was by profession a grinder of lenses for spectacles and even had a name whose last half (. .noza) may serve to suggest to us what a "Nosey Parker" of speculative thought he must have been to poke as he did into the secret of the world's basic substance and make sweeping postulates about it.

Please forgive me for straying into recondite realms and making you strain not only your eyes but also your brain.

Before I close I am tempted to one more gymnastic with words. May the cataract-removal usher in for you an era in which there will be no cause for any cataract in the sense of waterfall in your life, no reason for tears to drop!

(14.11.1994)

*

You have been most efficient. The Bio-zincs reached me as if transmitted instantaneously from Singapore by sheer thought-power. Now no fear of any surgery in a delicate region. Our play on “prostate” and “prostrate” reminds me of a line in *Savitri* which brings in an antonym of “prostrate” and reads a bit oddly. It’s in the passage (p. 392, lines 16-18):

And slowly a supine inconstant breeze
Ran like a fleeting sigh of happiness
Over slumberous grasses pranked with green and gold.

Should I take “supine” to mean “low, close to earth, nearly level with the ground” or to signify “indolent, lethargic”?

What makes you suspect Nirod and I were likely not to be pleased with your choosing to admire a poem which Sri Aurobindo had not directly praised? I mean “Seated Above”, the opening piece in *The Adventure of the Apocalypse*. I think you have exaggerated to yourself the somewhat humorous remarks Sri Aurobindo has made. What he means to illustrate is the most probable reaction of “some critics”. He says that he mentions the likely reaction “without supporting it” and begins by calling the poem “striking”.

I like your stand for your supposedly heretical liking for the poem and the spirited way you have brought in Luther. But you have got a trifle mixed up as regards the doings of that founder of Protestantism. He did not utter those words you cite—“I could do no other”—when “nailing his fateful thesis to the door”. What door? His own house’s? Surely not. It was of the church in Wittenberg and the words came out of him at the funny-sounding Diet of Worms where he had been summoned to recant or, to use a more appropriate phrase, “eat his own words”.

Your implied admiration for Luther shows very pleasantly to my mind that official Roman Catholicism sits lightly on you. One of my tutors—Father Gense (a Dutchman) at St. Xavier’s School—called Luther “a pig”. I was happy to read Chesterton styling him “a great man”. Maybe this compliment was possible to G.K.C. because he was a convert and not a born Catholic. You, in spite of being a Catholic by birth, have emerged into

An ampler ether, a diviner air

and found in our Ashram’s Mother a living culmination of the most precious and profound truth of the Roman Church—the vision and worship of the Divine Mother through the figure of the Virgin Mary. Of course, this is not the only source of soul-fulfilment for you. The Himalayan presence of Sri Aurobindo has given you the sense of reaching the end of all journeys. Your inmost being catches him saying (in words from a poem of mine where the Himalaya is vocal):

Here centuries lay down their pilgrim cry,
 Drowsed with the power in me to press my whole
 Bulk of unchanging peace upon the eye
 And weigh that vision deep into the soul. (30 12 1994)

*

The topic of Dante is very welcome to me. I have only a smattering of Italian but my keen interest in all things Dantesque has made me feel conversant with his many-sided nature and art. Sri Aurobindo's greater knowledge has helped me considerably. There is no doubt that Dante belongs to the top class of poets, but here we have to mark gradations and see how a poet stands with regard to the several abilities we should expect in the top class. According to Sri Aurobindo, they cover "supreme imaginative originality, supreme poetic gift, widest scope and supreme creative genius". These factors should include what I would call "quantity of quality", the abundance of the work. Thus Sri Aurobindo has said about Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth: "their best work is as fine poetry as any written, but they have written nothing on a larger scale which would place them among the greatest creators." Among the latter, Sri Aurobindo makes three rows:

First row—Homer, Shakespeare, Valmiki, Vyasa.

Second row—Dante, Kalidasa, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Virgil, Milton.

Third row—Goethe.

In Sri Aurobindo's view, Dante and Kalidasa would rank beside those in the first row except that they do not have enough of "a kind of elemental demiurgic power". Each of the others "has created a world of his own. Dante's triple world beyond is more constructed by the poetic seeing mind" than by such power.

Coming to "style", Sri Aurobindo distinguishes five kinds: the adequate, the effective, the illumined, the inspired, the inevitable. The last has to be understood in a special way. All the four preceding it can attain their inevitability but there is a category which falls outside all classification: one may dub it poetry in its sheer essence: this style is inevitability *par excellence*. When I once asked Sri Aurobindo how he would define Dante's style and I suggested the description "forceful adequate" because of "a certain simplicity mixed with power", he replied: "The 'forceful adequate' might apply to much of Dante's writing, but much else is pure inevitable; elsewhere it is the inspired style as in that reference to the result of Marsia's competition with Apollo:

Si comè quando Marsia traesti
 Della vagina delle membre sue.¹

¹ As when he plucked Marsia out of the sheath of his limbs

I would not call the other line—

E venni del martirio a questa pace—¹

merely adequate; it is much more than that. Dante's simplicity comes from a penetrating directness of poetic vision, it is not the simplicity of an adequate style."

Discussing poetic austerity and exuberance, Sri Aurobindo sets Dante between the two extremes of stringent bareness and colourful sumptuosity—extremes that also are capable of yielding first-rate poetry. Poised midway, Dante combines "the most sustained severity of expression with a precise power and fullness in the language which gives the sense of packed riches—no mere bareness anywhere."

You may be interested to know that I have translated into English *terza rima* the whole last canto of *Paradiso* as well as part of the fifth canto of *Inferno* telling the story of Francesca of Rimini, and a passage from Canto XXX of *Purgatorio* recounting Dante's meeting Beatrice. About the Francesca-rendering Sri Aurobindo wrote: "The translation is very good—though not Dantesque at all points." His comment on the last canto of *Paradiso*, as couched in a note to Dilip Kumar Roy, ran: "Amal in his translation of Dante has let himself go in the direction of eloquence more than Dante who is too succinct for eloquence and he has used also a mystical turn of phrase which is not Dante's—yet he has got something of the spirit in the language, something of Dante's concentrated force of expression into his lines."

A word now on Beatrice. We all are inclined to rave romantically about her and Dante. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo long ago: "I am drawn to Dante especially by his conception of Beatrice which seems to me to give him his excellence. How would you define that conception?" The answer was: "Outwardly it was an idealisation, probably due to a psychic connection of the past which could not fulfil itself in that life. But I do not see how his conception of Beatrice gives him his excellence—it was only one element in a very powerful and complex nature." I remember the Mother once telling me that what Dante wrote in connection with Beatrice in *La Vita Nuova* struck her as an imaginative reconstruction of his experience rather than a direct transcript of it. On the other hand, her impression of his account of *Inferno* was that there was much accuracy in the general vision of it.

I'll close with a remark apropos of the line which forms the *grand finale* of the *Divine Comedy*:

L'amore che move il sole e l'altre stelle.

¹ And came from that martyrdom into this peace

Translated into English—

The love that moves the sun and the other stars—

it sounds like a medieval anticipation of Shelley's insight into the universal movement while poring over the death of Keats and feeling the dead young poet to have been "made one with Nature":

He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own,
Which wields the world with never-wearied love,
Sustains it from below and kindles it above.

A Shelleyan understanding of Dante's line may make its "amor" akin to

the one Spirit's plastic stress
which
Sweeps through the dull dense world...

Here we have the intimation of a Divine Power and Love overarching the world and at the same time looking after it and guiding it onward. In Dante we have the Aristotelian notion transmitted by Thomas Aquinas to the Middle Ages that all creation moves towards its Creator—who is Himself unmoving—by a love born in all things because of His transcendent Beauty. Dante is not figuring God's love as urging onward the sun and the rest of the stellar world—the whole universe with all its living and non-living contents: he is imaging the whole universe as being attracted towards the Divine Reality by a spontaneous love in its heart for that Supernal Perfection. (29.10.1994)

*

You have asked me to say a few words on the subject of "friendship". Just the other day I myself got a spurt to reflect on it. A friend of mine whom I value greatly and who is staunch at heart had a half-minute argument with me on a certain minor theme while I was at my dining-table. Before I could realise what followed, the person disappeared from my sight. I thought there was only a walk-out into the front room towards which I had my back. After a minute or two I called out the name of my friend. As there was no answer I took my wheelchair to the front room. To my surprise I found that my friend had simply walked away!

It has been part of my Yogic practice neither to be disappointed nor to pass judgment. So I sat quietly facing the blank friendless-seeming space in front of me and let a “vision”, as it were, of the nature of true friendship take shape. What should I expect a friend to be like? The immediate answer was: “Nothing.” To make a formation and then try to fit people into it is folly. Human affairs are all the time in a flux because human nature itself is a constant movement, changing from minute to minute. However, there is a background of continuity, uniformity, constancy—the feeling that the same person persists behind all the variations of psychological weather—all the whims and moods and temperamental reactions rising and falling, turning this way and that, taking one colour or another. This feeling implies some measure of standing apart, an opportunity to weigh and decide, give a directive touch to the flying moment. Herein lies, I believe, what we sense to be our “freewill”, from which arises our sense of responsibility for our actions. And it is the influence of the watcher hovering, as it were, over the surface of the heaving and plunging career of our fluctuant human nature, that made my friend behave the next day with the usual warm intimacy as if nothing had happened the night earlier. It was a case of the thoughtful “I” getting the better of the impulsive “ego”. Of course I received the return of the usual warmth with a happy glow which had actually undergone no dimming, for I knew that my friend’s heart was as genuinely drawn into relationship as my own. But I knew also that the future might hold other brief erratic turns basically signifying nothing yet capable of leaving a slightly unpleasant taste in the mouth of anyone who was not calmly prepared for small zigzags.

Unpreparedness on one’s part and zigzagging on the other’s would both be due to their not going past the usual experience of the hovering watcher. Friendship—or, for that matter, the experience of being in love—cannot do what my fellow-scribbler Srinivasa Iyengar would neologically dub “beyonding” unless there is an inward penetration through that watcher to a self of peace which is not linked to the general flux of our life. No doubt, it is hardly felt at first as standing quite aloof, but there comes gradually the realisation of a depth and a silence within. There the usual motivations drop away, the common responses and refusals are absent and in their place a calm compassionate smile, full of understanding and tolerance, pervades all outward-looking states of mind.

(28.11.1994)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

THE FUTURE OF THE HUMAN RACE IN SRI AUROBINDO'S VISION

MAHATMA Gandhi was either too simplistic or else excessively ethical when he wrote his famous letter "To Every Briton" during the Second World War, offering a strange "Christian" solution to the Nazi drive to exterminate all civilised values: "I want you to fight Nazism without arms, or, if I am to retain the military terminology, with non-violent arms. I would like you to lay down the arms you have as being useless for saving you or humanity. You will invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of the countries you call your possessions. Let them take possession of your beautiful island, with your many beautiful buildings. You will give all these but neither your souls nor your minds. If these gentlemen choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourselves man, woman and child, to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them." Putting such an ultra-Christian doctrine on the highest socio-political pedestal is not only to dwarf humanity but is, in the deepest sense, to create anti-humanity. It sucks away the life-blood; it strangles the spirit; it kills with a dark knife the very soul of man. A great ethical virtue is converted into a deadly weapon. The violence of non-violence is far more cruel in its consequences than a straight upright battle. The thirst of no Mohammed Ghazni can be quenched by giving him the wealth of temples that uphold the loftiness of a rich spiritual tradition. The asceticism of an Aurangzeb is a kind of perversion which is befitting to the perfect instrumentality of a devil who is all poised to destroy what is ennobling and grandiosely heroic in the march of the spirit. Then, in the Mephistophelean drunkenness all that we hear is:

I know the nation's day of doom is nigh;
And since my little cask is running dry,
The universe is surely sinking fast.

Sri Aurobindo was the only one who saw the horror of the Walpurgis Night in the unbridled advance of the Nazi forces sweeping over Europe in the name of the Aryan complex which was nothing but a dangerous power surging from the depths of Inconscience. A great crisis was looming over the future of the human race and it had to be met with a sure and more luminous might. The universe was sinking fast and the process had to be decisively halted.

War and destruction are inherently present in the state of our material existence today and it is impossible to progress and to fulfil ourselves without recognising such a reality in the conduct of life. Naturally, therefore, the principle of Ahimsa can never be made a fetish in governing our life's dynamism. Violent action cannot be decried, if necessary under certain circumstances. Says

Sri Aurobindo: "There is a truth in Ahimsa, there is a truth in destruction also... Non-violence is better than violence as a rule, and still sometimes violence may be the right thing. I consider Dharma as relative; unity with the Divine and action from the Divine will, the highest way." If such is the law of life, it is no wonder that Gandhi's appeal to "every Briton" went completely unheeded; it received the response it deserved. No wonder also that Gandhi himself had earlier discarded Gopal Krishna Gokhale's specious argument about the benevolent British rule over India: "Who exercised the sovereign authority was to her people a minor matter, as long as it was well exercised and did not seriously interfere with their religious, social and communal life." The defective moderate method of "prayer, petition and protest" springing from such a distorted understanding of human psychology had no power in it to sustain the life-breath of a nation and had to be supplanted by a more assertive and genuine spirit of nationalism. If in this bright and aggressive character of the Indian renaissance Sri Aurobindo recognised the element of "action from the Divine will", so also did he consider it necessary, again for that Divine purpose, to set his will-force against the Hitlerean tide during the war. He saw in the Nazi threat the collapse of "civilisation and its highest attained social, cultural and spiritual values and of the whole future of humanity". Sri Aurobindo not only made an open War Fund contribution and supported the Allies, but also used his spiritual force at the grimmest hour of the war, the Battle of Dunkirk. He redeemed humanity from the invading peril of extermination.

But Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future of humanity did not lie only in saving it from destruction under Asuric Hitlerism. His concern was "action from the Divine will", not just the future of humanity but most significantly the future humanity, a new humanity preparing itself to receive the "divine multitude", the Rigvedic race of luminous beings, *divyam janam*. The mental beings that we are have to make place for the beings governed by the higher gnosis, ultimately in a body formed of the Truth-Substance. He saw even in Man's urge such an innate possibility, the very progressive meaning of the unfolding terrestrial evolution. He asserted that "... man as he is cannot be the last term of that evolution. he is too imperfect an expression of the Spirit, Mind itself a too limited form and instrumentation; Mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being. If, then, man is incapable of exceeding mentality, he must be surpassed and Supermind and superman must manifest and take the lead of the creation. But if his mind is capable of opening to what exceeds it, then there is no reason why man himself should not arrive at Supermind and supermanhood or at least lend his mentality, life and body to an evolution of that greater term of the Spirit manifesting in Nature." Thus, if man is not to fall by the wayside, he "must either himself become a divine humanity or give place to Superman". At this stage Sri Aurobindo has left the occult choice open, but its implication is quite definite. In any case, whichever be the

final outcome, the "heavenly Psyche must put off her veil" and take possession of our thought and life and body:

To mould humanity into God's own shape
And lead this great blind struggling world to light
Or a new world discover or create.

The soul of the Divine Mother must be marked as the centre of a "wide-drawn scheme". It was indeed with this that the Mother was busy and it is in this context that Sri Aurobindo's statement about what he called the "Mother's war" assumes immense importance: "It is the forces behind the battle that have to be seen and not this or that superficial circumstance." Obviously the Mahatma either had no idea about these forces or else he was playing into the Hitlerite hand. The occult battle was fierce, and merciless, and the Mother had to fight it for the Divine's victory. She was at the centre of a wide-drawn scheme. The one who had proclaimed himself as the Lord of Nations, the Asuric Power of Falsehood, had taken complete possession of Hitler and found in him his perfect instrument for the task of world-destruction. But the Mother outplayed him at his own game and turned the onrush of darksome forces in her favour. The Asura was vanquished in the "Mother's war", paving the path for an unprecedented event in the evolutionary history of the earth, the supramental manifestation in the earth's subtle-physical, in 1956. The Mother's focus after that became the invocation of the Will of the supreme Lord in the process of body-transformation.

Rabindranath Tagore had the idea of the "divine Humanity" with God as "the infinite ideal of Man towards whom men move in their collective growth, with whom they seek their union of love as individuals, in whom they find their ideal of father, friend and beloved". To realise this ideal in practice he started an educational institution but, to his dismay, he discovered that it was only "struggling to find its fulfilment"; he wanted the institution to be a living temple for his cherished ideal but it was quite far away from it. Perhaps this was inevitable when just the aestheticised divinity was summoned to give shape to the projected humanity. Something more than the mere anthropic element is involved, something fundamentally occult-yogic with the luminous dimension of the transcendent, and that was not available to the poetic vision launching itself on the task.

Nor does the vision of science fare better. In the words of Alexis Carrel: "For the first time in the history of humanity, a crumbling civilisation is capable of discerning the causes of its decay. For the first time it has at its disposal the gigantic strength of science. Will we utilize this knowledge and this power? It is our only hope of escaping the fate common to all great civilisations of the past. Our destiny is in our hands. On the new road, we must go forward." Surely we

must go forward. But can science be our true hope? No doubt it has been greatly instrumental in unifying man in a most practical and pragmatic sense. It has also kept at his disposal the secret powers of material nature never imagined by him in the past. But also imagine the havoc played by the present-day science which is capable of destroying the entire world several times with the hydrogen bomb. It could become the instrument of the dark Power for its hostile design.

Teilhard de Chardin makes a considerable advance over the position of Alexis Carrel. He considers that we are going into the human era of science in which man himself is the 'object of knowledge'. According to him, this is the key to the whole science of nature. Says he: "Carrel referred to man as 'the unknown'. But man, we should add, is the solution of everything that we can know." Talking about the "forward glimpse" of the world, he asserts that "man is irreplaceable" and that "he must reach the goal, not necessarily... but infallibly". This would definitely happen at the proper biological maturation and is inescapable, as it is in the very nature of things. Therefore man is destined to step into the noosphere, the sphere of the unifying mind. If such is the hope posited for him, can we say that he has no obligation to fulfil? It is as though an ancient palaeontological force were driving him towards a new level of consciousness beyond his. It is as though biogenesis were sufficient to achieve this *grand finale*. Is it?

Yogically speaking this is too simplistic a view, too incomplete to be useful. If there is an evolutionary urge pushing itself from below, there is also the downward descending dynamism of the higher consciousness bringing about a total fulfilment. Only when these two combine can the terrestrial future be said to have started getting materialised in the true sense, viz., in the sense of the Truth. The future of the human race, in Sri Aurobindo's vision, is therefore the beginning of life in divinity so that that divinity may manifest itself in it integrally and fulfillingly.

Sri Aurobindo has categorically stated that "fullness of being, fullness of consciousness, fullness of life must be the goal of development towards which we are tending and which will manifest at an early or later stage of our destiny". In order to make that destiny real at an early stage he "attempted all and achieved all". In fact, the whole of his yogic action lay in hastening "the hour of the collective realisation". We are therefore at a decisive turning point and the real question is if "man could consent to be spiritualised". That does not mean that in the absence of this consent the work is going to be terminated. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are not particularly in love with this civilisation and if it has to vanish, yielding place to the Law of divine Harmony, so much the better for it. They have already established the Power of transcendental Gnosis in the earth-consciousness and it is to that that the charge of terrestrial evolution is handed over. The world has been won back from the Asura and given to the Deva and it is for us now to profit by it. The choice is ours and there is no divine compulsion

in it; if we fail to recognise it we may stay back where we are or else be prepared to fall by the wayside. But let us choose the path of the Light and fulfil ourselves in it.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

MATRIMANDIR—AN ENLIGHTENED ASSUMPTION

MATRIMANDIR, fantastic beauty, fountain of the Mother's Grace acting like a waterfall that floods all Auroville, is the key to Auroville's growth and progress. To be drenched by these waters of Grace is the key because these are also powerful waters of harmonies that can reduce all problems to vanishing points. This powerful Grace is flowing to each Aurovilian personally at an unimaginable speed and constantly returning to the source in a cycle. However, Auroville is a part of the Integral Yoga, whether Aurovilians like it or not, believe it or not, accept it or not. Such being the case, the operative effect of the abundance of Grace that Matrimandir radiates is conducive to spiritual effort and self-giving which are very important if Auroville is to fully benefit from the Matrimandir.

Auroville was the dream conceived by the Mother to be realised close to the main Ashram premises, where Her residential quarters were. Auroville, therefore, in a specific perspective, is an emanation of the Ashram being worked out through the Matrimandir which itself is an extension of the Mother's room. To meditate in the Matrimandir equates to meditating in Her room. Auroville is much more broad-based in representing the world than the Ashram, and is a much bigger laboratory of our Divine Parents. For the outsiders, in the physical absence of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, the Ashram exists in the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's rooms, in the Samadhi and, as an extension, in the Matrimandir. The Matrimandir unites Auroville with the Ashram.

JAGAT KAPADIA

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of June 1995)

WHEN Sri Aurobindo came out of prison he observed that the political atmosphere had greatly changed. The fire of enthusiasm which was burning in the hearts of Nationalists had died down and the whole of the country had fallen into a state of lethargy. A good many members, the cream of the Nationalist Party, were in jail. Some had gone into seclusion. Undaunted, despite the prevailing sense of despair and despondency around him, Sri Aurobindo, single-handed, set about building anew the Nationalist edifice that had partly come down by the Government's repression. He held meetings in different parts of Calcutta, not dismayed by the fact that fewer people attended them.

A Swadeshi meeting was held at Beadon Square, Calcutta, on 13th June 1909. Babu Ramananda Chatterjee presided. Several eminent speakers addressed the meeting.

An authorised report of Sri Aurobindo's speech which was delivered on that occasion runs:

"Sri Aurobindo Ghose said that when in jail he had been told that the country was demoralised by the repression. He could not believe it then, because his experience of the movement had been very different. It seemed to him then impossible that the deportation would have a different effect. When nine of the most active and devoted workers for the country had been suddenly hurried away from their homes without any fault on their part, without the Government being able to formulate a single definite charge against them, surely the Boycott instead of decreasing would grow tenfold more intense.... This was nothing compared with the price other nations had paid for their liberty. They also would have to suffer much more than this before they could make any appreciable advance towards their goal. This was God's law; it was not the rulers who demanded the price, it was God who demanded it. It was his law that a fallen nation should not be allowed to rise without infinite suffering and mighty effort. That was the price it had to pay for its previous lapses from National duty.... He did not measure the strength of the movement by the number of meetings or of people present at the meetings. He measured it by the strength and indomitable obstinacy of feeling and purpose in the hearts of the people."

In fact, the words had come to him in jail, and he must now speak to the Indian Nation. He thought he should put new life into it and impart to it a new and steady sense of movement towards a clearly visualised goal.

Many friends requested Sri Aurobindo to revive the *Bande Mataram* which had been suppressed during his imprisonment. Others suggested that he should take over the editorship of *Bengalee* which was a going concern. Sri Aurobindo refused both. He wanted to break fresh ground by conducting journals entirely

his own. Accordingly he started two weeklies, *Dharma* in Bengali and *Karmayogin* in English. The *Karmayogin* was more of a national review than a weekly newspaper. It maintained a very high standard of journalism, laying emphasis on literary, philosophic and spiritual aspects, though politics was not excluded. The most enduring features were its enunciation of the Principles of a living Vedanta, of the *Sanatana Dharma*, and their application to every side of daily life. The *Karmayogin* proved to be more than a week-end newspaper, nor something to be read in a leisurely manner at the Sunday breakfast table. It came out on 19 June, 1909. Two months after the first issue of its Bengali counterpart, the *Dharma* came out on 23 August 1909.

The cover illustration of the *Karmayogin* was of the Chariot with Arjuna and Sri Krishna seated in it; and one of the three mottoes of the journal was the *Gita Vakya*: "Yoga is skill in works." Current events were important as they helped "the growth of the national life and the development of the Soul of the nation".

The *Dharma* carried as one of its two epigraphs the verse from the *Gita*: *Yadā yadāhi dharmasya glānurbhavati Bharata abhyuthānama dharmasya tadātmanam sṛjamyāham*. ("Whenever Dharma declines and adharma is in the ascendant, O Bharata, it is then I bring about my birth")

The object of the *Dharma* was to propagate the *Sanatana Dharma*, the "Eternal Religion". Sri Aurobindo affirmed: "It has to be applied not only to life, but to the whole of life; its spirit has to enter into and mould our society, our politics, our literature, our Science, our individual character, affections and aspirations. To understand the heart of this *dharmā*, to experience it as a truth, to feel the high emotions to which it raises and to express and execute it in life is what we understand by Karmayoga. We believe that it is to make the *Yoga* the ideal of human life that India rises today; by the *Yoga* she will get the strength to realise her freedom, unity and greatness, by the *Yoga* she will keep the strength to preserve it. It is a spiritual revolution we foresee and the material is only its shadow and reflex."²

Sri Aurobindo further enunciated: "We say to the nation: 'it is God's will that we should be ourselves and not Europe. We have sought to regain life by following the law of another being than our own. We must return and seek the sources of life and strength within ourselves. We must know our past and recover it for the purposes of our future. Our business is to realise ourselves first and to mould everything to the law of India's eternal life and nature. It will therefore be the object of the *Karmayogin* to read the heart of our religion, our society, our philosophy, politics, literature, art, jurisprudence, science, thought, everything that was and is ours, so that we may be able to say to ourselves and our nation, 'This is our dharma'. We shall review European civilisation entirely from the standpoint of Indian thought and knowledge and seek to throw off from us the dominating stamp of the occident; what we have to take from the West we shall

take as Indians, and the *dharmā* once discovered, we shall strive our utmost not only to profess but to live, in our individual actions, in our social life, in our political endeavours.”³

“... The early issues also carried his translations of the *Isha*, *Katha* and *Kena Upanishads*. There were literary contributions as well—several of his poems, ‘Bajī Prabhō’, ‘The Birth of Sin’, ‘Epiphany’ and others appeared in the paper for the first time; it also published his translation of the first thirteen chapters of Bankim Chandra’s *Anandamath*. In the later issues can be found some remarkably constructive prose contributions such as ‘A System of National Education’ ‘The National Value of Art’, ‘The Brain of India’, etc. Both the *Karmayogin* and *Dharma* soon acquired a wide readership and, unlike the *Bande Mataram*, were financially self-supporting.”⁴

(*To be continued*)

NILIMA DAS

References

- 1 *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, Vol 2, pp 25-26
- 2 *Ibid* , p 17
- 3 *Ibid* . p 20
- 4 *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, by Nirodbaran, p 108

ABOUT WOMAN

7. ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE OF WOMAN

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

THE freedom of woman will start becoming a reality only when she achieves economic independence. Of course there must first be the inner independence, freedom of mind, freedom from traditional customs and habits, there must be the awakening of self, of personality within and in the heart of hearts. For this what is needed is education and, even more than that, an initiation. But the thing within can take shape only with the support of a container without; the inner truth never matures, never finds an expression without having an outer base. Therefore, woman must have freedom of physical and vital sustenance if she wants to make effective her freedom of self and mind. A woman from the West, fighting for her sex's freedom and independence, made a statement on this issue in a very straightforward and simple manner: "How can you be courageous when you have not a penny and are incapable of earning one?" As a matter of fact, the change in women's economic condition lies at the root of whatever place in Europe and America they have acquired for themselves in society. The day the Married Woman's Property Act was passed in 1881 marked the beginning of a new age in the social life of women in England.

It is needless to say to what extent women in our country are enslaved to men just for the sake of food and clothing. Man's responsibility is to provide subsistence to woman and woman's responsibility is to serve man—this is the arrangement provided for in the very mantra of marriage ornamented with a great spiritual gesture. Not to speak of independent living, the way the framers of shastras guarded the receiving and enjoying wealth and property by women, whether it be a gift or an inheritance, reveals simply their only intention—*na strī svātantryamarhati* (Woman should never be independent). Katyayana has made this general rule about the personal property of woman:

*Prāptam silpaistu yadvittam prītyācaiva yadanyataḥ,
Bhartuḥ sāmāyam bhavet tatra śesantu strīdhanam smṛtam—*

that is to say, the husband too has his right on whatever the wife earns by her effort or whatever she receives as gift from others, but it is only these gifts if anything at all belongs solely to the wife. Of course the framers of the shastras will be wronged if we don't mention here that they have also specified some personal property of woman where the wives have full wilful right and which the father, the son, the brother or even the husband has no right to sell or gift away.

But even then some such flaws and excuses are handy by virtue of which this

right of woman becomes null and void effortlessly. Whatever it may be, whatever may be there in the shastras, in practice we find that any personal possession or acquisition of woman seems to man to be an extremely strange affair; man has a legitimate birthright over everything that belongs to woman! There is a story that a certain rustic became very angry at the upsurge of woman-independence in England and thumping the table said: "Do you mean to tell me that if my missis had a hundred pounds left her I couldn't spend it without asking her first?" We can safely vouch that many an educated person will agree with this rustic though he may not voice the thought.

In our country, for the so-called low-born women, there is some effort and scope of independent earning; but for high-born women there is hardly any. Not only so, earning is regarded as a sort of disgrace for high-born women. Better let me live without food and clothing but to earn my livelihood—*śirasi mā likha mā likha* (let not Providence prescribe it for me)! Better to die than take up the dharma of man on myself. It is not that the objection is from women alone; even when women are willing, a collective social pressure keeps that will in check. Let me relate here an incident so that everybody may realise our state of affairs. Finding no other alternative, two helpless girls from a respectable brahmin family used to make wicker-baskets at home and send them for sale to the market through a sympathetic young boy; out of the profits both somehow managed to survive. But when the matter was brought to the notice of the elders of the community, they all rushed menacingly to the scene with a hue and cry, "What an abominable practice! What an infernal age! The daughters of a brahmin adopting the occupation of a low-born!" They warned the boy and threatened the girls too but at the same time said with a show of pride that so long as they were alive, the brahmin-girls should not be in want of anything. But after this the wretched girls were on the point of starvation—luckily they survived by some other means. This is an utterly extreme application of that very system of traditional religion where women are not worthy of any freedom whatsoever under any circumstances.

And yet it is not a question of subsistence only. How miserable the heart of woman remains, how much her mind and life plunge into ignorance and falsehood with this utter dependence upon another, with this hanging on man solely—this is the matter which needs special attention. It is said that want is at the root of corruption. Indeed, when woman knows and feels that she has nothing save want, and only man is the answer to meet this want, then her nature, her womanhood is curbed and humbled a lot, her true self cannot blossom in such a condition, instead some perverse notions, some dirt of falsehood accumulates. Let me tell you how it happens.

Ours is the land of Sita and Savitri, it is said. The characteristic of our society too is that, nowhere can one find such unreserved self-giving, such unflinching single-minded devotion of woman; the womanhood of our women is

incomparable in the world. Superficially it seems to be very true, but on a deeper probe some such things show their faces which disturb our natural and simple faith to a great extent. We come to understand in what measure our women were forcibly made as chaste and devoted as Savitri, to what degree they have made a virtue of necessity, finding no other alternative. Before knowing themselves, our women have heard, seen and been taught that they have no other go but to depend solely on man; social atmosphere and past habit have unknowingly rooted this notion firmly in the hearts of women that to become dependent on man is a must for her—*esa dharmah sanātanaḥ* (this is the eternal dharma). Had this notion remained only in the world of ideas—in the mind and heart—then it would have been safe to some extent; but even the practical arrangement has been made in such a way that the body too has been tied up according to that notion. Before she is mature, when she has the least acquaintance with her own self, woman in our society is given to man in marriage like an inert bundle—and man has to carry that burden with his arms upraised. One who remains habituated to depending fully on another from very childhood, suddenly when one day she attains maturity, she finds that she is absolutely helpless without this other, she has no place to stand, nor even the capacity; so she wants to fully suppress this knowledge and start knitting around it a net of dharma, of good “What shall I do in the absence of my husband?”—is a very common utterance by women. But to what extent this comes from the attraction of hearts, that is to say of soul to soul and to what extent it is simply material, that is to say just the apprehension about food, clothing and shelter, is questionable; this may hurt our egotism but cannot for that matter alter the truth. Even with hundreds of spiritual explanations one cannot nullify the propensity to survive, the urge for food, clothing and shelter—because this is a fundamental propensity, a fundamental urge of a human. Therefore when I see this propensity, this urge of mine is satiated with another’s support, then it is quite natural that I shall clasp and stick to that support with redoubled force. But a human is not merely an animal, so he covers and dresses up this natural propensity and urge and gives it a colour, or at best really puts and mixes it with some higher propensities. But then to think that they become non-existent or that their strength is reduced is a great error amounting to self-deceit. Most people dare not dig into the unsavoury hidden account, a tragedy itself, that lies under the high-sounding words like self-giving and single-minded devotion of womanhood in our society. Our women adore the husband like a god but to what extent that devotion is out of fear—fear of being deprived of his favour in case the god is dead and gone—is a thing that cannot be overlooked by the seeker of truth even though it may sound impolite.

It is now clear that woman is bound to man by bare necessity so to say from the very beginning. This primary bondage must be released to see what the nature and dharma of woman want, how they move; then whatever relation she

may establish with man will at least not be shadowed by that uneasy and unhealthy relation of giver and receiver, of master and slave—there will be an opportunity for both to have the true relation between two free and self-reliant souls. From the spiritual point of view this will do good to woman as well as man; the system of society too will be able to put into practice a more up-to-date, more natural and more true form of arrangement. From the material point of view also this will be of advantage for all, particularly in the days of indigent circumstances. In our Hindu society helpless girls need no more be sacrificed anyhow, the burden on menfolk which is gradually becoming excessive will be lightened—society as a whole will surely be richer if its other half, which at present can only spend, tries to earn something.

One reason cited against woman's independent earning is her burden of child-bearing. But this reason is nothing but an excuse; because we see every day low-born uneducated women earn whatever possible in spite of the burden of motherhood. And our high-born women are no less diligent so far as physical labour is concerned; and with a little art, a bit of order and orientation, a bit of will and endeavour this labour could very well be used for earning purposes; and others who waste their time in idle talk and sleep or useless work have no excuses at all. Then again this burden of motherhood is not to be borne daily for the whole life—one can always avail oneself of some leisure whenever needed; besides this leisure there remains enough of unutilised time: how many want or try to utilise it?

A movement to provide voting or political right to women has recently been gaining momentum—this is a proof that the present-day trend is making itself felt by traditional society. But a political right becomes real only when supported by an economic right. So we think that economic independence is a more living thing for women than political independence. This thing runs close to the roots of woman's freedom. No independent opinion finds any opportunity to develop for one who is dependent on another for bare subsistence, and even when it develops there remains no way out for its expression or to act accordingly: —*utthāya hr̥di liyante daridrānām manorathāḥ* (A poor man's desire is never fulfilled). If woman has to secure an independent and separate place in the state or on a larger scale in society, if woman has also to take part in the systems of the state and society, then she must first become self-reliant with regard to money. We would like to see first this movement within society. Then we shall come to understand that not only is the movement for the political right becoming realistic, but the independence of the entire life of woman is also finding a surer base. The extent of men's participation in this movement will indicate how far men support from their heart women's right to freedom.

This should not make anybody think that we are denying the economic right of women to be all in all. In the very beginning we have already said that the basic thing is freedom of mind, awakening of the soul—education and initiation.

Without this inner thing all external ingredients are useless. In Burma and among the Khasia tribes of our country there is ample economic right for women but even then their society does not seem to be so very rich and developed; because there also this basic inner thing has not been given due emphasis. Yet we want to draw the attention of those who view freedom of woman as detrimental to the social order in those types of society—to the fact that it is possible to structure a society, give society an altogether different form with woman at its head, without the sovereignty of man.

PASSING THOUGHTS

WE notice three distinct stages in Sri Aurobindo's life leading to his discovery of spiritual truth and world-view.

The first was while he was still in England. Reading the Upanishads, he came across the idea of the Self and it immediately entered within him and he attempted the mental realisation of the Self which, from then on, prepared his way secretly.

The second was when he saw Barin, his younger brother, being miraculously cured of high fever by the power of yoga. Barin had returned from his wanderings in the hills with a raging mountain-fever. About the same time, came a yogi who cured him in a few minutes, by reciting some mantra and by a gesture of cutting water in a glass with a knife. In this event, Sri Aurobindo perceived a great truth and power behind yoga and took to its practice, unaided at first, but soon helped by Lele towards the first basic realisation, that of the Silent Brahman, which never left him

The third stage was when he was meditating in Alipore jail. He saw Swami Vivekananda come to him and reveal the knowledge of the higher planes of Consciousness. For nearly fifteen days he came continuously and gave Sri Aurobindo definitive knowledge of these planes.

The rest of his life seems to be to confirm this hierarchical truth in the daily life of his earthly existence, giving the unifying knowledge of the ascending and descending process an evolutionary purpose and fixing it in the mind of humanity.

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There are two leading words in Sri Aurobindo's view of things—*Life* and *Consciousness*. Life is the play of the manifold power of Consciousness. Consciousness is the light of the many-tiered being of the One. They are joined in a wedlock made in heaven. It can only be ruptured at the risk of dire consequences. The history of India is one instance where this separation was forced and we know to this day the confusion and catastrophe it created in the life of the people, now so difficult to annul.

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The most important contribution of Sri Aurobindo to the present humanity may be expressed by the one word 'yoga' with all the connotations, implications and significances attributed by him to the word. It is not merely something he found in a treasure-trove of a chest of our heritage. It is much more and is of vaster implication and application. It is something modern man had missed so far. It is now added to the repertoire of his means and methods of knowledge and is at the

base of his world-view, the technologies and energies of life, relating the knowledge of the subject to the knowledge of the object. It is now a part of his cultural equipment, like philosophy, metaphysics, science, music, art, poetry and other forms of self-fulfilment and self-discovery. He cannot now do without it. It has become a part of his life and daily living and expression of the delight of being and breath of existence.

The Son of Man will no longer be known as the child of a virgin mother. He will be the legitimate child of earth and heaven, admitted by the assembly of gods and men. He will no longer be obliged to have a crown of thorns, but will wear a diadem, nor carry a cross but walk in the garden path of roses. He can now freely dialogue with the Pilates, the Romans and Jews, or with Socrates and Marx, or compare notes with the Buddha and Sri Krishna and their like.

He will no longer be obliged to seek mountain-tops or deserts to find peace and know himself. He will walk in the market place fully possessed of himself or fight fearlessly with all that obstructs or obscures his path. He will be a friend of all, those marching and struggling on the way and those who have reached the gates of God. He will be known as the One in Many.

"The generalisation of yoga in humanity must be the last victory of Nature over Her own delays and concealments," says the Master.

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Sri Aurobindo's philosophy may be described as *Spiritual Positivism*. In positivism if what is seen, felt and experienced, what the physical mind of man can manipulate and deal with is Real, in spiritual positivism also all this must hold good. The only difference is that in positivism matter, sense-knowledge and the physical mind's reasoning are the deliberating and deciding factors, while in spiritual positivism matter is a manifold reality and so also are the senses of knowledge of an ascending order—subtle to subtler. The deciding and deliberating factor is Purusha, the witness and sanctioner and lord. But so also is he seated in the heart of energies guiding them.

In spiritual positivism matter is real, sense-knowledge is real, the physical mind and its perceptions are real, but these are not the only realities. To take cognisance of the other realities and find their due place in the totality of things and recognise their value is Spiritual Positivism. Even the negation and zero are also realities, but they are the undefined realities, hidden from our immediate attention and purpose. Sri Aurobindo speaks in terms of the Whole, the One—the manifold reality and the manifold sense of cognition.

JAYANTILAL PAREKH

IN SEARCH OF A SACRED FIRE

BY THE CORRESPONDENT OF *THE DAILY*, Bombay, 16.4.1995

THE Parsees are an ethno-religious minority distributed mainly in the west coast region of India. Despite being small in number, the community occupies an important position in recent Indian history having made major contributions in the economic, social, political and cultural spheres. However, apart from a vague notion of being migrants from Persia in the remote past, proper knowledge concerning their origins and evolution as a community is sadly lacking.

In an attempt to offset this anomaly Dr. Roxana Irani of the Deccan College, Pune has zeroed in on a site at Ajmalgadh hill to dig deep in an attempt "not just to find my own roots but also to know how all these people really lived. They came from Iran... the usual story is that they came from over the sea, but what about those who were already there on the fringes of the old Persian empire? People who were there in the outposts of the kingdom, and were forced to flee the limits of what had by then become a Muslim state".

Dr. Irani is reasonably certain that she will be able to find what she is looking for at this site... "But it is too early to say anything about exactly what we shall find here. For that we shall have to wait... I intend to continue this dig for sometime."

The excavation is taking place at Ajmalgadh hill in Ghodmal village of Bansda taluka in Valsad district, Gujarat, because this is where known structures dating back to the early years still exist. The idea is to find out exactly what still remains so that more can be learned about the evolution and development of this microscopic community who have contributed so much to the country, economically, socially, culturally and politically.

Dr. Roxana Irani of Deccan College, Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune is conducting this excavation as part of her postdoctoral work. She has completed her doctoral dissertation on the "Early Parsee settlements on the West Coast of India: An Archaeological Perspective."

The other participants in the excavation are Dr. Chetan Salil, Dr. Pradeep Mohanty, and Balram Tripathy.

The earliest written records we have are the 16th century *Kisseh-i-Sanjan* written by a Priest Baman Kaikobad Sanjana in the form of verse in Persian. "Before that there is nothing, and since there is no other record, my own work will take the archaeological approach," says Roxana.

What is known is that the Zoroastrians came to India in the late seventh to early eighth century, fleeing religious persecution in their own country from the Muslims. From Diu they moved to Sanjan in the 14th century and after its sack they fled once again, this time to the Barot Caves near Umbergaon in Thane district on the border of Gujarat.

From here the community went to Ajmalgadh where they lived with the sacred fire that they had been protecting for 600 years. They built a fire temple, there were other structures and indications are that there was a full-fledged Zoroastrian settlement here.

Roxana believes that once they remove the soil, there will be ample evidence of how the community lived, evolved and developed. For it was from here that they dispersed to different parts of India.

So far three weeks' excavation at Ajmalgadh hill has revealed the uniqueness of this site, as it was used as a place solely for religious rituals and ceremonies. The structures embedded on the top are cleared now and they indicate its use specifically for a religious purpose.

First of all there is the Fire Altar, the place where the Afarganu or the Fire Vase is kept (in which the fire burns 24 hours a day). The fire is always attended to and never allowed to burn out. Secondly there are two structures, one rectangular and the other square: both of them have yielded plenty of pottery pieces, ash and charcoal in bulk mixed with the soil. The most important find is that both these structures came from *in situ*, a rectangular dressed stone with a cuplike depression; this stone is the base on which the Fire Vase is kept (even today in the Fire Temple).

Unfortunately the Fire Vase was not found, but something very similar was found in the rubble surrounding the hill. Thirdly, the most interesting and imposing structure is a brick-lined rectangular water-tank five metres deep, it has flat bricks of three different sizes, one is small, the other two are flat and big. There is another water-tank carved from the rock itself but is now filled with boulders and cannot be cleared. Water is very important for religious ceremonies, hence the storage system.

Fourthly, there are two other structures which have a mound, like a small hill. One is squarish and the other is circular, this one again has the rectangular dressed stone with a cuplike depression, one was found *in situ* and the other was on its periphery out of any context. This too unfortunately does not have any Fire Vase.

The fact that all the Fire Vases are missing is a mystery.

Besides all these finds other antiquities found include a small oval-shaped elongated bead, a few pieces of bone, a small piece of a light green bangle, a broken goblet, pieces of porcelain in light green colour.

This excavation of Ajmalgadh is the first of its kind in the entire country.

Apart from a nebulous idea that Parsees had migrated from Persia in the distant past, very little is known about this small but relatively influential community. So what do these excavations really mean? Why was the Fire Temple at Ajmalgadh abandoned? What happened to all the fire vases? Where did all these people go? And why were they forced to leave their fire temple so that it could slowly become one with the earth on which it was built, only to be

excavated again so many years later? And why is it that there are no records of this temple anywhere in Parsee memorabilia or in historical literature?

Incredible as it might seem, this is the first time that anyone has made a serious attempt at even gathering archaeological evidence on the Parsees in this country. For a community that has made its mark everywhere else, there seems to be a certain reluctance in digging deep into its own past.

IN THE DISTANCE

In the distance the palm leaves sway
Gently, everything is quiet, still;
Lungs breathe and hearts pump, softly.
Like a few clouds in a sombre sky
Some thoughts drift across
The languorous expanse of a tired mind.
Stillness pervades all life
That once was a joyous smile.

I float like a paper-boat
In Time's stream.

O silent Witness, open your lips and whisper
In words of the storm that is building within,
In warmth of the flame that keeps me alive
In this cold winter of life,
In tones of the inner bell
As its sound waves spread through my cosmos.

O my self of all-knowledge, tell me,
That intense concern,
The song in my poems,
The soul of my paintings,
The very sense of my prayers
Awaiting to enrich aspiring hearts
And carry Her radiance and love
Wherever She leads my steps and lets
My eyes gaze and my tongue speak,
What took it away and left
This empty stare?

Or am I in a transit lounge
In an interspace vacuum while I await
Transfer from one craft to another?

O the wonder of wonders
My sweet Beloved!
I already see in the great inner distance
The smile on Your face,
The glow of the ever growing flame.

Another day approaches,
Another creation awaits,
Another journey begins
As You draw me near,
Through stillnesses and storms,
Near, ever nearer.

DINKAR D. PALANDE

LONE FLAME

LONE flame glowing in the night
With a faithful glimmer in mellow hue,
Your keen spirit holds within
A warmth which longs to kindle the true.
Yet from deep solitary spaces
There shines on you a silver star
Reminding of the upward journey
Crossing the firmament's sapphire bar
Which holds a crystalline sphere behind
Where spark by spark waves mystic rise
To touch the source which set ablaze
A myriad diamonds in endless skies.

Far below it seems like a dream
Where faint glimmers of that River steal
Through purple valleys waiting for the Sun,
Its ancient kinship with Earth to reveal.
Yet within the slumbering soil
Deathless ambers are ceaselessly made,
And because of a hidden miracle
Your candled spirit shall never fade.

HERTHA

A TEMPLE IS BORN

FACING the French Governor's bungalow in Pondicherry, on the south of it, there used to be an open ground about 6 acres in extent, rectangular in shape. In the centre of this ground stood an artistic memorial structure built in the 18th century. Curiously enough, it is a memorial to a courtesan named Aayi, who lived on the outskirts of Pondicherry in the 16th century and who was responsible for the construction of the fresh water tank, named Aayikulam after her. It was from this tank that French engineers were able to bring potable water in a canal to Pondicherry in the 18th century. The memorial is therefore an expression of gratitude to her. Today the picture of this monument serves as the official symbol of the union territory of Pondicherry.

In the early 40s of this century the then French Governor of Pondicherry decided to lay out a public park in this open space. Accordingly a layout was decided upon. Trees, shrubs and creepers were planted according to plan and walkways laid out. Over the last five decades the trees and shrubs have grown luxuriantly and the park attracts a large number of visitors, particularly on holidays and festive occasions. It also provides a convenient and shady atmosphere for the middle-aged and the old for their early morning perambulations, stretching exercises or meditation. Many film producers find it an excellent location for part of their outdoor shooting.

The French are well-known for their artistic tradition. In keeping with this tradition and in order to enhance the beauty of the park, a good number of idols of the deities of the Hindu pantheon, sculpted in stone, were brought and installed at different vantage points all over the park. As to whether these art objects were collected from ruins of temples or were obtained by desecration of then-existing temples is difficult to say. One thing, however, is certain and that is that the installation of all these deities within the area of the park was not done out of any faith in or love and devotion for the gods represented by these objects.

Among the sculpted figures thus installed are a beautiful idol of Lord Vishnu at the south-eastern corner of the park, a pillar with the figure of Lord Narasimha in the act of tearing open the entrails of demon Hiranyakashipu carved on all its four sides, a couple of idols of Nandi, Lord Shiva's mount, and several other deities at different points in the park. All these are in the open, exposed to sun, wind and rain.

It is an integral part of the Hindu psyche to feel a sense of reverence whenever one comes upon the figure of a Hindu deity. The sculpted figures of deities found in the park are no exception in the matter of how devout Hindus respond to their presence. Thus, it is not unusual to find at times one or more of these deities garlanded or marked with vermillion or sandal paste by an odd worshipper or two, and at times to find these worshippers waving a lighted piece of camphor or standing in prayer in front of the idol of their choice and devotion.

By far the most popular among these various deities is Lord Vishnu at the south-eastern corner and facing east. Some ten years back, this figure of Vishnu used to attract a handful of worshippers daily. There was an old Brahmin priest who would conduct the *pūjā* on behalf of the worshippers in the mornings and evenings. However, in the last three years or so, this old Brahmin priest has somehow disappeared from the scene and his place been taken by a young priest, obviously a non-Brahmin, because he does not sport the sacred thread.

The remarkable feature of the young man's tenure as the officiating priest has been the rapid development of the lonely idol of Vishnu into nothing less than a mini-temple, with an increasing number of worshippers turning up almost throughout the day. First came an octagonal parapet wall around the deity with a gate on the eastern side. Then followed, one by one, an electric light, an umbrella-shaped canopy made of a metal sheet above the idol, a lighted sign-board with the Vaishnava insignia and announcing the deity to be Arulmigu Sri Venkateshwara Balaji (in Tamil). A metal grill-covering came up in due course above the parapet wall right up to the canopy level, as also a metal grill door. Curtains were provided all round to screen the idol from the eyes of onlookers during the ceremonial bathing and dressing of the deity as part of the traditional ritualistic worship (*śoḍaśopacāra*). The idol has also been provided with a gold-painted arch and customary adornments, and is tastefully decorated with flowers right through the day. As a result, the deity looks in no way less resplendent than any such deity in a temple of greater antiquity and repute. In fact, the very sight of the idol, fully decked with flowers, ornaments and other paraphernalia, is evocative of a sense of piety and devotion in the onlooker. Added to it, the priest also has the traditional copper crown, common in Vaishnava temples in South India, a crown which, after the worship of the deity, the priest holds over the head of the devotee as a sign of the deity's benediction. The most recent addition to the deity's adornments is a string of tiny electric bulbs marking the outline of the arch around the idol.

The majority of the ever-increasing number of worshippers consists of the poor and lower-middle class people, among whom are a large number of patients and their relatives attending the nearby Government General Hospital. A number of people from the labour class residing even at distances of 3 km or more regularly visit the temple to seek the deity's favour.

It is the custom in South India to inaugurate the use of a newly acquired conveyance like a bicycle, moped, scooter, car, van, bus or truck by consecrating it to the deity at a temple. The vehicle is ceremonially worshipped by the priest on behalf of the owner, with flowers, vermilion, sandal paste and *ārati*, and fresh lemons are crushed under the tyres of the vehicle. This, the devout believe, is some kind of divine insurance against the occurrence of all accidents, whereas the insurance policy taken out as a compulsory legal requirement for all motorised vehicles is merely a convenient financial arrangement that is no

insurance against the occurrence of accidents, but only assures of suitable compensation in the event of any damage/loss that may be sustained as a result of accidents, fire or theft.

It is not uncommon among poor people who cannot afford the heavy expenses of traditional marriages to have marriages in their families solemnised at a simple ceremony performed at a temple.

It is a measure of people's growing faith in the power of Lord Balaji at this little temple that more and more of them have started consecrating their newly acquired vehicles at the temple and having marriage vows taken in front of, and blessed by, the deity.

No wonder then that the increasing popularity of this once neglected piece of temple sculpture, now grown into a regular temple, has caused some anxiety to the authorities of Pondicherry Municipality and, in order to obviate the possibility of its becoming a traffic hazard due to the crowds, they were even thinking of having it shifted to some other location. There have, however, been strong protests by the people against this move and apparently it has been shelved for the present.

Generally, the traditional installation of a deity in a temple is done with elaborate rituals lasting many days in strict accordance with the manner and details set forth in the Agama and Tantra Shastras, and the full proceedings of the installation ceremony are conducted under the direction of a person well-versed in the Shastras, who has enough purity and spiritual attainment. It is only then that divinity is infused into the deity and it is endowed with the power to grant the righteous prayers of its worshippers. It is also a part of the belief that, in course of time, this power gets slowly attenuated, because people come to the deity with all sorts of impure desires as part of their prayers. In order to revive the deity's powers, purificatory rituals are prescribed in the Shastras which may be performed once in 4 to 5 decades. That a piece of temple sculpture brought from its original location and installed without any ritual or ceremony by a non-believer in Hinduism, and without any thought of either the divinity it was sought to represent or its sanctity, merely for its aesthetic appeal in order to enhance the beauty of a public park, should, in time and on its own, grow into a temple with enough power of granting prayers to attract increasing number of worshippers is perhaps proof that in the ultimate analysis it is the strength of people's faith that endows a deity with the power to sanction prayers more than all the rituals and ceremonies laid down in the Shastras.

B. G. PATTEGAR

MUSINGS ON *PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS*

(Continued from the issue of June 1995)

THE MEETING (5)

Part Fourteen

From Wonder⁴ to Wonder

WHERE the non-believer sees only a piece of chiselled stone, the devotee sees and experiences a great Godhead; where the prosaic would see only a cloud, a Kalidasa sees a messenger from the beloved; where an ordinary person sees an ordinary life, a seer has the vision of a supreme Grace's working and benediction.

For the Mother, those days aboard the *Kaga Maru* must have been a marvel of Divine Revelations with their resultant Ecstasies and Ananda. On March 28, 1914, she wrote in her diary,

From the time we started and every day more and more, in all things we can see Thy divine intervention, everywhere Thy law is expressed, and I need all my inner conviction to feel that this is perfectly natural, so that I do not pass from wonder to wonder.

For one who can see directly the Divine working behind the manifestation, the least sunbeam is a messenger from the Master of the Suns, the smallest whisper of the winds is a loving note from the lyre of the Master of our Hearts. She who was the Divine as well as His creation, realised integrally the wonder behind each facet of living, each moment of being. We, with our clipped outlook, fragmented understanding and limited consciousness, do not realise the marvel of Grace that a rose, a snowflake or a rainbow represents. Those who understand the workings of the Lord become one with His being and becoming. The Mother further writes,

At no moment do I feel that I am living outside Thee and never have the horizons appeared vaster to me and the depths at once more luminous and unfathomable.

To be one with Him and yet to find *the depths at once more luminous and unfathomable* represents a divine paradox which we human beings, imprisoned in our ego-self, may not be able to understand. But what follows is a clearest statement of the dual aspect of the Mother, the Individual and the Transcendent. She writes,

Grant, O Divine Teacher, that we may know and accomplish our mission upon earth better and better, more and more, that we may make full use of all the energies that are in us, and Thy sovereign Presence become manifest ever more perfectly in the silent depths of our soul, in all our thoughts, all our feelings, all our actions.

As has been noted elsewhere the Mother had embarked on this voyage conscious of her Divine Mission on earth and had ingathered her energies and had prepared herself totally to seize the Unknown and Unknowable and to bring and manifest Him here upon this earth. One moment she identifies herself with the earth and creation, the next she remembers her oneness with the Creator and writes,

I find it almost strange to speak to Thee, so much is it Thou who livest in me, thinkest and lovest.

Thus playing hide and seek with her Individual and Transcendent aspects the Mother approached the Indian shores, to prepare a New Dawn, to give birth to a New Creation here, where Sri Aurobindo was awaiting some further impetus to his Yoga. One day more was to pass before the Divine Meeting.

Part Fifteen

The Blessed Day

The great day for which Gods and Demons had awaited for millenniums arrived at last. The Divine Mother put down the word Pondicherry on top of a new page of her diary and with it surely put her seal of approval on the small city and made it the City of the Future. Sri Aurobindo had already sanctified it by his arrival; by the Mother's added acceptance it became the sacredmost place, the venue of the greatest Divine Lila and later of the descent of the highest Divine Power on earth.

Who can sing of that day which was the most pregnant one in all time? Did the moments know the sublime Event, *The Meeting*, which was to take place that afternoon? What were the expectations of the Gods or of the Sages, who supposedly know the significance of coming Events? Did some new sun take birth on that Day of Days? Let us read what the Mother wrote in her diary on March 29, 1914 —

O Thou whom we must know, understand, realise, absolute Consciousness, eternal Law, Thou who guidest and illuminest us, who movest

and inspirest us, grant that these weak souls may be strengthened and those who fear be reassured. To Thee I entrust them, even as I entrust to Thee our entire destiny.

Every being of the Lord's Creation was dear to our sweet Mother and the welfare of her children was always uppermost in her mind. That day first she offered them to the Lord and prayed on their behalf. Then after entrusting them and herself entirely to the Lord, she prepared herself for a total surrender to Sri Aurobindo.

This Day and this Date will be forever sacred in the calendar of the Creation.

In Memory of March 29, 1914

On this day of days opened the golden pathway to the glorious future of all creation. The foundation was laid, the union effectuated which was to raise the lofty structure of the Divine Truth-consciousness.

The Gandharvas must have sung, Apsaras must have danced and Gods must have rained flowers, though in the Kali Yuga only chosen eyes may have had the privilege to witness the heavenly phenomena. The vibration spirals of those sweet moments are now touching all the shores of time-eternity and pervading the manifest and the unmanifest.

The union of their eyes has put its seal on destiny. In between them the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have churned all the poison of the worlds and drunk it to the last bitter dregs.

And now we are waiting for her descent or rather ascent with the pot of Immortality from the abysses of the Inconscient.

O Beloved, come!

Part Sixteen

The Meeting

At last the voyage ended. The Divine Mother reached Pondicherry. The fated and blessed day of the *meeting* dawned on the shores of the Bay of Bengal. She walked on the soil of this small city of India, still under the French Rule. The earth must have thrilled to the touch of her feet, the air must have exulted at the sweet cadence of her voice. March 29, 1914 was the chosen Date. There must have been a hushed expectation in the worlds of the Perfects. The Gods must have waited for the moment with bated breath.

At about 3.30 p.m. the Mother approached the "Guest House" where Sri

Aurobindo lived. She entered and the Two stood in front of each other. The Avatar met the Aditi, the Shakti stood before her Lord. Time must have stood still and all eternity gathered into that sacred moment. In total surrender the Mother sat at the feet of Sri Aurobindo, whom she recognised as the *One* who had appeared before her in her visions and whom she had called Krishna. Effacing herself totally she laid at the feet of the Lord all her great experiences and all her *siddhis*. There was no need of words, all was said and understood in silence.

On March 30, 1914 she recorded in her diary the feelings and emotions of that momentous *meeting* which millenniums had prepared and which some day will surely usher in, as its result, in this long-suffering world the awaited Millennium. She wrote,

In the presence of those who are integrally Thy servitors, those who have attained the perfect consciousness of Thy presence, I became aware that I am still far, very far from what I yearn to realise; and I know the highest I can conceive, the noblest and purest is still dark and ignorant beside what I should conceive.

Here we see an example of true humility. In the presence of Sri Aurobindo the Mother became conscious of the future goal that was to be achieved—the Supramental Transformation. It entered her consciousness. Probably this is what the Mother refers to as *what I should conceive*, she who had already entered the worlds of Supermind. She writes,

But this perception, far from being depressing, stimulates and strengthens the aspiration, the energy, the will to triumph over all obstacles so as to be at last identified with Thy law and Thy work.

Gradually the horizon becomes distinct, the path grows clear, and we move towards a greater and greater certitude.

The realisation of the enormity of what is to be accomplished gives to her aspiration a new uplift and vibrant élan. A greater energy courses through her and the path of light that she was treading becomes broader and more luminous. Her resolve is strengthened and henceforth she will walk onwards with Sri Aurobindo's support towards the goal which was till then even beyond conception, a thing seemingly impossible. Henceforth, she would walk on this road, towards this goal, without any hesitation for the rest of her life, without doubting or questioning, because Sri Aurobindo would be there to support and guide. To him she pays the supreme compliment,

It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the

densest darkness, He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.

During that one meeting she had realised not only who *He* was whom she had seen, but also what his being here on this earth meant in the history of the evolution. And also that due to his advent, one day, the Reign of the Lord would be established on earth.

This is the declaration and the assurance which can light our path when we do not see even an inch in the dense darkness of our individual and collective falsehood and misery. That day the Mother granted a supreme assurance and the greatest boon. In the light of this we can rest confident that surely all life will be divinized. We can say, "Have patience, O heart, it is only a matter of time. Our Master and Lord will seize us and cast us anew in his own likeness." In thankfulness we can offer our adoration and gratitude to the two Avatars in the Mother's own words, with which she ended this great prayer,

O Lord, Divine Builder of this marvel, my heart overflows with gratitude when I think of it, and my hope has no bound.

My adoration is beyond all words, my reverence is silent.

Thus was laid the foundation of a new divine future for our universe on that day of the *meeting*.

Part Seventeen

At Last

A New Creation's seed was sown in the fields of Infinity, and Eternity consented to be imprisoned in Time, when on the top of the stairs stood Sri Aurobindo and on the landing of the curving staircase stood the incarnate Love—our Divine Mother. From her eyes the yearning of the Earth and all its suffering creatures gazed at him, imploring for his Grace. He saw before him his *shakti*, without whom, for four years, he stood still on a high summit-pass to the Unknown. Thus the two looked at each other and wove in that look a glorious Future to be unfolded in Time.

Later when she sat at his feet for an hour she annulled her being with all its great realizations and consented henceforth to unfolding anew in his Light. The mighty collaborators met and in that profound silence the marvels of the future were sketched in the hues of Supermind.

Part Eighteen

After the Meeting

To enter the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo one has to wipe out not only the old *sanskaras* but also the old *siddhis*. When face to face with the Heights and Depths of this Supreme Yoga we realise that our attainments gained with such intense effort were only a preparation for stepping onto this High Road to Divinity. As a bus cannot take us right to the top of Everest—it can only take us to a low plateau where we can make our base camp—in the same way all the other high human endeavours help us set foot on this path which uses Everest-like summits as first stepping stones. One might have attained the *ashtasiddhis* or *nava nuddhis*—in short, all the powers that occultism, Vedanta or the old yogas can give can at best serve only as a spring-board from where we can take a leap into the great Unknown, into the Beyond, and can participate in this never-before-attempted adventure of the Integral Yoga—the never-before-imagined-or-deemed-possible Transformation that this Yoga aims to bring about. Sri Aurobindo said that his yoga begins from the point where the other yogas end.

When one enters this path one has to make oneself a clean slate for the Divine to write upon. The riches of the past yogas have to be offered at the altar of the future. The crutch of the mental knowledge, howsoever profound, has to be discarded in the same way as the ape first discarded the use of his tail to stand upright on both his feet. We have to make ourselves ready to enter the worlds of Intuition. We have to understand that till now we have only dabbled in relative knowings, not in true Knowledge.

What is surrender and how is it done? It is shown to us by the Mother. On March 29, 1914 she met Sri Aurobindo and in one sweep she laid all the luminous treasures of her great past at his feet. On April 1, 1914, she noted in her diary,

I feel we have entered the very heart of Thy sanctuary and grown aware of Thy very will. A great joy, a deep peace reign in me, and yet all my inner constructions have vanished like a vain dream and I find myself now, before Thy immensity, without a frame or system, like a being not yet individualised. All the past in its external form seems ridiculously arbitrary to me, and yet I know it was useful in its own time.

Thus, she, the Greatest, in one day, undid the near-perfect individualization that she had achieved. When one enters *the Immensity* what *frame or system* can one use to take one's bearings? Only in the Divine Presence which is like a sanctuary can one experience the deepest peace and joy. Like a child one has to begin anew.

About all that she had been, the Mother made only this brief comment,

But now all is changed: a new stage has begun.

Then what have we to which we should cling? One has to renounce all to gain All.

(To be continued)

SHYAM KUMARI

THE GOLDEN PATH

You can now stand straight and tall before Divinity,
for your soul is sanctified by Her supreme Touch.
She has placed the Golden Chain around your mortal neck
and the Holy Trail is whereupon you the Pilgrim will tread.

Your Golden Path is straight as a silent speeding arrow:
no power on earth can bend or bar its way.
You know the Destination and have the Address
to which you will proceed and shall never despair or digress.

You are verily Her child in the Spirit's own right.
None can snatch you nor snare you from Her Sovereign Domain.
No circumstances can cow you down nor any force
Compel or crush you. That's Her assurance and command.

Go now, my friend, with adoration in your heart and a smile in
your soul.
Fear not, doubt not, for She is holding your hand on the Salvation
road.

VIREN

A GREAT CHALLENGE AND A GREAT OPPORTUNITY

1

GENERALLY, we Ashramites do not realise how privileged we are to be living in the Ashram and serving the Mother. We have been as if given all the heavens on a platter. To have seen and received the blessings of the Avatars, to have been accepted by the Incarnate Divine Mother, to have the honour to serve in some way or other Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, to have been deemed worthy of participating in this great Divine Work, in spite of our thousand and one imperfections, are opportunities for which surely the Gods envy us.

Generally, upon entering the Ashram premises, the first Ashramite whom a visitor sees and comes into contact with, is the person on duty at the Ashram gate, through whom the Mother meets her children who come from all over the world to pay homage to the Supramental Avatars' Samadhi. Some of these visitors are poor, some illiterate, others shy or sensitive. For such people even the hint of harshness or snobbishness would be a great ordeal. It might have taken them a long time to gather courage even to enter the Ashram. For them the Ashram is an unknown place. They neither know our rules nor do they know what sort of behaviour is expected from them. Others are brash, uncouth or unclean. Many walk in puffed up with the pride of their wealth, expecting VIP treatment. Some are outright rude. Many talk loudly in the Ashram courtyard breaking the sacred hush. Some of them even spit in the building or walk with their shoes on to the Samadhi. There is regular jostling in the queue for Sri Aurobindo's Room Darshan and so many try to push inside the Lord's chamber elbowing or crowding out those who have their birthdays, forgetting that one can be far from the Divine even in the most sacred spot and the Divine may reveal Itself to anybody living in a humble hut. Even worse are those who quarrel with the people on duty or make critical remarks against things in the Ashram or those of its departments which do not appeal to them.

It is natural to lose one's calm and poise when one is confronted daily by such crowds, each visitor being a challenge to those who welcome them to the Ashram. Yet, in spite of everything, it is a welcome we should and must extend to every visitor. A successful crowd management will not do.

We all remember how the Mother smiled at thousands of people, even upon those openly hostile or outrightly hypocritical, day in and day out, year after year, for more than half-a-century, knowing very well the ugly thoughts or the careless attitude a particular person might have. The Mother used to seize the smallest receptive part in the persons to open the inner portals and to infuse them with divinity, of course according to their capacity and aspiration. This work She attempts to do at present through each of Her children who are Her spiritual ambassadors.

This then is the challenge and this the opportunity for those on duty at the Ashram gate. It is no easy task, far from it,—a great yogic poise and equanimity is expected from and required of these sadhaks.

2

THE RECEPTIONISTS' PRAYER

We, The Mother's children,
 We, who represent the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to humanity through our interaction with visitors and devotees,
 We, who feel privileged to receive at one place people of all lands and races, of all denominations and all cultures,
 We, who have been called by the Mother to manifest Her Light and Love through our actions,
 We, to whom, as the sadhaks of Integral Yoga, the visitors look with great expectation
 of sweet and smiling courtesy,
 of goodwill and benevolence,
 of calm strength and joyful composure,
 of the absence of rudeness, anger, harshness, roughness, haughtiness and bad temper,
 We, the heroes and soldiers of Her army of Light,
 We, one and all, without exception, resolve that we shall make sincere efforts to come up to these high and difficult expectations and become worthy of our Divine Masters.
 Therefore, we should not judge people from their appearances but with all humility endeavour to recognise and feel the Divine Presence in them.
 While maintaining order and enforcing discipline, we may at times have apparently to be strict and even severe. Yet we shall not be rude, harsh or arrogant. A thin line of demarcation makes it a most difficult factor in our job which our critics fail to understand or appreciate.
 When we tend to become mechanical, the soul seems to recede into the background and we lose warmth and freshness in our dealings, we become like withered flowers without fragrance.
 So, on this auspicious day of the 75th year of the Mother's final arrival, we implore Her Grace and Blessings upon us and pray that we may march forward to yet greater perfection.

DWARPAL

TWO POEMS

ALL LEAD ME...

STUMBLINGS, errors,
Falls or failures
All lead me to Thee,
O my dear!

To the longed-for glory.
The third eye is open...
And I wake up
To life's mysterious morn.

Why torment myself
With stains of sin
Which enwrap me
With claims of time?

Let my path
Be sun-lit,
Let my heart
Be moon-lit
To discover thee
With fervour
And install Thee
In depths inviolate.

All have been prepared
And enacted
By the unseen Doer
To attune myself

REALISATION

My meek eyes
Seek the One
In earnest Calm;
In familiar Crowds,
As well as
In lonely woods.

Only one Presence
Reigns...
It guides and controls
Me, You and all.
Giving the taste of the whole,
It leads
To a castle of love
Where we, in a circle
Of never-ending game,
Play and smile
In a blithe bloom
That never un-petals.

ASHALATA DASH

TWO SAPPHIRE BLUE EYES

Dark and silent was the night
And the stars peered afar.
I sat under a Peepal tree
With a quiet mind and heart.
Earth and Nature were asleep
Or were they in a trance?
I do not know.

A soft melody slowly neared,
A humming of bees,
Or was it jingling anklet-bells?
Ripples of far-off seas
Or the Rishis' hymnal chants?
Or from Saraswati's Veena-strings
Emerging, an immortal harmony?
I do not know.

Opening ajar the doors of Night
A flow of golden light came down.
To infinity it spread.
I saw two feet bathed in light,
Rosy-hued and petal-soft,
Or moonbeams crystallised?
I do not know.

I looked up and beheld,
Two sapphire-blue eyes
Looking calmly at me,
Deep they gazed
And thrilled my soul.
Love, Beauty, Grace and Bliss –
All was there.
That I know.

JYOTSNA MOHANTY

AMRITA—THE WONDERFUL MESSENGER OF THE MOTHER

ON 24th September 1955 in the morning, to my astonishment, the Mother for the first time sent me tiny, cute, pink rose buds—signifying “Tenderness for the Divine. It is sweet with charming shade and delicate form, a smile that blossoms”—through Amrita, the General Manager of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He received my thanks with a smile. This was how I had his first contact. Afterwards we met and talked several times. His subtle sense of humour was something to be relished and remembered.

Mostly he read out to the Mother my letters regarding *Savitri*-work and other matters.

In the Sixties the white roses sent by the Mother came through Amrita. Chinmoy, his assistant, used to bring them to me.

The Mother wrote the following letter to Amrita when she opened my bank-account.

13.10.62

Amrita,

This morning (Saturday) you must go to the Bank (United Commercial) to open *an account in the name of Huta* (Miss Huta Hindocha).

For that purpose you will take Rs. 500—Five hundred rupees—from my account at the Bank. She will operate this account and she must be given a cheque book.

If it is necessary you will take her (Huta) to the Bank. I attach a note which you will give to her if you have to take her to the Bank.

If there is something you do not understand you can come up at 9 o'clock to ask me.

He did the needful exactly according to the Mother's wish.

*

Time passed by.

Now I was busy arranging the exhibition of *Savitri*-paintings along with the Mother's sketches.

I suggested to the Mother that it would be nice if Amrita declared open the Exhibition. She answered on 1.2.1967:

“My very dear little child Huta,

Amrita will go at 10.30 a.m. on 10th to open the exhibition and Nolini will go with him.

All my love.”

Since I was not allowed by the Mother to attend, I came to know from others that the exhibition of *Savitri*-paintings was highly appreciated by people. Amrita and Nolini congratulated me and praised the work profusely. They also expressed their feelings to the Mother. She informed me of it.

Much later, to my amazement, I came to know from some Ashramites that Amrita had been in a previous life Michelangelo!

When I went to Europe in 1952 I saw the magnificent work of Michelangelo. I was fascinated by his masterpieces both in sculpture and painting.

Let me quote from the translation of a Sonnet by Michelangelo:

“With chiselled touch
The stone unhewn and cold
Becomes a living mould.
The more the marble wastes,
The more the statue grows.”

He has also written:

“The true work of art is but a shadow of the divine perfection.”

*

One day the Mother could not write in answer to my letter owing to her ill-health. So she conveyed her message through Amrita. He wrote to me:

“The Mother said: ‘The Divine is always in you. One must become conscious of its Presence and gain the contact with it.’

“This is what I understood from what the Mother said.”

He was a wonderful messenger full of understanding, good will, consideration and kindness.

I am extremely sad to miss people like Amrita, Nolini, Pavitra, André, Vasudha, Champaklal, Dyuman, Parichand and so many others who dedicated their lives exclusively to the cause of the Supreme Lord. These people will never be forgotten. By the Grace of the Divine Mother, they may have taken a new birth in order to fulfil yet other brilliant and higher aspirations of their souls.

I read the book, *Reminiscences* by Nolini Kanta Gupta and K. Amrita. It is a very interesting book. It gives us an idea how these people worked together in perfect harmony and understanding, fulfilling selflessly the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in building the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Amrita stated in *Reminiscences*:

“.... An image of immeasurable power—that was how I felt the Mother to be whenever I approached her. She, however, held that power in herself without allowing the least display of it. On some occasions the great power would shine forth irresistibly. Our inner sense would perceive this radiation if it was awake....”

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A PLUNGE INTO THE UNKNOWN

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE UNEXPECTED

(7)

THE MOTHER'S New Year Message for 1951:

Lord, we are upon earth to accomplish Thy work of transformation. It is our sole will, our sole preoccupation. Grant that it may be also our sole occupation and that all our actions may help us towards this single goal.

This year, for me personally, was a year of deep inner preparation. I was preparing myself to make Sri Aurobindo's Yoga the "sole occupation" of my life. This year too I had an unexpected experience. One evening I felt feverish. So I did not take my normal dinner. About midnight the temperature rose to a very high degree with a severe pain all over my body. I was sleeping alone in a room. I did not call anybody and was bearing the pain. When the pain was unbearable something from within started calling, without uttering a word or making any noise,—Mā! Mā! Mā! and with that very call I felt some comfort. I felt as if a magic wand had passed over a turbulent sea and the sea had become calm. Things went on like this for some time and then I fell asleep. When I woke up in the morning, the fever was gone, only a little weakness remained. I told nobody of what had happened to me at night and started the normal routine.

My father was of an opposite nature. Although on one side he was an idealist, a teetotaller and a highly intellectual man, he lacked control over his nervous being. Whenever he had a fever he would create such a situation that everybody around him would feel himself or herself responsible for his fever!

The New Year Message of 1952:

O Lord, Thou hast decided to test the quality of our faith and to pass our sincerity on Thy touchstone. Grant that we come out greater and purer from the ordeal.

I have narrated earlier how I came to Pondicherry in February, had two darshans and then went back to Calcutta *via* Puri. I failed in the 'test'. However, a strong resolution was taken within to pass the final test.

My resolution was rewarded by Mother Mahalakshmi with an unforgettable experience. I wanted to avoid the noise and crowd of Calcutta during the Puja days and went to Santiniketan to spend a few quiet days amidst Nature's autumnal splendour. The Durgapuja days were rainy and stormy because of the

fight between Mother Durga and the Asura. At last the victory of the Mother came, and on the Lakshmipuja day the sky was showering in daytime its golden rays over the green fields all around, and in the evening the full moon rose with all its splendour. I meditated for a long time with open eyes and in my ecstasy seemed to have seen Mother Mahalakshmi's face in the full moon. That night even my sleep and dreams were washed with moonlight and I felt Mother Mahalakshmi's presence throughout the night.

The New Year message of 1953 was:

Lord, Thou hast told us: Do not give way, hold tight. It is when everything seems lost that all is saved.

This was the year when I took the final plunge in August. A few months before that, my father wrote to me to see him at Santiniketan. I was in Calcutta. I surmised my father's purpose. I was absolutely correct. Something cautioned me from within in the Mother's words: "Don't speak. Act."

This time my father poured out all his arguments, all his emotions to debar me from going to Pondicherry and taking to the life of Yoga. He said: "If you want to do sadhana do it after the age of sixty. Now you have to get married and look after the whole family. Who will look after me in my old age?"

He said this after reading *The Life Divine*, *The Mother*, and some of Sri Aurobindo's *Letters*! I kept absolutely mum like an obedient son. Says Sri Aurobindo in one of his letters on Yoga:

3a "Family, society, country are a larger ego—they are not the Divine. One
can work for them and say that one is working for the Divine only if one is
conscious of the Divine Adesh to act for that purpose or of the Divine Force
working within one..."

And at another place:

"The man who turns to the spiritual life... is reproached by lots of people for his 'Adharma'. But if he does not do this Adharma, he is bound for ever to the lower life—for there is always some duty there to be done—and cannot take up the spiritual Dharma or can do it only when he is old and his faculties impaired."

This time I had already taken the final decision. One thing remained to be done—to seek the blessings of Gurudev Rabindranth Tagore, in whose Ashram I had been brought up since my boyhood days and was educated too. He had departed long ago. I went to his earthly abode, the 'Uttarayana' complex, and silently spoke to his soul about my decision. I believe his soul heard me and gave its blessing.

I came back to Calcutta. I did not know that a conspiracy was going on behind my back. In our Calcutta house I lived in a small room by the side of my father's room on the third storey. One evening somebody came and told me that

my 'Didima' (maternal grandmother) wanted to see me. She was in her room on the second storey. As soon as I entered her room I saw a fair-looking girl, whom I did not know, sitting on a cot. Naturally, we exchanged glances. I asked 'Didima' why she had sent for me. Didima kept smiling. I was taken aback. Then a lady of our house came and asked me to see if the girl would be to my choice. I was angry and went back. However, I felt sorry for the girl. Was it not an insult to her? I was always sympathetic towards girls and women, and felt that our social customs needed to be changed.

The Mother's new year message came to my rescue. I did not give way to my father's intentions and held firm. Under the pressure of my father when everything seemed lost to me all was saved by the divine Grace. And all was saved not for me alone but also for my father and the whole of our family. This will be revealed gradually.

Let me take this opportunity to dwell a bit on the artist and poet Nishikanto who was also an ex-student of Santiniketan, older than I by about ten years and contemporary with me during 1930-32. He was at that time a student of Kalabhavan. But he soon left Santiniketan for good and came over to Pondicherry. Nishikanto's elder brother, Sudhakanto, was a dedicated Santiniketanite who served Tagore throughout his life. Tagore loved Nishikanto too and wanted to draw him nearer. But who could cage Nishikanto whose bird-soul with its fire-wings aspired to scan the Aurobindonian firmament? Nishikanto himself told me that when he was about to leave Santiniketan a disappointed Tagore said: "When I came to know that you had been reading Aurobindo Ghose's books I realised that you were out of bounds for me."

Such was Nishikanto's soul. But as for his vital being we find entirely a different Nishikanto both in Santiniketan and in Pondicherry. His greed and gluttony for food caused him tremendous physical suffering throughout his life. I still remember an incident in the Santiniketan hospital where both of us got admitted, myself for a surgical intervention, and he for some stomach-trouble. When the doctor came he petitioned for a chicken. But the doctor prescribed for him only milk and puffed rice. Much later I came to know that Nishikanto stealthily slipped into the kitchen. A big pan of milk and a basketful of puffed-rice were kept there. He emptied the contents of both into his stomach. Later, when apprehended and taken to task, he calmly replied: "I have followed the doctor's advice, I have taken only milk and puffed rice, nothing else!" And the same Nishikanto we found here in Pondicherry. He was always unrepentant about his exploits in the matter of food.

In 1950, when I stayed in the same house with him for a few days, once he spoke to me jocularly: "You know, Abani, one day I prepared a bottle of vinegar with green mangoes. Now, a spoon or two of vinegar does not satisfy my palate as they do that of you people. You know what I did? I poured the entire content down my throat!" He broke into a devilish laugh. And then he added

with some sense of pride: "And immediately I had an ulcer in my stomach and it took the Mother ten years to cure me!"

Another day, when a few of us—Nishikanto, Sisir Mitra, a visitor and myself were waiting for the Mother's balcony darshan, Sisir-da introduced Nishikanto to the visitor with these words—"He is poet Nishikanto, it is because of his poor health that he clings to the feet of the Mother, otherwise he would go elsewhere and open up a hotel." Swift came the reply—"And whatever food would not be sold would go down to my stomach!" He would make fun of his own greed.

One day as I was standing behind Nishikanto in the queue to the Dining Room—it was then raining heavily—I told him: "Nishikanto-da, it looks like Bengal's rainy season." He retorted: "But where are the hilsa fishes of Bengal?" My elder brother also was equally greedy. Whenever he came to the Ashram he would bring a big bottle of mustard oil for Nishikanto. With that oil the poet would fry fishes and both of them would enjoy themselves. Once Nishikanto told me: "Abani, one day I shall feed you fried fishes." I retorted: "Nishikanto-da, have I come here to eat fried fishes?" He laughed.

However, Nishikanto was very conscious about his weaknesses. My elder brother purchased a book of the poet and got it signed by him. The poet wrote a couplet on it in Bengali. I still remember one line which could be translated thus:

"Forget the greedy and remember the poet."

In 1952, on 24th April, before I left for Calcutta, I handed over to Nishikanto two of his books of poems entitled 'Diganta' and 'Baijayanti' for his signature. Along with his signature he wrote two couplets on them. On 'Diganta' (meaning 'The Horizon') he wrote—(I am giving a free adaptation):

Infinity meets the Finite on a line of the earth's horizon. And in the depth of that union the poet's couplet exists.

It is interesting to note that he used both the name of the book and my name (Abani, meaning the earth) in this couplet.

'Baijayanti' means 'the flag of Victory'. He wrote:

This flag of Victory, given by the Mother,—let me hand it over to you, and I shall be ever with you in this victory march.

On the day of Tagore's passing the Muse paid me a surprise visit and opened for me a little the gate into the realm of poesy. In 1953 Sri Aurobindo and the Mother opened that gate wider and wider for me. This was the very first effect of my plunge into the Unknown.

Although I am writing this series as reminiscences, to me Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are not relics of the past, they are in the living present, they are the *living present*!

Had they not been present with me always, I would have died long ago. To me it is their *living presence* that constitutes the Ashram Tree. We, ashramites, are but that tree's leaves and twigs which must fall today or tomorrow.

It is absolutely idle to speculate as to who is going to be the first Superman. Even the prospective superman should be humble enough to realise that he is but a doll of clay in the hands of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. They can make or break him as they will.

For any spiritual realisation humility is the first condition. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were the humblest persons in the Ashram. Let us all try our best to emulate them in order to acquire this virtue. Without this quality it is absolutely vain to try to become a superman, although one may become a super-ego—that is to say, asuric superman—a Ravana, a Hitler, a Stalin.

The greatest lesson that I have learnt from the Mother is her humility and her power of forgiveness. In spite of my innumerable stupidities and vain arrogance she has always forgiven me till the end and has made me understand what humility is. Sri Aurobindo has spoken of the Mother's humility and the Mother has always spoken of Sri Aurobindo's humility. Sri Aurobindo in his poem 'God' says that God's Godhead is to be understood by His Power of humility. The poem ends:

Thou who disdainest not the worm to be
Nor even the clod,
Therefore we know by that humility
That thou art God.

Soon after taking the final plunge I found to my dismay that I was struggling in a stormy sea. I left one shore definitively but did not reach the other. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother took my resolution seriously and tested me severely. I did not want to become a superman, nor even a great sadhak,—I had no such ambition, I wanted only to be a simple worker giving my best for the work of the Mother—and yet I observed with a shock that the Mother was cold-shouldering me this time.

I had a limited fund of money which I deposited with the Ashram cashier and while staying at Golconde I informed Nolini-da about my final decision. He himself was sympathetic but there was no clear assurance from the Mother's side.

Of course, I was quite comfortable at Golconde, took up my old garden work in the afternoon and started my sadhana, the very first effect of which was a flurry of Bengali songs and poems.

On Durgapuja day (1953) the Mother distributed the following message of Sri Aurobindo:

O soldier and hero of God, where for thee is sorrow or shame or suffering?
For thy life is a glory, thy deeds a consecration, victory thy apotheosis,
defeat thy triumph.

Fight, while thy hands are free, with thy hands and thy voice and thy
brain and all manner of weapons. Art thou chained in the enemy's
dungeons and have his gags silenced thee? Fight with thy silent all-besieging
soul and thy wide-ranging will-power and when thou art dead, fight still
with the world-encompassing force that went out from God within thee....

I was so inspired with this message that the day I received it from the
Mother's hand I translated it into a Bengali poem. I also started translating Sri
Aurobindo's poems which gave me great courage and strength on my path of
sadhana and in my fight against the hostile forces and against my own lower
nature.

I was leading a more rigorous and austere life than most of the Ashramites.
All the Ashramites got fruits which I did not. All the Ashramites were given tea,
eggs etc. which I voluntarily abnegated. I was not taking any extra food beyond
the Dining Room food three times a day. I was working in the garden from 1.30
p.m. to 5 p.m. with strict regularity. And when the call came from the Mother to
the Ashramites and visitors to devote their extra time to help build the proposed
new building of the Cottage Industries (now called 'Cottage Guest House') I was
one of the first to join it and one of the last to leave it after about two years,
when the hired labour took over. So, even in manual labour I was behind none of
the Ashramites. And yet my stay in Golconde had become an eyesore to some of
the Ashramites.

One elderly sadhak started behaving roughly with me and tried to pick a
quarrel to which I did not respond. Still he continued in his endeavour. He was
working at the Dining Room. He served bananas for breakfast, rice for lunch
and he had gate duty at the Playground in the evening. One morning as soon as I
stood before him following the queue, he moved away and started doing some
other work. This was deliberate mischief. Because I could not move forward the
whole queue stood still. But the Ashram people at that time were very
disciplined and visitors were quite negligible in number. Such behaviour would
not be tolerated outside the Ashram. He was at least thirty years older than I. I
was wondering and everybody was wondering why he behaved like that. At last
he came and threw a banana so hard on my plate that it rebounded and fell on
the ground. I picked it up. I was irritated although I did not give vent to my
irritation. Something warned me from within—"If you want to do Yoga, you
should not be irritated whatever the reason. The Mother is testing you."

On another occasion when he was on gate duty at the Playground I was
entering along with some other people. There were people in front and people
behind. The rule was that the last man to enter should close the gate. As soon as

I entered he took me to task—"Why haven't you closed the gate?" I replied—"There is a man behind me, how can I close the gate in his face?" He spoke in a harsh tone—"That is not your look-out, you must close the gate." Again something spoke within me—"In spite of his rough and unseemly behaviour, don't be irritated; on the contrary, bear only goodwill towards him and even try to love him." And I sincerely tried the method. Still, on another occasion after entering as I closed the gate he shouted at me—"Why is there such noise?" As a matter of fact, his shouting was much more noisy than the noise of my closing the gate. But this time I was prepared. I spontaneously looked straight into his eyes and smiled. On seeing me smiling he too smiled, and, wonder of wonders! since then he never again tried to pick a quarrel with me! These were the practical lessons that the Mother was giving me on the way of sadhana.

A young newcomer wanted to stay in the Ashram. The Mother at once made him a permanent member of the Ashram and gave him work in the laundry. One evening as I was taking a stroll on the sea-side footpath he stopped me and started chatting. At that time I was always concentrated on sadhana even while walking. The very next day was a special occasion when the Mother would distribute some message. I was always eagerly waiting for these messages. They were the guidelines and torchlight on the path of my difficult journey. I told him with much enthusiasm—"Tomorrow we are going to have special blessings." He poohpoohed my enthusiasm and replied—"Again we are going to have a piece of paper!" I was stunned! Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's messages are mere pieces of paper to him!? And him the Mother had made a permanent member of the Ashram without a trial, and in my case?

These are moments of ordeal. The hostile forces are on the pounce. Their voices could be heard: "Now see for yourself—is this not sheer injustice? You have taken up your sadhana so sincerely and she is just playing with you as a cat plays with a mouse! She is sending you trial after trial; and that man who has scant respect for her messages is made a permanent member of the Ashram without a question! Can that French lady be the Divine Mother? If you want to do sadhana go to some other Ashram, there is no dearth of Ashrams in India. Particularly when Sri Aurobindo is not there why subject yourself to the whims of that 'memsahib'? Have you no self-respect as an Indian? Pack up and leave the Ashram without informing her."

I knew that these were hostile suggestions, and yet in the Playground when the Mother was sitting on her chair, I from quite a distance poured all the venom of my heart out, aiming it at her, without uttering a word. And I shall never forget the expression on her face! With closed eyes she was offering all that venom to the Supreme Lord. If she had hit back I would have fallen flat on the ground. This is divine humility. On another occasion when the Mother was distributing toffees from the same place and the hostile forces were after me I shouted within against the hostile forces. The Mother was so open to our

* in a sarcastic tone

vibrations that her body shook quite visibly—clearly I saw it. Although the shout was internal, without a sound, and although it was against the hostile forces, she looked askance at me while giving me the toffee. Her silent message was clear to me—“Why this noise? Fight them with your calm Self.”

(To be continued)

ABANI SINHA

THE MASTER OF SACRIFICE

O LORD, summit and source of all,
 Teach me the secret of Thy Sacrifice.
 In Thy creative scheme I am the base and the altar!
 Resolve in me the mystery of Thy breath...

I carry within the crude elements and dross of existence...
 Sprinkle on them clarified butter from above,
 Bring down the heavenly flame
 And kindle the eternal Pyre!

Offer there the incense of immortality
 And make me incense-smelling for ever...
 Let me not compromise with the evil and the undivine,
 O master Fashioner of destiny!

Convert my desires into glowing aspirations...
 Keep at bay the ever-attacking darkness,
 And hurl Thy superconscient Discus
 To cut asunder the knots of obscurity!

Let Light flow through nerves and veins
 Chanting always the original Word OM!
 Tissues and cells will quiver with expectancy
 And release the fettered life into immensities...

O Lord, befriend me to attain the inner selfhood!
 And thus pave the way for the oncoming Race,
 Dreamt and yearned for by the spiritual Elite
 As the culmination of the evolutionary march...

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

CHRISTALIS

by

GEORGETTE COTY

(Continued from the issue of June 1995)

A Flight

THE winds were wild tonight, the window panes rattled on—the flame flickered in the lamp and my thoughts took flight in search of myself.

Where dwells my heart? I mused. Not the one that ticks away inside my chest, wearing away toward its own end—but the one that feels the ripples of emotions and love.

Where dwells my soul? Is my mind a messenger to my earth-bound comprehension? How am I linked, put together body-to-mind, mind-to-soul? Who tuned up this complex instrument? Am I my maker's musical device and does he play upon it now and then marvellous resonances—at other times closes it, so that no fine sound issues from it?

Marvels of heaven, open your gates of earth towards your dwellings. Let my kin, your children, O Lord, find you. Stretch out your hands toward us. Can you make heaven and earth as one? Can you bring us to new pastures with new seeds sown in them, and will you teach us how to garner the crops, so that there may be a good harvest for our lives?

Even though, sitting on this barren ground, my heart is heavy with yield... May I offer it to you? Will you accept it, can it serve delight before your throne?

And I have children... many children. Do you love us, as I love them? Teach me, O Great, that I may teach them how to call you and where to find your presence... be father and mother to us, for we are so orphaned.... And a voice inside me gave reply:

"I am within you, there I dwell, teach my children that. Inside you my earth and heaven are one, playgrounds of my delight. Build your bridge of faith toward me, and I will blend them into one."

For a timeless time I was transported far from where I sat. Past my mind, past horizon after horizon I travelled, with no other compass to direct my voyage but the force in those words. Words that sent me over boundaries that I had never crossed before. Was I within or was I without? No sensation of one or the other—or separate from either—I was only I. That, who I always have been, and always will be.

A familiar hand touched mine and I came to a halt. "Beloved light, let us return. Your solo flight was marvellous, a great achievement of the pioneer

spirit. You had found the gate open; now, Halio, come back with me from here."

He looked into my eyes and I saw that his shone with a light I had not seen before. I nodded in agreement and wordlessly gave myself over to his charge.

"We will stay over there for a while,"—Christalis pointed to a garden full of marvellous flowers—"and talk for some time, if you wish."

"If I wish? Were it for me to decide, I would never stop asking you questions. May I do that now?"

"Please do, I know you are waiting for clarifications on what you have recently experienced."

"Yes, very much, but first please tell me: how did I get here?—how did you find me? Did you search for me then?" He laughed a little and put his hand on my shoulder.

"Halio, my contact with you is constant, you must know this, we are linked together. I stopped you from going further, that was all, you came thus far by your own effort. Now to your questions."

"Yes, when we were at the story-teller's place Christopher was there, but I did not see him at the Hall of the Architect. Do all who attend those classes remember those teachings when they return to earth, and do they apply them?"

"These are two questions in one! As for the first, Christopher is still in his young years and the classes he can attend at this stage are largely inspirational. They are preparatory for higher tuning at a later stage.

"The Architect-Builder's teaching is more advanced, as you would have observed. Secondly, not all those learners live on earth at present. Some do, but not all that many as yet. Most of them do not remember the event at all when they return to their bodies, but what they have experienced acts within them as inspiration, leading to self-expression. Men call them talented, but in truth they receive their abilities, as you have observed. Their preparations are most exact and potent, because those souls will consciously bring down with them that higher knowledge which is given them. They are the first candidates for the earth's betterment.

"An advanced knowledge, not released before, will be brought down in this way. Every science is taught, all the arts are enhanced with their beings there, in accordance with each soul's own attunement of course. We will talk about this in more detail later.

"So you see, my dear Halio, how bright is the horizon.

"You are concerned about your generators not yet restored, and duly so, since you are in need of them. In need of fuel, light, transport, means of communication, medicines and what not. But you had those things before and to what end were they utilized? How can the consequences be erased overnight? But, above all, this: the consciousness of people must develop first, so that no misuse of the higher knowledge may occur again. Can you hasten that?"

I offered no comment. He continued.

"Admittedly, important lessons had been learnt from past mistakes, but this is not enough. The inner person has to awaken sufficiently to be able to receive the presences of those highly evolved souls who will come to live amongst them. This will take time of course, but have no doubt; teachers will come to teach humanity and help them toward self-development. And I do speak here of the truly self-aware teachers, and not the ones who pretend to be that and who mislead the genuinely seeking souls. Theirs is unfortunately a false light in place of the true. Still, they too have their usefulness in God's order of things, if no other than to teach discrimination to men. This is an important basic knowledge, and there is no substitute for this learning."

"You say that more teachers will come to us, will this happen in the same way as you had come to me?" I asked him.

"Not necessarily, Halio. What I am saying is that high-souled beings will be born among men, who have offered themselves for the task, not only to hasten recreation of the physical conditions, but also for transforming mind and consciousness, leading to better existence on earth.

"Man is never left alone and unaided—never think that. Greater beings than men can imagine now have remained on earth throughout the ages. Unseen by men, they labour on as guardians of the world, and by the immense spiritual power that is theirs they help to uphold this world and elevate humanity.

"Be happy therefore and look to the spiritual sun, whose rays are evenly distributed, shining on good and bad equally. Trust in the Divine's power—the higher light, and have faith in Him who has created this universe and who will transform and recreate it.

"Surely you have observed the changing orientation in people's thinking, their attitudes to circumstances, to one another. Is there not more love in their hearts than there was before? Self-oriented mostly as it has been—but not now, don't you think? This is the sign and the proof of a growing consciousness in men. The light from above is descending in degrees and it registers itself in the hearts of men."

He paused a while.... I sat beside him waiting for more, but he got up suddenly, pulling me up with him.

"Time for our descent, Halio, come, let us return you to your body! The Light be with you," was his farewell greeting. He was in a hurry to leave.

When I rose from my sleep that morning, in one joyful pull I stretched my arms out toward the horizon and, flinging the doors and windows open, went out into the garden and called out softly—"Good day, eternal day! Good morrow to the new world to come!"

The little plants trembled with joy, they had heard my call and Christopher came from his room with a beaming smile that shone a light even on his forehead. His arms opened wide as he came toward me. "Mother, I heard you

call in my sleep and my heart fluttered like a butterfly.”

We held one another in embrace for some time. We two, yet it was as if all the others were within our arms as well, sharing in this rapture. Christalis’s voice echoed in me.... “The Light be with you!” and now I replied... “The Light be for all!”

*

Light upon Ignorance

Time had lost its meaning, somehow it no longer mattered. Learning expanded into infinity, consciousness into timelessness. Christalis was pleased with the progress we made in our relationship, because he said that earth was responding in the same way, absorbing what came to it from above and more souls were awakening. The children most especially, since their minds were not cluttered with wrong influences—and what joy this information gave me!

From time to time he took me to witness the classes of various sciences, including medicine and surgery, where the entire body’s structure was studied from the atom to the cells, the nerves and all the hidden subtle spiritual centres were observed within it.

“When these will be activated consciously,” he explained, “man will be able to effect his own restoration of health and rejuvenation. There will be no decay, nor old age then. Youth will not lose its beauty and vigour and the spirit’s force will never wane. The future is truly marvellous.”

He made this statement repeatedly. Was it to strengthen my faith, was it to affirm an unalterable fact, which he knew about? All his utterances, the slightest gestures he made, were surcharged with meaning. His very presence became the breath of life to my existence and my gratitude knew no bounds.

“Christalis,” I said to him one day—“all this wonderful knowledge you impart to me, only confirms how blind we are, still groping in the dark and, without the higher help coming to us, there can be little hope for real progress which will not mislead us again.”

“Bravo! This is exactly right! Now you begin to understand why it is of the utmost importance to raise the consciousness of humanity. This alone can make possible the transmission coming from the superior knowledge and its reception on earth. Just as it is between yourself and me. This link must be forged, if man is to receive the higher knowledge given to him. And now I will tell you that it is because you have chosen to work with children, that I so readily responded to your call for help.

“Yes, the children,” he continued—“they are the first receptacles of the superior light followed by the wonderful flowering of youth. But later on when those with the enlightened knowledge are born, then the bridge will be truly built

between heaven and earth!

"But now to earth again;—it is not that man has no commendable knowledge already developed in him, but he has forgotten the Divine Creator and at some stage has even denied His existence. Certainly, religions have been instrumental to further the teachings of the Greats, those who came to earth from age to age to kindle the truth. But sometimes their leaders thought themselves to be the only keepers of the key to it, and their mistaken self-esteem caused them to become vain. As a result, the essence of the teachings was lessened—even lost, alas!

"In these conditions the forces of darkness found a ready passage and set one religion against the other, causing terrible harm and retardation of development. As a consequence, humanity became an easy prey to the manipulations of the adverse forces.

"Power, Halo, is a deadly tool in the hands of the unenlightened, but I need not go into this, even your own experience and knowledge of history will inform you of it."

He stopped now and observed me closely. I often noticed that after some teaching he would always make sure that I understood clearly what he had told me. His eyes of light penetrated the inner chambers of my being like an X-ray, and when he found a gap anywhere in my perception his patience was endless. He brought up other examples he thought to be more suited to my understanding. He continued now, evidently satisfied with what he was looking for.

"Then there is the condition of partial knowledge," he explained. "Partial understanding that leads to half truth only and this also leads to a dangerous path. So you see, don't you, that until the Higher Consciousness can enter the field made ready for its descent, and govern it by its own laws—we shall only have further chaos, in yet another form.

"However, do not be disheartened if things do not happen immediately. The process of progression is not only gradual, it also passes through trials and errors for the sake of establishing the firmest, and best desired result.

"Not only this, but you must know that chaos itself is within the order of things. It acts as an instigator toward further development and spiritual ascent. Within this movement, the force of urging is activated. The desire to emerge from it—and most importantly, the impetus to develop the will in order to arrive at a better stage.

"The Creator fulfils His play by the law of Motion and of Becoming, which is Evolution. Without this play of striving, there would be no movement in any direction at all. Everything would rest in its own seed of possibilities—until, awakened by the Higher will, Motion begins once more; chaos at its first stage."

"Isn't it wonderful?" I exclaimed, "nothing is static then, is it? Every fall leads to a new ascent. I am almost glad now of the mistakes I have made, because nothing has been wasted. I understand that every time I bumped my

head against the wall, it made me reflect on what I had done wrong, it urged me to try to better myself.

"But what am I saying? Do excuse me, please, no one ever taught me such wisdom as you are giving me. And I am being so foolish as to bring it down to my childish level. I am ashamed of myself really, will you forgive me? It's just that your teaching has thrown light upon how it's with us in our smaller ways."

No reply came from him. My heart sank. Surely I had offended him? I began to cry. He looked at me deeply as was his way, then all at once his eyes came to be full of light and he stretched out his arms toward me.

"Flower—Halio, my dear, I am so glad, so very glad!"—And with his velvety hand he wiped my tears away. "You think that what you have said is foolish. But this is the very thing I want, can't you see? To bring the Light of the High down to the simple base of everyone's understanding. I consider this statement the most significant stage in our relationship. What good would there be, if the High remained on His own height, and the low in its low position? This is not His aim.

"You are right, you have understood it; nothing is static. The Supreme moves on towards ever better ways,—from high to low—the low will rise to the heights." And with this, he broke into a dance of such gracefulness that his beautiful body emanated rays of colours with him at the centre. A dance of delight in heaven's terrain, leaving me breathless as I watched him.

He stopped his dance and embraced me once again. "Soon I can take you further, Halio, after I have fulfilled your longing for certain things I know you'd like to experience. You like music and dance performances, don't you, and you miss them sometimes. Not so? And all the Arts?"

"Well, yes, I do, but really I have everything from you to fill all my stores, dear Christalis."

"I am glad to hear that; but you see, even a little desire left unfulfilled can pull you back later on, nagging at your heels. It is best to get rid of them this way. We want to be free, don't we? But for now, are there any questions you would like to ask me?"

"Yes, thank you, I would if I may. I would like to know how it happens—I mean how can man find the way towards his own inner self? How does one contact one's soul? How can one .. oh, I am afraid to ask it... but how does one go towards God?"

"I am so very fortunate because you have come to teach me and to guide me, but can one do this on one's own? Can one travel to higher regions without a guide? It happened to me once, and I don't even know how it did happen. How I left my body, my boundaries. I never did this before, I did not even try to. Did you help me do it?"

"Well, then, one question at a time. I will talk with you later about the first—as to the next, no, I did not help you to open your own gate on yourself.

You did it by the merit of your own force, as it should be. No one can help you in your self-efforts. That would not be your achievement but an interference—and that is against the Law of Growth. But once you had achieved it, I was instantly behind you, watching your flight, observing the direction you took and of course guarding you from any danger of unwanted interference.”

“Danger, Christalis? But was I not on a pure plane when you met me? I felt it to be so.”

“True, you had arrived at a plane of Light, and your flight was a mark of development, but then you must know that there are beings, not pure themselves, who would try to obstruct your path toward the light and do anything to divert you. They would mislead you by showing you a false light and themselves as shining great entities to bedazzle you. They can take on any form they wish and make wrong suggestions to inexperienced souls. This is the reason why the utmost care must be taken to develop the power of observation first of all and then that of discernment.

“From there on the faculty of discrimination develops, which is your compass—especially on a yet unknown terrain. Without these faculties in the forefront, how are you to tell the true from the false? These stages of development are essential requirements and they need to be firmly established in the very nature of the being. We will give them due attention.”

“But then,”—I asked—“how can they make suggestions to me to do anything I myself don’t want to do? Surely one would know that much of one’s own mind?”—I ventured to say.

“My dear, they are very clever and subtle in their cunning. They can present a thought which will seem to be your own. Unless you are exceedingly vigilant, an experienced knower in the field of observation, you will not notice it, until it is too late, and they will have brought about your fall. Their aim is to oppose the Light of Truth, so that they may prolong their own hold on the helpless souls. They feed on suffering and misery, produce quarrels, disharmony, disunity, bringing about disagreements that will result in confrontation. They bring about fight, carnage and ruin—where there could have been a flowering of peace and happiness. This is the mark of their work and of their nature and you need to observe it carefully. God is harmony, creating unity, hostile forces work in disharmony bringing about division. There you find them.

“Yet, none can go against the Higher Law and if these unfortunate beings themselves do not evolve, they will be forcibly converted and brought to serve the Light, from which they originated... I see a question hovering above your forehead.”

“May I ask it then?”

“Yes, of course, without questions the teacher has no indication of the learner’s comprehension and of his progress. Ask then!”

“In my heart I know that the Supreme has created everything and every

living being. Then did He create beings of darkness also, as He created the ones of Light? Forgive me for asking this, but religions mention this in some way and I would truly like to know; this troubles the minds of many a thinker too."

"Let me explain, Halio. The Lord appointed some executors of His will for the task of testing the development of the evolving man by placing in his paths certain obstacles, so that by striving he should increase his will toward growth and self-betterment and the desire to reach out towards the Divine.

"A sportsman has to strain and train his muscles for the task he strives to achieve—does he not subject himself to a punishing regime, and vigorous self-discipline? So must man, the evolving being, undergo the same kind of obstacle-course.

"As for the opposing powers, the beings of darkness, they were pure and full of light at first—as I said before—but as their tasks began, they found beings on earth so much below their own status that they started to make easy play of them. Gradually they made themselves masters of this earth-theatre—unfortunately for them and for men's development. When finally their ego got the better of them, they actually forgot that they themselves had also been created beings and thought themselves to be creators instead, lording over men. At this stage they lost the Light that had been theirs at first, and fell into darkness, which became their kingdom and terrain. From this low position—since Heaven was now closed to them—they would exercise their influence upon men, wherever they found an opening to do so."

I listened intently, this was a truth of great significance. It threw light on many imponderables.

"How could they do this?—I see you ask.—Largely by giving boons of easy victories and gains to those who succumbed to their influences. Powers and positions, success and wealth, all kinds of desirable possessions to captivate them. By these means they invaded their minds at first—then covered their inner lights with their own darkness.

"But have no fear, this stage is now coming to an end and they themselves are asking for redemption and for the Grace to re-admit them to the Light. Their influence was much lessened after the Great Confrontation and when men realised that they had taken the wrong turn.

"True, they fought hard for some time, not all that willing to let go of their long rule over this earth. But finally they knew who had defeated them, and knew also that none could go against that Will."

He fell silent for a while, then continued.

"And here we meet, my dear Halio, at the border of a new era. Yet I repeat: vigilance is imperative on all levels. Meditate on all this knowledge and you will find answers to many of your questions within yourself. Open your spiritual heart to the sun and be illumined by it."

His smile indicated that this was where we would stop for the present. I

looked at him, for he reflected the love of heaven, and the flowers in the field where he sat seemed to have known it... Everything was conscious here.

I tried to find my voice, hardly wishing to break the inner silence that words could only mar. I waited a while, but my being sought exclamation for its sentiment at last.

“How can I ever express my gratitude to you, Christalis, who are my teacher, guide and guardian? I look into your eyes of light and at times it is blinding like the sun, and at others deep like an ocean... infinite. Your words of wisdom and truth are a flow of nectar coming from your lips. Each time I hear your voice, my soul rises in answer to the call of heaven. When you touch my hand, currents of delight come from you to uplift me.

“Day and night I think of you, all you have taught me—and I pray in the truth of my heart. I pray that all I am given may in some way benefit my poor children and my fellows whose hearts are pure and sweet and in great need of heaven’s love.

“Will they receive it too, Christalis? I am not more worthy than they. If I could only make my heart grow so large with God’s love, that I would cover the whole world with it! But I am poor, with so very little to give. I can only offer the labour of my caring to them... and to you my love and gratitude.”

His eyes shone rays of light. He went into himself for quite some time, then he lifted his arms high and uttered:

“Mother of the Creating Light and Lord of Heaven—I am only your instrument, no more. All things I impart are not mine, but what you give me for the giving. Accept the prayer of this flower-soul whose call you sent me to attend.

“I serve you alone, I pray for your victory in bringing the opulence of your Grace to men and to all creatures on earth, and for your new world to come.”

(To be continued)

THE BOOK OF JOB

A NEW COMMENTARY

(Continued from the issue of June 1995)

Verses 7 to 9.

Job had questioned the justice of God. Zophar asked him if he could ever know or understand him.

Verse 7.

Could Job find God, asked the God-knower, by his search? RSV reads, “deep things of God” for AV’s “God”. Could he find the Almighty (the limits of the Almighty—RSV) perfectly?

Verses 8 and 9.

God’s Almightyness or wisdom was as high heaven. What could he do? It was deeper than hell. What could he know? Its measure was longer than the earth and broader than the sea. God was unknowable.

As Hartley¹⁶⁸ shows, the vastness of God’s creation is brought out in the mention of all the four dimensions, height, depth, length and breadth.

Verse 9.

Its measure was longer than the earth and deeper than the sea.
Zophar meant that God was unknowable.

Verse 10.

The verse in AV reads,

If he cut off, and shut up and gather together who can hinder him?

RSV reads *passes through* for *cut off*, *imprison* for *shut up* and *calls to judgment* for *gather together*. Habel’s rendering is both intelligent and intelligible:

If he glides past or imprisons,
Or arraigns—who can hinder him?

Habel notes that Zophar by echoing Job’s own words could attack him effectively

Verses 11 and 12.

Zophar called Job vain and wicked by telling him that God knew vain men

and saw wickedness also. Would he not consider it?

He did not stop with that; he called Job an ass! The vain man, he said, would think himself wise even if he were born the young one of a wild ass.

That was a limit that the earlier speakers did not touch.

Verses 13 to 19.

Having used the most abusive language, Zophar changed his tone and promised a life of ease and comfort if only Job put away wickedness from him.

If Job prepared his heart and stretched his hands towards God (in prayer), if he put his wickedness far away in case he had it in his hand, if he did not permit wickedness to dwell in his tabernacles (tents), then should he be able to lift up his face without a spot or blemish, and should be steadfast and fearless. That would be possible because he would forget his misery. He would remember it only like waters that have flowed away.

Zophar further assured Job that his age (= old age) (RSV reads *life*) would be as clear (unclouded by problems) as the noonday, he would shine forth and be (fresh) like the morning.

And he would be secure because there would be hope. He would dig around himself (would be protected—RSV) and rest in safety.

He would also lie down (in repose) and none would make him afraid. (On the other hand) He would have many suitors

Verse 20.

But Zophar thought that he would not appear wise enough if he concluded with words of comfort. He had to end as he began:

But the eyes of the wicked would fail. They (the wicked) would not escape and their hope would be like dying (their hope was to breathe last—RSV).

Job had heard all the three “comforters” and it was his turn to answer them all together

Chapters 12 to 14. Job’s Reply to His Friends.

David J. A. Clines¹⁶⁹ comments on Job’s reply not so much to Zophar as to all the three friends together,

The importance of this speech of Job, standing at the threshold between the first and second cycles (of the discussion between Job and his friends), is marked by its length. It is the longest of all the speeches so far, and only his closing speech in chapters 29-31 will be longer. At this position, the speech serves both as a first reply to the friends collectively and as the precipitating cause of the ensuing cycle of speeches. There are no compelling reasons for connecting the speech with the second cycle (as do most scholars) rather

than with the first, and it is preferable to regard it (and similarly chapter 21) as transitional.

Anderson¹⁷⁰ notes what is most significant in the evolution of Job:

Hitherto, Job's rapidly changing emotions of outrage and despair had imparted to his utterances a turbulence that sometimes bordered on incoherence. His attainment of a greater measure of self-control is reflected in the calmer tone and lucid thought of his discourse.

That does not imply that we do not see any note of despair etc. in the speech. Till the last we see Job's varying moods. But there is a definite progress and a greater self-control, with *rajas* prevailing over *tamas*, and even *sattva* trying to assert itself.

Scholars differ about the structure of the speech. Terrien¹⁷¹ comments,

Its traditional division into three chapters fits accurately its organic plan: (a) an empirical critique of providence (12:1-25), (b) an indictment of friends' ministrations leading to a new attack upon God (13:1-27), (c) a prayerful meditation on the tragedy of life.

Habel¹⁷² also sees that the speech falls into three divisions but, according to him, the divisions cut across the chapters: 12:1-13:5, 13:6-28 and 14:1-22. According to him "wisdom" is the key-word of the opening section. The second section is replete with forensic language and the key-word is "God's face". The closing section is a cry of futility we hear even at the end of the second section.

Hartley¹⁷³ on the other hand divides the speech according to the party Job addresses.

In the first part Job defends his skill in wisdom as equal to his friends' (12:1-13:17). In the second part he petitions God to try his case before the divine tribunal (13:18-14:22).

Clines prefers

to see only two sections, making the transition from Job's address to his friends to his address to God the major dividing-line in the speech; and that line should be drawn between 13:19 and 19:20.

Chapter 12.

Verse 1

And Job answered and said: As noted above Job answered not Zophar alone

but all the friends together. He found that with all the differences in what they said and how they said it their "wisdom" did not differ essentially. They all believed in retributive justice. Hence, as all of them had expressed the same wisdom he thought it best to address them all together.

Verse 2.

Clines¹⁷⁴ noted like other scholars,

For the first time in the book, Job is contemptuous of his friends. Earlier he had expressed his disappointment in them (6:15-21), and even pronounced them disloyal (6:14) and had angrily inveighed against their callousness (6:26-7) though he had not previously accused them of laying exclusive claim to wisdom.

But Clines adds,

That they have not of course done.

Literally speaking, Clines is right. But the tone in which they have talked all the time reveals an attitude as of possession of a superior wisdom exclusive to themselves.

Job speaks beautifully:

No doubt, but ye are the people, and the wisdom shall die with you.

The expression, "ye are the people" has been interpreted in several ways. Terrien¹⁷⁵ comments,

Job sarcastically magnifies the opinions of his three comforters as representing the general consensus of mankind.

Pope¹⁷⁶ and Hartley¹⁷⁷ following him consider "people" as a kind of technical term like "the people of the land" and translate the word as "gentry" which seems unwarranted. As Anderson¹⁷⁸ points out, the absence of the article (the) in Hebrew makes the interpretation really difficult. One cannot be sure if it could be taken as Clines¹⁷⁹ has done: "people at whose death wisdom will pass away," taking the word with the next part of the sentence. But Clines is a profound Hebrew scholar and he must know what he is about. Job says "ye are the people and wisdom shall die with you". "People" perhaps could mean "people specially chosen by Wisdom to be its mouthpieces".

Verse 3.

Job plainly stated that he had as much understanding as they. He was not inferior to them. Who did not know the conventionalities they had chosen to repeat?

It is interesting to note that the original Hebrew word for understanding is "heart". It is suggested that Job by implication might be referring to Zophar's comparison of him with the colt of a wild ass.

Verse 4.

Though his understanding was not inferior to that of his friends he was in the situation of a person mocked by his neighbour; though continually he called upon God the just man but he was laughed to scorn.

This and the next two verses are omitted by the earlier exegetes and commentators as interrupting the thread of verse 3 which, as they believe, is picked up in verse 7.

But this verse is specially chosen by William Blake for illustration in his twenty-two engravings of the whole Book. In the twenty-two engravings Blake chooses significant situations which bring out the spiritual meaning of the Book. The verse with related texts forms the theme of Plate 10.

Kathleen Raine¹⁸⁰ emphasizes the fact that in his paintings and engravings, Blake

was above all a prophet with a spiritual message and regarded the arts of poetry and painting alike as a means to this end, never as ends in themselves.

It is because of this fact that Blake's interpretation of Job is more authentic than that of theologians who mentally try to fit theories on what is beyond the mind.

Raine, commenting on the plate, points out how the three friends become Job's accusers.

He (Job) has argued his innocence. But they insist on moral law which sees in his sufferings a punishment for his sins. The Accuser is one of Satan's titles, and here the friends are shown as his agents. In this they resemble... the accusers of Socrates.

Blake, who considers Job elsewhere, for his own reasons, self-righteous, is able to bring out the nature of his friends in their relation to him.

Raine, referring to other quotations from the later chapters of *Job* in the painting and the different emblems in it, reveals the presence in Job of a conflict between the despair of mortality and the hope in the God whom he has not yet seen but in whom he nevertheless trusts.

But the painting reveals Job's friends accusing him when he actually needed their compassion.

Verses 5 and 6.

The verses pose considerable difficulty to the commentators: they are not only unable to explain each verse by itself but find themselves at a loss to relate the two verses

Verse 5

Verse 5 continues the thought of verse 4 As Clines¹⁸¹ tells us, the verse explains what it means to be a laughing stock. He who is at ease believes he is so because he is pious and despises one who slips into suffering: he (the man at ease) believes the other man has stumbled because he has deviated from the right path. The comparison with the lamp is to show that the sufferer loses his light.

Verse 6.

This verse brings about the truth of life. Job showed that the stumbling into suffering need not necessarily mean deviating from the right path. He showed how the tabernacles of robbers prospered. Prosperity had nothing to do with one's moral state. Job here contradicted Zophar who told him at the end of his speech (11:13-15) that if only he stretched out his hands towards God and put away his iniquity he could lift up his face without a cause to fear.

Actually those who provoked God by their wrong actions were secure, according to Job. God would bring prosperity abundantly into their hands.

For the line in the Authorised Version,

into whose hand God bringeth abundantly

Marvin¹⁸² Pope renders from the original Hebrew,

One who carries God in his hand

and relates the line to Virgil's

dextra mihi deus (*Aeneid* x 773).*

He comments that Battenwiser's

they whose God is their fist

* "My god is my right hand "

and Moffat's

who make a God of their own power

are the best interpretations.

Incidentally Job showed the nature of the "wisdom" of his friends who believed in retributive justice.

(To be continued)

K. B. SITARAMAYYA

Notes

168 Hartley, p 197

169 D J A Clines, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Word Books, Dallas, Texas Clines, Professor of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield, U K and Miss Kathleen Raine whose book will be referred to soon have responded positively to this humble endeavour Miss Raine, especially, has shown the approach in this commentary to be close to Blake's Clines's approach is academic and theological, Miss Raine's spiritual and mystical. Clines is very widely read and his bibliography is most comprehensive—he does not omit any book or paper of any significance Miss Raine's correspondence has been very illuminating What the Editor of *Mother India* has called elsewhere her "easy scholarship" is revealed in her book on Blake's engravings of Job, *The Human Face of God*, as well as in her correspondence Both of them have been generous in sending their expensive volumes to me

170 Anderson, p 159

171 Terrien, p 997

172 Habel, p 215

173 Hartley, p 205

174 Clines, p 288

175 Terrien, p 997

176 Pope, p 86

177 Hartley, p 206

178 Anderson, p 159

179 Clines

180 Kathleen Raine, *The Human Face of God, William Blake and the Book of Job*, Thames and Hudson, pp 92-4

181 Clines, p 290

182 Marvin Pope, p 88

A TREASURY OF ANCIENT TAMIL LEGENDS

(Continued from the issue of June 1995)

63. THE STYLUS IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

“Am I not a son to the dead king? Is my mother not a woman like his? In what way am I inferior to him, be it in horse-riding or lathi-display or sword-fight? Yet he is crowned king while I am offered the armoury to look after. Shame on the royal blood that circulates in my veins if I have no kingdom to rule,” thus thought Kulamagan and decided to wage a war against the new king.

King Nandhivarman, the son of the principal queen, quashed all Kulamagan’s plans and proved that his half-brother was foolishly bold.

Kulamagan didn’t lose hope. He sought the help of the foes of Nandhivarman. They helped him in all possible ways. Yet the Pallava king Nandhivarman overpowered him and as a punishment for his rebellious deed drove him out of his kingdom.

Rejected and dejected, Kulamagan spent restless days till an idea dawned upon him. “The stylus is mightier than the sword,” he said and gleefully punched the air with his fist as if he had already defeated the king and usurped his throne.

A few months passed by.

One night Nandhivarman was delighted to hear one of his courtesans sing songs. Every song sang of his glory and praised him sky-high.

“It’s different from all the other genres I have listened to before,” said Nandhivarman, a connoisseur of art and literature. “Who taught them to you?”

“I learnt them from the wandering minstrels,” said the courtesan.

“It is learned poetry, but has the tune of folksongs. This is altogether a different genre,” appreciated the king.

As days rolled by, King Nandhivarman heard several such melodious songs, all in praise of him. They came not only from courtesans and minstrels, but also from children playing in the street. But none of these singers were able to say anything about the author.

“The author of these melodious songs deserves an award,” declared the king.

The king’s spies were at work. And they soon brought the news that the author of the melodious songs had just completed writing a book titled *Nandi-kalampakam*, and that he had requested for the king’s audience.

“Kalampakam?” asked the king, knitting his eyebrows.

“Yes, your Majesty,” said a spy. “‘Kalampakam’ is a new genre invented by the author of the melodious songs purely for the purpose of writing this book. It means, I am told, a garland of varying flowers. It is important in that it brings together learned poetry and folk songs. The language is simple and enchanting.”

"But what has prevented you from bringing the poet here, when he himself had sought my audience?"

"We can't, your Majesty! for the poet is none but your rebellious half-brother whom you have banished."

"Let's revoke his banishment for the good songs he has composed," declared the king.

Kulamagan was given a very warm welcome in the palace and King Nandhivarman hugged him and showered kisses on him.

"My success is quite near," thought Kulamagan and shed crocodile tears like a penitent brother.

"I didn't know that you were such a talented poet. It's your poetry that has revoked my order... Now go ahead. We are all ears," said the king.

"I will, my brother," said Kulamagan, "Only if you sanction a wish of mine."

"What's it?"

"I would like you to listen to my songs on a newly built pyre at the cremation ground."

As Nandhivarman thought awhile, his minister whispered into his ears thus: "It's a ruse... Evil-minded Kulamagan is planning to finish you off and usurp your throne "

"Kulamagan knows it well that you have an active interest in songs. He wants to exploit your weakness for songs. Banish him again lest your life be in danger," advised another minister.

Nandhivarman listened to none and commanded his men to build a funeral pyre at the cremation ground. He added: "If Death awaits me there on the funeral pyre, let me die with the satisfaction of having listened to his enthralling songs."

The king's order was immediately obeyed.

Followed by his ministers and many common men, Nandhivarman headed towards the cremation ground. He sat at the centre of the pyre built of sandalwood and motioned his brother with a wave of his hand to start singing his compositions.

Playing on a stringed instrument, Kulamagan began to sing his songs one after another.

Songs that glorified Nandhivarman's acts of epic valour, songs that lauded Nandhivarman's philanthropic activities, songs that brought to light Nandhivarman's devotion to Lord Siva, songs that applauded Nandhivarman's love for the Tamil language, and songs depicting God's plenty in Nandhivarman that lured many a woman towards him, came in succession.

Nandhivarman, drunk with music and song, went on nodding his head in appreciation and approval.

Kulamagan came to the fag end of his work—*Nandhi-k-Kalampakam*. He

sang the last song:

Moon too will shy away, O King,
at the sight of your visage.
Your boldness will put to flight, O King,
even a ferocious tiger.
Unknown to none, you are, O King,
the topic of discussion round the globe.
Your ever-giving hands, O King,
are like fruit-bearing trees round the year.
But I, your co-born, O King,
am destined to wallow in poverty.
Who will shelter me, if not you,
O Lord Nandhi? What shall I do?

Kulamagan clapped shut his book leaving Nandhivarma to his thoughts.

After a while Nandhivarma addressed the courtiers and common men gathered around thus: "I've lived fully. There is nothing more to achieve. When one's mission in life is over, better to go back to one's eternal abode. And I've decided to go. No one should grieve over my death. Now light my funeral pyre."

Shocked stood the people. The ministers tried to give him good advice. But Nandhivarma stopped them and said: "I'll not die. My brother has immortalised me in his work. *Nandhi-k-kalampakam* will continue to speak of my glory... And now obey my command."

The King's command was obeyed.

Nandhivarma gave away his life for the sheer pleasures of poetry.

Historians speak of Nandhivarma III as the greatest of the Pallava kings. *Nandhi-k-kalampakam* is a living witness to it. Written in a simple and enchanting language it is no wonder that the work that changed the mind of a king retains its youthful vigour and charm even today.

64. WHO BUILT THE TEMPLE?

Emperor Rajaraja Chozhan puffed up in pride as he looked at his monumental creation unique in several respects. Called Rajarajeswaram, it is a magnificent temple he built at the capital of his empire, Thanjavur.

"A giant... the tallest and greatest of all temples," applauded Kundavai, the emperor's elder sister.

"Created in a short time for all time," prophesied Loka Mahadevi, the emperor's principal queen.

"A dream fulfilled," said the emperor as a couple of tears trickled out of the

corners of his eyes.

"Tears of joy," whispered Vanavan Mahadevi, as she nudged the other queens of the emperor. The bevy of the emperor's women grinned.

Accompanied by the royal women, the emperor went around the temple reading its entire history engraved on its walls in beautiful calligraphy.

A golden plaque fixed to a wall attracted everyone's attention. While all others looked at the gold letters inscribed on the plaque, Kundavai read it aloud:

THIS TEMPLE IS BUILT BY EMPEROR RAJARAJA CHOZHAN.

She then looked at her brother's queens and said: "Nobody else could have created this wonder in stone and that too without anyone's financial assistance."

"Had the emperor asked for help from his friends and subjects, they would have filled all his coffers," said a queen.

"But it was he who promulgated the order that no one should contribute in any manner to the construction of the temple," said another.

"My brother's war-won booty has gone into the making of this temple. He has the world under his command and the innumerable kings who pay tribute to him make his coffers overflow," lauded Kundavai.

"Yes! You are right, *Akka*. I want posterity to speak of this temple as a single man's effort," boasted the emperor. Seconds later he added, "A dream fulfilled."

That night the emperor went to bed beaming with satisfaction. Sleep hugged him.

An hour or so later he woke up with a start. "Huh! Only a dream," he said and went back to sleep.

But when he had the same dream for a third time on the same night, he was mentally disturbed and sleep left him.

"Who the hell is this Peru Udaiyar?" the emperor yelled and thereby startled his principal queen, Loka Mahadevi, sleeping by his side.

"What's the matter?" asked she, looking askance at her husband.

The emperor was sweating profusely.

"Shall I send for the physician?" she asked.

"No!" responded the emperor. "I had a dream... I saw Lord Siva Himself rubbing off my name from the golden plaque at the temple with His own hands and inscribing the name of Peru Udaiyar in its place."

"Stop fussing and worrying. It's after all a dream."

"No dream comes again and again on the same night. I must find the truth of the matter," so saying he rushed out of the bed chamber. Loka Mahadevi was treading hard on his heels. As they moved out of the palace, a couple of guards with burning torches in their hands were hot in pursuit.

The emperor entered the temple and swiftly moved towards the plaque.

"Hold up the torch," he commanded.

"Look for yourself. Your name is intact. It was only a dream," said the queen.

The king looked at the plaque at close quarters. He saw his name fading away and in its place appeared the name of Peru Udaiyar. He rubbed his eyes and looked at the plaque once again. He saw his name. Then again it faded away giving rise to the name of Peru Udaiyar.

He read aloud: THIS TEMPLE IS BUILT BY PERU UDAIYAR. He then yelled: "Who the devil is this Peru Udaiyar?"

By daybreak the King's men moved in different directions within and around Thanjavur. They went from house to house in search of the man named Peru Udaiyar.

A week later Peru Udaiyar was brought to the emperor's court by the king's men. "He is the only one in the whole country known by that name, your Majesty!"

The emperor looked at Peru Udaiyar. He was an excuse for a skeleton. His sunken cheeks and hollow eyes told tales about his poverty. He had no stitch of cloth on his body except a loin cloth that sparsely covered his nakedness.

"What did you do to deserve your name get inscribed by God Himself on the golden plaque?" asked the emperor.

Peru Udaiyar blinked. The emperor himself thought that it was foolish to ask him such a question but yet... "In what way have you contributed to the making of my temple?"

"Who? Me?... What have I to give except my poverty?" grumbled Peru Udaiyar.

"I can't believe you. I have faith in Lord Siva. Tell me the truth. I'll reward you."

"Your Majesty!" said Peru Udaiyar, "I am also a devotee of Siva. I too longed to build a shrine for Siva in a small way. But I had no means. But I was quite happy when you started the construction of the Siva Temple. My landlord once gave me a few sheaves of paddy. I threshed them, and poured the grain into a basket. And the sheaves of hay I gave to the bullocks that carted stones and rafters for the construction of the temple. That's all."

"Now it's clear to me," said the emperor, "I understand why God had removed my name from the plaque and inscribed yours... I constructed the temple purely with the intention of glorifying myself. But God seemed to have accepted the little offering you had made, for you expected nothing in return. The huge amount of money I spent for the construction of this temple is nothing more than a pittance when compared to your hay given with love."

The emperor then told the temple authorities to remove the golden plaque, replace his name with the name of Peru Udaiyar and fix it to the wall at the entrance of the temple.

Rajarajeswaram, the great Temple at Thanjavur, is also known as the Peru Udaiyar Temple.

(More legends on the way)

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Arise, Arjuna: Hinduism and the Modern World, by David Frawley, pub. by Voice of India, New Delhi.

HINDUISM as a religion and culture still has a fascinating appeal for spiritually-minded thinkers all over the world, especially from Europe and America. The author of the book under review belongs to this category of genuine spiritual seekers who are deeply influenced by Hindu spirituality and view of life. Most of what the author says in this book may not be new but very much on the lines of the teachings of modern spiritual masters like Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ramatirtha, all of whom the author mentions in his book with deep admiration and respect as some of the major spiritual influences on his thought and life.

But the unique feature of this book which distinguishes it from similar writings on the subject is the focus on some of the political and social realities facing the present Hindu community. Frawley brings to our attention two dangers facing this community: first is the persistent and systematic attempts made by some influential groups in the press and the academia to undermine Hindu culture for political gains and second, the passivity of the Hindu community under attack and its unwillingness to defend its cultural heritage against the onslaught of its enemies. The central theme of the book as suggested by the title “*Arise, Arjuna*” is a call to the Indian Nation in general and the Hindu community in particular to shake off its passivity, rise to the occasion and defend its Sanatana Dharma.

One of the disturbing trends we are witnessing today in the Indian press, especially the English language press, is an open or a subtle anti-Hindu stance which tends to lump together everything which speaks in support of Hinduism as “Hindu Fundamentalism”. Some of the journalists who belong to this group go to the extent of accusing our great spiritual masters like Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda of being the source of inspiration for what they call “Hindu Fundamentalism” or “Hindu Revivalism”. Even some of the uniquely positive features of Hinduism are given a negative twist. For example, one of the writers calls modern Hinduism “assimilative communalism”. On the other hand even blatantly communal assertions of Islamic fundamentalist leaders are either ignored or let off with a mild rebuke. This clever collusion between leftist “secular” intellectuals and the Islamic fundamentalist group banding together against the united and organised awakening of the Hindu community is one of the ominous shadows hanging over modern Indian society. The danger here is that many of the journalists and academics belonging to this group are not just ignorant non-entities who can be dismissed lightly but well-known names in the press and academia with a substantial influence over their readers and a strong

strong political clout in the corridors of power. The author of this book expresses deep concern that nothing positive is done by the Hindu community and intelligentsia to counter this threat at the ideological level. The main issue here is, as the author rightly points out, not the defence of a religion but defending the source and foundation of a great culture and its value-system which has a living relevance for the future evolution of humanity. In such a situation the passivity of the "mild and tolerant" Hindu is coming as a great disadvantage. The author quotes from Sri Aurobindo: "That has always been the case with aggressive religions—they tend to overrun the Earth. Hinduism on the other hand is passive and therein lies the danger." (p 46)

When a culture and its cherished values are under attack especially from a strong and powerful enemy, the only sound strategy is an equally strong counter-offensive which will force the enemy into a defensive position. An attitude of weak, neutral and uncritical passivity and "tolerance" against a strong, aggressive and intolerant assailant is not a noble virtue but only a cover for cowardice and lack of self-confidence. This counter-offensive must have a positive and a negative side. The positive side is to hold before the people a cultural ideal and vision which is superior to that of the opponent and the negative side is to launch a critical ideological onslaught against the enemy which will expose the falsity and weakness of his ideological base. This is a bold line of thinking adopted by Sri Aurobindo against the colonial politically-motivated villifiers of Indian culture when India was under the British rule—a line followed by later Hindu thinkers like Ram Swaroop against the anti-Hindu stance of the "secular" Marxist-Islamic axis. The author of the book under review seems to approve this line of thinking.

In a series of articles, he critically examines some of the controversial and contentious issues facing the Hindu Community today—like the so-called Hindu fundamentalism *vis-à-vis* Islamic history and ideology, and the Leftist influence on the Indian intelligentsia and Hindu passivity—and upholds the Hindu point of view with a lucid clarity of thought and an elegant and dignified simplicity in style. There are two articles which are worth mentioning. First is an article "What is Hindu Fundamentalism?" in which the author exposes the falsity of the exaggerated bogey of "Hindu Fundamentalism" blown out of proportion in the Indian press. The other article is on "Ramatirtha's view of Islam". The author quotes profusely from Ramatirtha's own writings. In refreshing contrast to the mostly spiteful and slanderous writings we see to-day in the Indian press, here is a criticism of Islam coming from a saintly heart of overflowing love. The great Vedantin is unsparing in his criticism of the history of Islam in India. But every one of his words is suffused with such a deep love for his Islamic brothers he was addressing, it completely takes the sting out of the criticism, while laying the truth bare without glossing over it.

The other important topic which the author takes up for discussion is the

widely held belief among the secular as well as the Hindu intelligentsia that "all religions are equal" This is a sentimental belief which is paraded by the secular as well as the Hindu leaders from Mahatma Gandhi onwards and swallowed by their followers without any serious and critical thinking. What exactly does it mean to say "all religions are equal"? If it means that there are mutually complementing spiritual truths behind all religions, then it sounds sensible. But if it means, as is normally understood, giving a sort of democratic or socialistic equality to all religions, then it raises some important questions. Does it mean that the scriptures of all religions are inspired from the same level of spiritual consciousness? For example, do the Koran and the Upanishads have the same source of inspiration? Have the founders of all religions attained to the same heights of spiritual consciousness? This sentimental equalisation of all religions ignores a basic fact of the spiritual path which is constantly emphasised by Sri Aurobindo in his writings: the possibility of an infinite variety and gradation of spiritual experience In a series of illuminating articles Frawley critically examines this topic and comes to certain conclusions which may be disturbing not only to the secular thinker and the religious fundamentalist but also to the sentimental Hindu who has swallowed for a long time all this "Sarva Dharma Sambhava" blah-blah without any critical thinking.

But the best part of the book is the last section on cultural issues ending with an autobiographical note: "An American Discovers the Vedas". In this last article in which the author describes how he came into contact with the Hindu spirituality especially the mystical dimension of the Veda and its deep and profound influence on his life. In the other two articles on cultural issues Frawley makes some insightful observations on Hindu culture and spirituality which are worth pondering over. Regarding the value of a supportive culture for the growth of spirituality, Frawley says: "if we look at humanity through history we can observe that men and women of spiritual realisation have not come equally from all cultures, which would be the case if cultures were merely a neutral factor in the spiritual life. Some cultures, particularly India, have created an environment that has better allowed for great spiritual personages to arise. There has been an ongoing stream of great spiritual figures in India since the ancient Vedic sages to modern times .. Other cultures particularly those of the European and the Islamic world have rarely produced comparable spiritual figures and have not given them much value, when they have risen within their ranks. They still trumpet their one son of God or one prophet as if only one great religious figure were possible which becomes the sad epitaph on the spirituality of their culture. Emphasising only one such figure prevents others from developing or being recognised should they arise... such a negative attitude about the human capacity must have an effect in stultifying the spiritual potential of the culture itself" (p. 202) To the modern Indian youth Frawley asks: "Why should the youth of India focus their studies on western thinkers while much greater figures in the culture

of India are ignored throughout the world? Why should they emulate such thinkers as Freud, Marx and Kant when they have those from Shankara to Sri Aurobindo, who could contain the entire minds of these western thinkers in one corner of their much vaster awareness?" (p. 209) And finally on the question of what East and West can offer to each other, Frawley writes: "what does East have to offer to the West? It is obviously a much older, better developed, wiser and more tolerant, as well as more scientific approach to the spiritual life. Similarly the West has to offer the East a more scientific, and often more humane and practical way to organise the outer life."

M. S. SRINIVASAN

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

Seventy-eighth Seminar

19 February 1995

SOME GLIMPSES OF THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF THE MOTHER

THE MOTHER—THE SAVIOUR GRACE OF THE SUPREME

Speech by Samrat Das

SINCE the Mother's life and teachings are multi-faceted, it is possible to have many glimpses of them. But in my present speech, I will focus on only one of them because it seems to me of fundamental importance, as it is related to the central purpose of Her life and work.

In the evolution of Nature, man emerges as a creature who is acutely conscious of his own limitations. He perceives that he is inexorably bound by dualities such as life and death, knowledge and ignorance, strength and weakness, pleasure and suffering. And consciously or unconsciously, he aspires always to break free from them, and gain their absolute terms such as immortality, omniscience, omnipotence, infinite and eternal bliss.

With a deeper insight one realises that this perpetual dissatisfaction and inherent human aspiration is an indication of the profound truth that all life is actually a vast yoga of Nature. For by yoga, we mean here the manifestation of the integrality of divine perfection which lies potentially dormant in the bosom of Nature. Though to the apparent eye Nature seems only a blind, mechanical force, yet is she secretly working out the Divine Will. The roots of this creation are above, as our ancient seers proclaimed by giving the image of an inverted tree.

In man, Nature has devised for the first time self-conscious means and centres through which she can carry on her immense yoga of the aeons. Thus to man alone is given the unique opportunity of aspiring and pursuing yoga consciously whereby he can intensify and accelerate this process of divine unfolding. For as Sri Aurobindo writes: "The animal is satisfied with a modicum of necessity; the gods are content with their splendours. But man cannot rest permanently until he reaches some highest good. He is the greatest of living beings because he is the most discontented, because he feels most the pressure of limitations. He alone, perhaps, is capable of being seized by the divine frenzy for a remote ideal."¹

But in his forward stride, man is baffled by a formidable riddle. An apparently unbridgeable gulf exists between what he perceives as supremely desirable and the actual realisation of it in this lower triple existence of matter, life and mind. This lower existence seems to be ever divorced in nature from its divine source, for its very fabric is made of ignorance. Whenever some individual succeeded in attaining the divine roots above, he was compelled to withdraw or discard the existence below because it was obstinately steeped in the inconscience. He finds it impossible to change the lower hemisphere into the terms of the upper hemisphere. As a consequence, he is convinced that the world and life are irredeemably the play-fields of falsehood.

But surely not for some individual salvation and liberation which leave the world and humanity basically unchanged, nor for some collective withdrawal from this world and an extinction into a supreme unknown was this labour of creation undertaken through the millenniums. Surely did God have a purpose in this world which is nothing else but his own self-manifestation in it. This is what Sri Aurobindo reveals in his epic poem, *Savitri*. I quote:

“A high and black negation is not all,
A huge extinction is not God’s last word,
Life’s ultimate sense, the close of being’s course,
The meaning of this great mysterious world.
In absolute silence sleeps an absolute Power.
Awaking, it can wake the trance-bound soul
And in the ray reveal the parent sun:
It can make the world a vessel of Spirit’s force,
It can fashion in the clay God’s perfect shape.
To free the self is but one radiant pace;
Here to fulfil himself was God’s desire.”²

But though Nature is secretly heading for this divine transformation, yet in her external modes and workings she appears unwilling to quickly surmount this impasse which humanity is facing. She seems more inclined to progress tardily using her laborious methods of experimentation. For she has got all eternity to fulfil her aim. But can man bear for an eternity this painful yoke of ignorance? How long can he suffer this blind stumbling forward, this chequered progress?

Thus was it that in this moment of great crisis, at this critical point of evolution, the Saviour Grace of the Supreme descended into mortality in the form of the Mother. In fact, it is about Her that Sri Aurobindo speaks in his epic poem, *Savitri*, revealing to us that She is: “the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the Supreme *Truth who comes down and is born to save.*” (Italics ours) For “Alone her hands can change Time’s dragon base”,³ by taking upon herself the cross of ignorance and pain. She laboured, unknown to man, to

change this world which clings to its own darkness. A world, in which each step is a compromise with falsehood. We can never really fathom the supreme sacrifice She made for humanity. Sri Aurobindo writes about this, giving us an inkling of it in his book *The Mother*: "In her deep and great love for her children she has consented to put on herself the cloak of this obscurity, condescended to bear the attacks and torturing influences of the powers of the Darkness and the Falsehood, borne to pass through the portals of the birth that is a death, taken upon herself the pangs and sorrows and sufferings of the creation, since it seemed that thus alone could it be lifted to the Light and Joy and Truth and eternal Life. This is the great sacrifice called sometimes the sacrifice of the Purusha, but much more deeply the holocaust of Prakriti, the sacrifice of the Divine Mother."⁴

It was the Mother who turned earth's smoke-obscured flame of aspiration into a blazing pyre of yearning when She identified Herself with the earth-consciousness, and prayed ardently for its deliverance to the Supreme in such words as Sri Aurobindo puts in the mouth of His Savitri:

"Thy embrace which rends the living knot of pain,
Thy joy, O Lord, in which all creatures breathe,
Thy magic flowing waters of deep love,
Thy sweetness give to me for earth and men."⁵

Thus she strove and brought down into our earth-atmosphere the supramental world of unwall'd light. For it is only by the action of the Supermind or Gnosis that the chasm between the ideal and its effectuation can be bridged successfully. In the Gnosis alone man can find the magic key to the divine transformation of the world-nature, because there divine knowledge and divine will are one—knowledge is itself a self-effectuating will or power. As Sri Aurobindo explains, "This is the tragedy of ineffectivity, of the hiatus between ideal and effective will, of our constant incapacity to work out in living form and action the truth we feel in our inner consciousness that pursues all the aspiration of mind and life towards the divinity behind them. But the *vijñāna* or gnosis is *not only truth but truth-power, it is the very working of the infinite* and divine nature; it is the divine knowledge one with the divine will in the force and delight of a spontaneous and luminous and inevitable self-fulfilment. By the gnosis, then, we change our human nature into a divine nature."⁶ (Italics ours)

So with the advent of the Supermind in the subtle physical layer of the earth the Mother has assured humanity of its divine fulfilment. Now that the Supermind is already at work in the subtle earth-atmosphere, it is only a matter of time when this marvellous Supramental world will manifest itself overtly. We, the children of the Mother, can hasten the coming of this Hour of God by becoming her divine portions and instruments. That is the best way to express

our gratitude to Her. And this can be best achieved only by surrendering ourselves completely to Her, by drowning ourselves in Her consciousness and not bothering our little heads over this or that individual or collective progress and realisation. A total consecration and surrender is all that She asks from us, and She will see to the rest.

I conclude with a vision of Nolini-da which is extremely pertinent and revelatory in nature about the proper attitude of surrender to the Mother. This is what, according to him, the Mother is now saying to us:

“Just see. Look at me. I am here come back in my new body,—divine, transformed and glorious. And I am the same mother, still human. Do not worry. Do not be concerned about your own self, your progress and realisation, nor about others. I am here, look at me, gaze into me, enter into me wholly, merge into my being, lose yourself into my love, with your love. You will see all problems solved, everything done. Forget all else, forget the world. Remember me alone, be one with me, with my love....”⁷

References

- 1 *The Life Divine* (Cent Ed , Vol 18), p 46
- 2 *Savitri* (Cent Ed , Vol 28), pp 311-12
- 3 *Ibid* , p 314
- 4 *The Mother* (Cent Ed , Vol 25), pp 24-25
- 5 *Savitri* (Cent Ed , Vol 29), p 697
- 6 *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 20), p 457
- 7 Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Sweet Mother*, 4th Series, p 11