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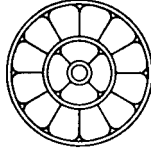
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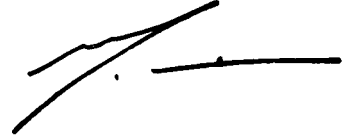
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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No. 11

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

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THE SUN FROM WHICH WE KINDLE ALL OUR SUNS

ACROSS the silence of the ultimate Calm,
Out of a marvellous Transcendence' core,
A body of wonder and translucency
As if a sweet mystic summary of her self
Escaping into the original Bliss
Had come enlarged out of eternity,
Someone came infinite and absolute
A being of wisdom, power and delight,
Even as a mother draws her child to her arms,
Took to her breast Nature and world and soul.
Abolishing the signless emptiness,
Breaking the vacancy and voiceless hush,
Piercing the limitless Unknowable,
Into the liberty of the motionless depths
A beautiful and felicitous lustre stole.
A moment's sweetness of the All-Beautiful
Cancelled the vanity of the cosmic whirl
A Nature throbbing with a Heart divine
Was felt in the unconscious universe;
It made the breath a happy mystery
And brought a love sustaining pain with joy...
Affirming in life a hidden ecstasy
It held the spirit to its miraculous course;
Carrying immortal values to the hours
It justified the labour of the suns.
For one was there supreme behind the God.
A Mother Might brooded upon the world;
A Consciousness revealed its marvellous front
Transcending all that is, denying none...
The undying Truth appeared, the enduring Power
Of all that here is made and then destroyed,
The Mother of all godheads and all strengths
Who, mediatrix, binds earth to the Supreme.
The Enigma ceased that rules our nature's night,
The covering Nescience was unmasked and slain;
Its mind of error was stripped off from things
And the dull moods of its perverting will..
No more existence seemed an aimless fall,

Extinction was no more the sole release
 The hidden Word was found, the long-sought clue,
 Revealed was the meaning of our spirit's birth,
 Condemned to an imperfect body and mind,
 In the inconscience of material things
 And the indignity of mortal life
 A Heart was felt in the spaces wide and bare,
 A burning Love from white spiritual founts
 Annulled the sorrow of the ignorant depths;
 Suffering was lost in her immortal smile.
 A Life from beyond grew conqueror here of Death;
 To err no more was natural to mind,
 Wrong could not come where all was light and love
 The Formless and the Formed were joined in her.
 Immensity was exceeded by a look,
 A Face revealed the crowded Infinite.
 Incarnating inexpressibly in her limbs
 The boundless joy the blind world-forces seek,
 Her body of beauty mooned the seas of bliss.
 At the head she stands of birth and toil and fate,
 In their slow round the cycles turn to her call;
 Alone her hands can change Time's dragon base.
 Hers is the mystery the Night conceals;
 The spirit's alchemist energy is hers;
 She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire.
 The luminous heart of the Unknown is she,
 A power of silence in the depths of God;
 She is the Force, the inevitable Word,
 The magnet of our difficult ascent,
 The Sun from which we kindle all our suns,
 The Light that leans from the unrealised Vasts,
 The joy that beckons from the impossible,
 The Might of all that never yet came down.
 All Nature dumbly calls to her alone
 To heal with her feet the aching throb of life
 And break the seals on the dim soul of man
 And kindle her fire in the closed heart of things.
 All here shall be one day her sweetness's home

SRI AUROBINDO

A VEDIC HYMN AND THE MANTRA

INDRA AND THE THOUGHT-FORCES

Rig Veda I.171

प्रति व एना नमसाहमेमि सूक्तेन भिक्षे सुमतिं तुराणाम् ।
रराणता मरुतो वेद्याभिर्नि हेळो धत्त वि मुचध्वमश्चान् ॥१॥

1. To you I come with this obeisance, by the perfect word I seek right mentality from the swift in the passage. Take delight, O Maruts, in the things of knowledge, lay aside your wrath, unyoke your steeds

एष वः स्तोमो मरुतो नमस्वानूहदा तष्टो मनसा धायि देवाः ।
उपेमा यात मनसा जुषाणा यूयं हि ह्य नमस इदृधासः ॥२॥

2. Lo, the hymn of your affirmation, O Maruts; it is fraught with my obeisance, it was framed by the heart, it was established by the mind, O ye gods. Approach these my words and embrace them with the mind; for of submission¹ are you the increasers.

स्तुतासो नो मरुतो मृळयन्तुत स्तुतो मधवा शम्भविष्टः ।
ऊर्ध्वा नः सन्तु कोम्या वनान्यहानि विश्वा मरुतो जिगीषा ॥३॥

3. Affirmed let the Maruts be benign to us, affirmed the lord of plenitude has become wholly creative of felicity Upward may our desirable delights² be uplifted, O Maruts, upward all our days by the will towards victory

अस्मादहं तविषादीषमाण इन्द्राद्विया मरुतो रेजमानः ।
युष्मभ्यं हव्या निशितान्यासन्तान्यारे चकृमा मृळता नः ॥४॥

- 4 I, mastered by this mighty one, trembling with the fear of Indra, O Maruts, put far away the offerings that for you had been made intense. Let your grace be upon us.

येन मानासश्चितयन्त उन्ना व्युष्टिषु शवसा शश्वतीनाम् ।
स नो मरुद्विर्वृषभ श्रवो धा उग्र उग्रेभिः स्थविरः सहोदाः ॥५॥

¹ *Namasah* Sayana takes *namas* throughout in his favourite sense, food, for “increasers of salutation” is obviously impossible. It is evident from this and other passages that behind the physical sense of obeisance the word carries with it a psychological significance which here disengages itself clearly from the concrete figure

² *Vanāni* The word means both “forests” and “enjoyments” or as an adjective, “enjoyable” It has commonly the double sense in the Veda, the “pleasant growths” of our physical existence, *romā prthivyāh*

- 5 Thou by whom the movements of the mind grow conscient and brilliant¹ in our mornings through the bright power² of the continuous Dawns, O Bull of the herd³ establish by the Maruts inspired knowledge in us—by them in their energy thou energetic, steadfast, a giver of might

त्वं पाहीन्द्र सहीयसो नृन्भवा मरुद्भिरवयातहेळाः ।
सुप्रकेतेभिः सासहिर्दधानो विद्यामेघं वृजनं जीरदानुम् ॥६॥

- 6 Do thou, O Indra, protect the Powers⁴ in their increased might, put away thy wrath against the Maruts, by them in thy forcefulness upheld, who have right perceptions May we find the strong impulsion that shall break swiftly through

(*The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL, Vol 10, pp 254-55)

*

THE PROCESS OF THE FORMATION OF THE MANTRA

In the system of the Mystics, which has partially survived in the schools of Indian Yoga, the Word is a power, the Word creates. For all creation is expression, everything exists already in the secret abode of the Infinite, *guhā hutam*, and has only to be brought out here in apparent form by the active consciousness. Certain schools of Vedic thought even suppose the worlds to have been created by the goddess Word and sound as first etheric vibration to have preceded formation. In the Veda itself there are passages which treat the poetic measures of the sacred mantras,—*anustubh*, *triṣṭubh*, *jagatī*, *gāyatrī*,—as symbolic of the rhythms in which the universal movement of things is cast.

By expression then we create and men are even said to create the gods in themselves by the mantra. Again, that which we have created in our consciousness by the Word, we can fix there by the Word to become part of ourselves and effective not only in our inner life but upon the outer physical world. By

¹ *Usrāh* In the feminine the word is used as a synonym for the Vedic *go*, meaning at once Cow and ray of light. *Usāh*, the Dawn, also, is *gomati*, girt with rays or accompanied by the herds of the Sun. There is in the text a significant assonance, *usrā vi-ustisu*, one of the common devices used by the Vedic Rishis to suggest a thought or a connection which they do not consider it essential to bring out expressly.

² *Savasā* There are a host of words in the Veda for strength, force, power and each of them carries with it its own peculiar shade of significance. *Savas* usually conveys the idea of light as well as force.

³ *Vrsabha* Bull, Male, Lord or Puissant. Indra is constantly spoken of as *vrsabha* or *vrsan*. The word is sometimes used by itself, as here, sometimes with another governed by it to bring out the idea of the herds, e.g. *vrsabhah matinām*, Lord of the thoughts, where the image of the bull and the herd is plainly intended.

⁴ *Nrn* The word *nr* seems to have meant originally active, swift or strong. We have *nrmna*, strength, and *nrtamo nrnām*, most puissant of the Powers. It came afterwards to mean male or man and in the Veda is oftenest applied to the gods as the male powers or Purushas presiding over the energies of Nature as opposed to the female powers, who are called *gnāh* or *gnāvah*.

expression we form, by affirmation we establish. As a power of expression the word is termed *gīḥ* or *vacas*, as a power of affirmation, *stoma*. In either aspect it is named *manma* or *mantra*, expression of thought in mind, and *brahman*, expression of the heart or the soul,—for this seems to have been the earlier sense of the word *brahman*,¹ afterwards applied to the Supreme Soul or Universal Being

The process of formation of the mantra is described in the second verse along with the conditions of its effectivity. Agastya presents the *stoma*, hymn at once of affirmation and of submission, to the Maruts. Fashioned by the heart, it receives its just place in the mentality through confirmation by the mind. The mantra, though it expresses thought in mind, is not in its essential part a creation of the intellect. To be the sacred and effective word, it must have come as an inspiration from the supramental plane, termed in Veda, *rtam*, the Truth, and have been received into the superficial consciousness either through the heart or by the luminous intelligence, *manīsā*. The heart in Vedic psychology is not restricted to the seat of the emotions, it includes all that large tract of spontaneous mentality, nearest to the subconscious in us, out of which rise the sensations, emotions, instincts, impulses and all those intuitions and inspirations that travel through these agencies before they arrive at form in the intelligence. This is the “heart” of Veda and Vedanta, *hrdaya*, *hrd*, or *brahman*. There in the present state of mankind the Purusha is supposed to be seated centrally. Nearer to the vastness of the subconscious, it is there that, in ordinary mankind,—man not yet exalted to a higher plane where the contact with the Infinite is luminous, intimate and direct,—the inspirations of the Universal Soul can most easily enter in and most swiftly take possession of the individual soul. It is therefore by the power of the heart that the mantra takes form. But it has to be received and held in the thought of the intelligence as well as in the perceptions of the heart; for not till the intelligence has accepted and even brooded upon it, can that truth of thought which the truth of the Word expresses be firmly possessed or normally effective. Fashioned by the heart, it is confirmed by the mind.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL, Vol 10, pp. 258-59)

¹ Also found in the form *brh* (Brihaspati, Brahmanaspati), and there seem to have been older forms, *brhan* and *brahan*. It is from *brahan* (gen *brahnas*) that, in all probability, we have the greek *phren*, *phrenos*, signifying mind

DYUMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MOTHER

Mother,

I had no intention of violating Your orders. The wiping was already finished by the time I received Your last order at 5 p.m. or so. Mother, I am at Your feet for any punishment for violating Your orders even unconsciously.

WHY punishment, my child?

I never thought of such a thing! I never thought even that you had violated any rules. The whole thing is a misunderstanding.

You must know that I trust you and have full confidence in your earnestness and your good will. It is on that ground that we are working together and also that I let you know whenever there is something that has to be corrected

Never doubt my love.

12 June 1929

Mother,

When X handed the monthly Prosperity things to me I thought. "What will Mother do if the stock of toothbrushes is exhausted? Mother must have this one—it goes to Mother."

I have taken already my precautions. Since more than four months I am using my finger as a toothbrush and find it quite convenient. So I am sending back your toothbrush. If you have no use for it, you can return it to the stores.

2 February 1932

Mother,

This bowl has been put on the fire by somebody and is now spoiled. Who this somebody is, is not known

It is a great pity, because the best punishment would be to serve his or her meal in the bowl!

7 June 1933

My child,

I have an impression that the visitors are arriving with a big appetite and that they may find our dishes somewhat small. Consequently I have increased the quantity on the "menu"

14 February 1933

My child,

Why were you so serious at pranam?

Don't let anything from outside approach and disturb you. What people think, do or say is of little importance. The only thing that counts is your relation with the Divine—and from that point of view you have nothing to worry about, all is all right

And never forget that we love and trust you

30 April 1933

My dear Mother,

Y and I went to Aroumé today. We find the existing kitchen an impossibility. To change it we will have to spend time and money. We can put the kitchen somewhere else, as I am showing here in the plan.

The room which has an opening towards the Governor's house can be turned into a kitchen. It has tiles on the roof and glass ventilators for light. We can put the ovens there. As for the smoke from the ovens, we can put up a chimney. The food we can carry to the serving room. The kitchen vessels we can wash in the kitchen itself

Unfortunately the latrines are next to the kitchen and also a new gutter. We can close the gutter and cut off the view of the latrines by planting a creeper.

I do not think this idea is at all practicable

First, the greatest objection is the neighbourhood of the latrines; to hide them or to shut a gutter does not prevent the flies from going freely from the latrines to the food in the kitchen.

Second, Xavier was very particular that we should not misuse these rooms. I do not think he would agree to turn them into a kitchen.

Third, to put a kitchen just under the windows of the Government House, sending them directly all the smoke of our cooking, is just the best way to get us into trouble

Fourth, it is a long way to carry the food to the serving place.

Fifth, there are many other minor inconveniences.

Sixth, you cannot judge the existing kitchen so long as it is not thoroughly cleaned and repaired. If it is not sufficiently ventilated and if there is not enough light, we can put in a new window. I am ready to do it at my own expense if necessary

4 December 1933

My Mother,

Bless me with Thy Love. I now go out of this compound for the Divine Work,

protected and surrounded by Your Love and the Love of my beloved Sri Aurobindo.

My Mother, though I shall be working outside, I am ever Thine, ever at Thy Feet.

Why do you speak of working *outside*? Do you think that any house of the Ashram is outside our atmosphere, even the most material? Here or there it is just the same, I am always close to you, helping you, supporting you, working through you, and it is not a few yards more or less which can make any difference for that

4 January 1934

Mother,

Z wanted to spend 20 minutes with me. That is not possible—not even 10 minutes regularly at a fixed hour. It is nothing but a vital demand on me, I cannot satisfy that, I can give her 2 or 3 minutes and not more

It is not at all advisable to let her encroach like that upon you. The more she will get, the more she will want and finally, if she could, she would swallow you up

Mother, I do not think that I should go to call her; if she comes to me I shall receive her. What do You say?

Keep quiet. You must not go to call her. She wants to annex you; this cannot be tolerated.

c 25 January 1934

(To be continued)

NISHIKANTA'S WONDERFUL POETRY

NIRODBARAN'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

I had been plodding at a poem and now it is ready. I called in Nishikanta who did in five minutes what would have taken me five hours, and with what result. Do our styles harmonise?

What of that? The result is all right. Harin used to write ten or twelve poems in a day or any number more. It takes me usually a day or two days to write and perfect one or three days even, or if very inspired, I get two short ones out, and have perhaps to revise the next day. Another poet will be like Virgil writing nine lines a day and spending all the rest of his time polishing and polishing. A fourth will be like Monomohan, as I knew him, setting down half lines and fragments and taking 2 weeks or 2 months to put them into shape. The time does not matter, getting it done and the quality alone matter. So forge ahead and don't be discouraged by the prodigious rapidity of Nishikanta.

It is certainly a little difficult to keep them together, especially as Nishikanta's stanzas are strong and fiery and yours are delicate and plaintive. It is like a strong robustious fellow and a delicate slender one walking in a leash—they don't quite coalesce.

Here is Nishikanta's poem. Just think of it—a fellow who never has written a single line in English and doesn't know it well, translates his own poem at a shot into a more beautiful, richer poem! Look at his astonishing mistakes in spelling but does it matter?

No, so long as there is somebody to correct it.

And on the whole the metre also seems all right.

What metre? Is it the one I indicated?

Amal has corrected the whole thing, he says some of the lines are striking. What would you say, and will you kindly retouch, if necessary?

It is very beautiful. Amal has worked much upon it, so it is so surprisingly perfect. The original form is very poetic, but it is only the first two lines of it and the first two also of the second stanza that are quite successful. All the same it is a remarkable endeavour.

Nishikanta says that before writing or painting he bows down once before the

Mother and you If that is the secret, why, I shall bow a hundred times, Sir!

It depends on how you bow.

Amal says that he wanted to make a metrical experiment by a sort of combination of iambic and anapaest You write that after Amal's correction of Nishikanta's poem, it is surprisingly perfect. Can it be called a poem, with so many irregular variations? Or would it be called free verse, with some metrical arrangement?

What on earth do you mean? Iambics and anapaests can be combined in English verse at any time, provided one does not set out to write a purely iambic or a purely anapaestic metre. Mixed anapaest and iamb make a most beautifully flexible lyric rhythm. It has no more connection with free verse than the constellation of the Great Bear has to do with a cat's tail. Free verse indicates verse free from the shackles of rhyme and metre, but rhythmic (or trying to be rhythmic) in one way or another. If you put rhymes, that will be considered a shackle and the "free" will kick at the chain. The rhythm and metrical arrangement is perfect on the iamb-anapaest basis. I only wanted to know whether that was what Amal intended. For the rhyme scheme of the poem is that of a sonnet and in English the sonnet is always written in iambic pentameter—the combination of a lyrical metre with sonnet rhyme scheme is a novel adventure.

If Nishikanta can learn the English metre, he will produce some splendid poems. What do you say?

Possibly and even probably—only he must learn also what is and is not possible in English poetic style.

I hope you didn't fail to notice in Nishikanta's poem—"With profuse success, each pot of my every dot fulfils," word for word a translation by him of his Bengali line—প্রতি বিন্দু প্রতি আধাব

Amal and I had a hearty laugh!

Yes, it was a stroke of genius.

Amal said "Better send Nishikanta's poem, as it is, to Sri Aurobindo and ask him whether it would not be better to write such poems in free verse."

Free verse would very likely be the death of his new possibility. His genius runs naturally into rhyme.

But don't you agree that it is a very striking piece with much original imagery?

It is indeed a remarkable effort, full of beauty and power. You will see that by some changes (for the sake of metre and correct language and style) it becomes a poem of great original beauty.

It seems to be better than the previous one—both in force and imagery and yet it doesn't seem to be so oriental. Am I right?

You are right; it is much more possible in English

I believe that Nishikanta will profit immensely if he tries to learn the metre.

Yes. This one I have turned into a very flexible amalgam of iambs, trochees and anapaests. It gives to my eye a very attractive and original effect

I have grave doubts about the success of the orientals in the field of English poetry. It is very difficult for us to enter into the subtleties of English language, and our oriental nature is also unappealing to the Westerners.

What you say is no doubt correct, but on the other hand it is possible that the mind of the future will be more international than it is now. In that case the expression of various temperaments in English poetry will have a chance.

Look at Harin's poetry. We're so ecstatic over it here, but outside he hardly gets a good audience; not even K seems to like his poetry.

I don't think I can put as much value on K's literary judgments as on his comments on Yoga etc. Some of his criticisms astonished me. For instance he found fault with Harin for using rhymes which Shelley uses freely in his best poems

You must remember also that Harin's poetry has been appreciated by some of the finest English writers like Binyon and De la Mare. But anyway all growing writers (unless they are very lucky) meet with depreciation and criticism at first until people get accustomed to it. Perhaps if Harin had published his poems under the name let us say of Harry Chatto, he would have succeeded by this time and no one would have talked of Oriental inaptness.

I always look with pity at our people trying poetic exercises in English, except Harin, and always think of Michael Madhusudan's failure. But I suppose you think otherwise, because you have a big trump up your sleeve—the Supermind.

My aim is not personal glory, but to arrive at the expression of spiritual truth and experience of all kinds in poetry. The English tongue is the most wide-spread—if it can be used for the highest spiritual expression, that is worth trying

How do you explain Nishikanta's miraculous feat? He can't speak at all correctly in English, whereas he writes wonderful poetry!

That has nothing to do with it. Speech and Poetry come from two quite different sources—Remember Goldsmith who wrote like an angel and talked like a parrot.

You can't say that it is all due to Yoga. He has been here only for a year and D for so many years, yet the difference between them as poets, is striking. I can understand your yogic success in his Bengali poetry, because the field was ready, but the opening of his channel in English has staggered me I can't explain if it is your success or his.

What do you mean by Yoga? There is a Force here in the atmosphere which will give itself to anyone open to it. Naturally it will work best when the native language is used—but it can do big things through English if the channel used is a poetic one and if that channel offers itself. Two things are necessary—no personal resistance and some willingness to take trouble about understanding the elementary technique at least so that the transcription may not meet with too many obstacles. Nishikanta has a fine channel and with a very poetic turn in it—he offers no resistance to the flow of the force, no interference of his mental ego, only the convenience of his mental individuality. Whether he takes the trouble for the technique is another matter.

I had written to you that Nishikanta bows in front of your photograph before he sits down to write, and that I am ready to bow a hundred times, if that is the trick. You answered that it depends on how one bows Methinks it does not depend on it. Even if it did I don't think Nishikanta knows it. Or was it in his past life that he knew it?

Well, there is a certain faculty of effacing oneself and letting the Universal Force run through you—that is the way of bowing. It can be acquired by various means, but also one may have the capacity for doing it in certain directions by nature.

After hearing what you have written regarding the learning of metre, Nishikanta approached Ramchandra for learning it; because it was he who had given him the push to write in English. But Ramchandra wants to read with him English poetry,

so that he may plunge into the spirit before learning metre. To develop the English poetic style, I suppose, it would be the best plan

It is not English yet. But they can do like that if they prefer. Right rhythm however is the one thing still lacking and, until he learns it, these efforts will be only a promise

Are we taxing you too much by this occupation with our poetry? If not, Nishikanta proposes to send you one poem a day. How would you like having the dish every night?

You can send it. I will look at the dish even if I don't devour it

Here is a lyrical dish prepared by Nishikanta all on a sudden after reading a book on metre. How do you find it?

For a first attempt remarkable—but he has not yet the necessary niceties of phrase and rhythm. The first three lines of the second stanza are very powerful, as good a thing as any English poet could have written. With some doctoring it makes a powerful lyric

Nishikanta has got the metre all right this time

Almost—he has the gift But there are defects—e.g. he sometimes gave 3 ft. for 2 ft. lines and vice-versa Having made a scheme he should keep to it

He wants to know how to get the right rhythm and the right poetic style. I said by reading English poetry.

Yes, reading and listening with the inner ear to the modulation of the lines.

About myself—as I go on writing, the lines, expressions, images seem so commonplace that I distrust the value of my work.

It is no use being *too* squeamish at first By that distrust you can depreciate good as well as cheap values

Secondly, I get tired of waiting and leave off, say after an hour What else can one do? Where is the ego or personal resistance you speak of?

I didn't mean all that. I meant that a certain Nirod gets in the way, is too active or too blocky. Too subtle for farther explanation, you have to feel.

It is not the question of “being open” or “knowing how to bow”, but having a poetic being open or semi-open.

It has nothing to do with the poetic being.

“Personal resistance, mental ego” are phrases, for there must first be a poetic being, for an ego to resist

The poetic being is not burdened with an ego. It is the outer being which contributes that.

Nishikanta started with a desire to write after reading about metre, but without any central idea. After an hour or so he felt a power descending, then the poem began to unroll itself. But he had no sleep at night.

That is all right—except for the no sleep which I don’t exactly advise

It means one need not have any preformed ideas, not even inspiration, a simple desire will do.

But that is the inspiration when something descends.

(Nirodbaran’s Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, pp 401-408.)

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE

THE MOTHER will give you what you need,
Just trust in Her to take the lead.
She’s always with you through thick and thin
Just open your heart and let Her in

Know in your heart that it’s no dream
That She is inside you and is The Supreme.

MARY (ANGEL) FINN

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

SOME PERSONAL LETTERS

THE contents of your letter make somewhat unhappy reading, what with your own illness and “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” in the past and the prospect of “a sea of troubles” in the future. But whatever has happened to the Hamlet in you, let us hope your taking “arms” against anticipated evils will be unnecessary and a good time will start with this year. In any case the calling of the Divine Peace into yourself as well as into your wife and daughter is very important. With its presence many untoward things can be prevented or, if not prevented, borne with a vision of the Divine’s secret hand behind everything, stretched out to lead us closer to Himself.

In all that you say about me I hardly recognise the “poor Tom” that’s me. This name that I have given myself is not an infelicitous one when I remember what a chap who was selling books in Madhav’s office offered to Dr. Chubb. He put before Chubb the two “tomes” of *On Yoga* and asked him, “Would you like to have Mother’s toms?” To be a “tom” of the Mother—a he-cat such as she had loved in her cat-evolving days—is quite a bit of luck. And, after all, to be a baby “tom” hanging surrendered in the mamma-cat’s mouth is the image of an ideal sadhak of the Integral Yoga. But, apart from all this, I am aware how lacking I have been in the realisation of the great dream with which I came to the Ashram both on 16 December 1927 and on 19 February 1954. I am not being humble: I am only being realistic in view of the extreme of the idealistic I had been. Now all my mind and heart are fixed on getting closer and closer to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The demand on the sadhana is very intense at present. Something in me which had its centre of Godward flow in the subtle dimension seems suddenly to have got projected into the outermost physical consciousness with all its natural resistance which answers to the sense I have expressed in a line of one of my poems:

Thwarted, alone,
We struggle through an atmosphere of stone

Yet this thrust outward is absolutely necessary. To turn it inward and upward is the crucial stage. The neglect of it is what is ultimately meant in that famous declaration of Sri Aurobindo: “I have no intention of giving my sanction to a new edition of the old fiasco.” The old fiasco was that one had wonderful experiences in the inner consciousness but, when the eyes of meditation opened, one was the same old damned if not bloody fool as ever. I have always attempted to fulfil the Socratic-Aurobindonian prayer: “O may the inner and the outer be always in harmony!” but the demand for this harmony has never been so stringent as now. A new phase of Yoga seems to begin and to go through it

hopefully an immense calm is required as the backdrop against which the super-Shakespearean "Tempest" has to be played out, excluding tricky variations on the theme of "As You Like It" and looking forward to a *grand finale* of "All's Well that Ends Well"

Don't get mystified or, worse still, "gabrified", our Indian school-slang for "frightened". I am quite normal, except for a slow Agni-sense in the chest-region working for purification, which may feel like a low fever at times but is really nothing to worry about. I am very tranquil and patient and know that a significant breakthrough will come. You may remember that I had been waiting for some strange breakthrough by which either I would inwardly shoot into the Beyond or the Beyond would pour into me. Now I understand that what was working out was neither of these two movements but the transition from the inner subtle-physical poise to the outermost physical bodily consciousness. The supramentalisation of the body is a matter of some other birth, now that the Mother has withdrawn. But what is happening can prove a good preparation for the first few steps towards some glorious future pointing in that direction.

I have to know how to wait and endure. No actual suffering is felt but a sort of calm tension watchful lest anything not in tune with the Godward turn should get its voice heard. Before the slightest whisper of common impulse starts I have to sweep the ominous silence out. To go on making more and more room for the Presence in the very blood and bone, as it were, seems to be the difficult process started. I am my usual cheerful self without being the carefree chap I was. Formerly the glowing inner used to take care of everything, no matter what ran across the outer consciousness, that inner remained untouched. Now the inner itself appears to have stepped into the outer and it has to be guarded like a delicate flame between two hands from the wind of the world. The guarding, however, is done without any agitation or excitement. Some imperturbable Vast pushes forward those protective hands from an unknown background which is yet felt to be my own depth. And those hands protecting the growing flame are also as if brought close to each other in constant prayer:

Leave thou no quiver of this time-born heart
A poor and visionless wanderer apart:
Make even my darkness a divine repose
One with thy nameless root, O mystic rose!

Enough of my own story! But I may add that my prayer gathers into its intensity an awareness of the needs of all who are dear to me and to whom I mean much. It invokes the Supreme Grace in some form or other for whoever is connected with the beating of "this time-born heart". In a subtle way the feel of the whole physical universe is directed towards the Ever-radiant Beauty, but more concretely the invocatory gesture merges in its own cry an appeal on behalf

of the Amalian circle. So please remember that all your troubles, along with the difficulties of other associates of mine, are always offered to the Mother for solution according to her light and love. Do stop being “plagued with many worries”
(11 1 1983)

*

“Poor Tom”, as I have dubbed myself, is not too self-humiliating a name. Perhaps the adjective is out of place when the abbreviation “Tom” for “Thomas” has illustrious associations. The great medieval philosopher, afterwards saint, Aquinas was a Tom. So were Carlyle and Macaulay and the poet Moore and the scientist Edison. Then there are the heroes of fiction: Tom Jones, Tom Brown, Tom Sawyer.

As to the Mother’s “cat-evolving days”, soon after she came to settle in Pondi she started making experiments with the cat-consciousness. She personally looked after a cat, carrying it in her arms and walking with it when it was ill. There was a cat which used to meditate with her and Sri Aurobindo and even get out of its body. Whenever a cat used to go and sit in Sri Aurobindo’s chair, he used to go and sit elsewhere rather than disturb it. When a cat named “Big Boy” was dying, Sri Aurobindo came all the way down from his room and caressed it while it died. In her talks the Mother has recounted how she once brought a scorpion-stung cat to Sri Aurobindo and asked him to set it right. Even at the time I came to the Ashram the sadhaks were encouraged to keep cats. The Mother would work occultly through them. Lalita had three cats—Pink Nose, Black Nose (also known as “Professor” because of its constant meowing, as if lecturing) and Pichun, a semi-wild cat which made it a point to pass No. 1 or 2 on Lalita’s bed until she complained to the Mother and the Mother changed Pichun’s habit. I tried to keep a kitten but after a few days I had to give up. The Mother did not quite like my failure. When Satprem wanted to poison a cat which was a constant nuisance the Mother told him that she had attached a curse to cat-killing ever since a certain cat of hers had been killed. Latterly everything changed. The cat-occult phase passed. The Mother has spoken of some cats which would get reborn as human beings as soon as they died. In a chapter in *Our Light and Delight* I have written of her way and Sri Aurobindo’s with animals.

The Mother’s past incarnations must have been very numerous. We know of a few: Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt, Mona Lisa, Joan of Arc, Queen Elizabeth I of England. At the time of the Renaissance she was not only Mona Lisa but also Marguerite de Valois and another woman. It seems that at the time of Christ too she was incarnated or projected in three persons, of whom Cleopatra was one.

Reading poetry that has come from the inner or the higher planes is very good therapy. I make it a practice to repeat several lines from *Savitri* again and

again. A stanza that is one of my first favourites, though not from that epic, is:

Arms taking to a voiceless supreme delight,
Life that meets the Eternal with close breast,
An unvalled mind dissolved in the Infinite,
Force one with unimaginable rest

These lines come straight from the Overmind and their profoundly suggestive rhythm which seems to go from “everlasting to everlasting” can work a great deal of change in our inner being and even affect our outer. At present the first line is the master-mantra of my sadhana. I had some sense of the reality behind the words of the other three but never before had I realised the intense bodily movement towards Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that could lie in this opening phrase. It crystallises for me the breakthrough of the sadhana outwards, of which I wrote to you in my last letter. Of course my body has worshipped the Mother and the Master but that was the inner being acting through the outer, not the outer being acting in its own spiritual right, as it were, and making an independent spontaneous self-offering and passionately yearning to be lost in the eternal Ananda of the Divine Existence.

The word “lost” should not add to the unnecessary worry my last letter may have caused you. It does not mean giving up the body. It only means fusing the body-sense with the Transcendent Substance, the Substance that permeated the body-sense of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. To sustain the “arms taking to a voiceless supreme Delight” a lot of self-purifying and self-voiding is required and it is the movement towards such a process that creates the symptoms which I wrote of, and which can be summed up as “a calm tension” (23 2 1983)

K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

RECOLLECTIONS OF SUDHIR KUMAR SARKAR

HIS EARLY ASSOCIATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

[Sudhir Kumar Sarkar as a young revolutionary had come in close contact with Sri Aurobindo during the Nationalist Movement started by him in 1905. Sudhir lived with Sri Aurobindo almost for a year like a family member and later, in 1908-1909, looked after him when they were in Alipore Jail as undertrial prisoners. These recollections, originally recounted in Bengali by Sudhir, are from A Spirit Indomitable edited by Mona Sarkar]

It was the year 1907 I had stepped into my seventeenth year. The idea of a University degree was extremely repugnant to me and accordingly, I gave up my studies in the wake of the great stir for National Education. This was done by me with the solemn intention of snatching my country back from the clutches of the British.

There was a mood of expectancy in the air. Rumours were floating about. It was said that all the provinces were ready for a battle and that a hundred and fifty thousand Naga Sannyasins (naked ascetics) had pledged themselves to come to the aid of Bengal and fight unto death. Such stories filled the atmosphere. I was boiling with an inexpressible excitement and was completely under its sway. Home and family comfort no longer held any charm for me. I started using pompous phrases and high-sounding words in conversation with my parents, brothers and sisters. Indeed I believed at that time that I had become an extraordinary mortal, a kind of superman, and that nothing was too great or too difficult for me to do.

I Joined the Revolutionaries

When news reached Calcutta that idols of Durga had been smashed in the temples at Jamalpur, seven of us started at once for the place, intending to teach the miscreants a lesson. There was a big meeting, a gathering of thousands. Fighting flared up and we had to use firearms to defend ourselves. My six companions were arrested on charges of murder. I alone escaped and after going through excruciating hardships, I managed to reach Calcutta. There I received, from known and unknown alike, many a pat on the back for being plucky. Detailed reports of our exploits were published in the newspapers. I was acclaimed a hero. While the others had been caught, I had escaped! Till then I was doubtful about my reception; least of all did I expect any praise. Rather I had misgivings that I might face disgrace for having left my comrades in the lurch, while I escaped alone. But the leaders of those days made a lot of noise about me. Perhaps because I qualified myself through this examination, I

became trustworthy in the eyes of the seniors; at any rate I was promoted to the next higher grade. I was directed to stay in Sri Aurobindo's house and to look after him.

I continued my studies there. I felt greatly honoured for the privilege of being able to stay with such a great and learned man, one who was so gentle and quiet, one who had sacrificed so much. Perhaps I wanted to show off this privilege before my friends and relatives a little. Till then I had not been able to feel any real sense of achievement or glory unless I received acclamation from others.

Was He a God?

The house was a small two-storey building with three living rooms. There Sri Aurobindo used to translate the Mahabharata into English verse and write articles for *Bande Mataram*, the most prominent newspaper in those days, and at the same time he would explain things to me, such as Carlyle's idea of the French Revolution and Hero-worship. For the first time I observed that it was quite possible to direct one's mind towards three or four activities at the same time. Once I could not help asking how this was possible. Sri Aurobindo answered: "It is not very difficult. If the mind is sufficiently trained and cultivated, it can easily do many things simultaneously." An innate bashfulness and seeming humility was still my wont. Sri Aurobindo's simple and easy manner, his politeness, friendliness and equanimity overwhelmed me. I wondered at that time if he was really a being of this world or some other. Yet my mischievous mind had the temerity to test him—I had been brought up in an atmosphere of insincerity and suspicion, a life beset with want and struggle, misunderstanding and jealousy, the play of hide and seek and duplicity. I could never convince myself that a man could be of his height. Was it really possible? Yet I could not help liking Sri Aurobindo. On how many occasions I tried to look searchingly through him with my mischievous eyes to discover some little bit of human weakness; later, I felt overwhelmed with shame and disgust at my own lowly mentality.

He Called Me a 'Friend'!

Sri Aurobindo used to mingle with us unreservedly, eating, sleeping, talking and joking with us! There was no barrier at all. At that time so much liberality appeared a little too much for me. One day I went so far as to protest. It happened when I found he had written in a letter to his friend Sundari Mohan Das, "My friend Sudhir Kumar is going to see you." I asked him point-blank, "How do I become your friend? You, who are so much above me in learning, age, accomplishment and fame—in fact, in every respect. Rather it is proper that I should venerate you, seek advice from you, be humble to you; instead I am

described as your friend and equal. And that too while writing to someone who is much older than me, and higher in status!" But Sri Aurobindo brushed all this aside and would not let me go before convincing me thoroughly of my misconception. In his faltering Bengali which sounded so sweet in his English-accented tongue, he said, "Our aims, our hopes and our aspirations are so much the same: how can we be any other than friends? The diffidence you feel is due to the tradition of this country. At present it has gone beyond limit and taken an exaggerated form which seems so unnatural "

The Mahabharata—Is It All True?

Seeing Sri Aurobindo absorbed in his work on the Mahabharata, I asked him one day, rather with a motive, "Do you really believe everything that is written in the Mahabharata? I have heard that there is much in it that was added later." That day I was caught quite off my guard and I exposed myself openly. Sri Aurobindo seemed to be extremely surprised at the question, as if he had never expected it from me. I felt very ashamed and my words became confused. But Sri Aurobindo seemed to understand and was pained at my feeling of embarrassment and went on to explain in his gentle and halting Bengali, so sweet to hear: the story of Vasuki supporting the earth on its head is as true as our existence—but the vision which revealed it has been lost to us. And the vision through which we observe the modern scientific world, which has evolved through a long process of action and counteraction, is not the whole of man's vision. Vasuki represents vital power and is a symbol of total Life-energy. Man becomes conscious gradually after passing through all the gradations of evolution, inorganic and organic, inanimate and animate. All those multitudinous expanses of innumerable lives journeying through which we have attained to our present human consciousness, lie embedded in us fold upon fold, in deep kinship with us. Because of that, the snake and the jackal, the tiger and the lion are all our old relatives. Man's kinship with the snake is indeed very close. Behind the body of all creatures lies the subtle body of the great creative Energy in seed form. That subtle body becomes veiled upon our taking this gross body. The ideas and beliefs of the Hindus were not false. We have now to regain that Vision. Because of our present state of ignorance, there is so much suffering and want, so much stress and anguish for awakening.

Read the Mahabharata

Out of Sri Aurobindo's remuneration for the post of principal of National College, which was 75 rupees, 23 rupees had to be paid for house rent, the rest of the amount was spent for the maintenance of four or five persons in the family. One day he suddenly told me that I should read the Mahabharata translated by

Kaliprasanna Sinha. The price of the book was 18 rupees. I reflected. He ordered the book without ever thinking of our household expenses. Moreover, I had neither the patience nor the inclination to read such a big volume. I went to a bookshop and found a Mahabharata by Sourendra Mohan Tagore, a neat and smaller edition for seven and a half rupees. I bought it and read it. A few days later when the topic of the Mahabharata came up again I brought out the book with some diffidence and placed it in Sri Aurobindo's hands. Seeing the book he glanced at me and said with a little smile, "There is no profit in reading this Mahabharata. It is written according to the modern historical ideas, these are but the outer husk. It is like taking out the kernel of its spirit and leaving only the husk. Return this translation and get the translation of Kaliprasanna Sinha instead." As if I would be able to follow Sanskrit even if I read it! I thought of raising the question of domestic expenses. Anyhow, I did not return the book and considered many a way out if asked a second time. I pondered over something which I could offer as an excuse in order to acquit myself

(To be continued)

IF LIFE IS A TALE

If life is a tale told by an idiot
 Ye children fair, come out and see the stars.
 The halo of red suns, the nightly bars,
 The dandelion dales of sober ghat
 Where tumbling rills jostle down the glades—
 The steep and slopes of pleasure squeezing life.
 The flash of purple woes after their strife
 With lovely grapes of mirth under life's shades.

The scribbling sport on hugging savannahs
 Ever plays the aspen pantomime of shades
 From puerile plays to hoary diadems
 Does great economy of Creations
 Keep perfect equipoise with grades
 In grand extravagance of Destructions?

KRISHNA SRINIVAS

REMEMBERING KISHOR GANDHI

(1915-1996)

EACH age has its own heroes and produces its own unique history of personalities and events. Each stage of human life too records our changing attitude towards the meaning of greatness in life. Like the adolescent poetic Self in William Wordsworth's poem "Tintern Abbey", we too are drawn to quicksilver and dazzling heroes during our childhood and youth. We see virtue in action and variation, and often equate reflection with monotony or boredom. We might think differently when in later life we revisit a scene or recollect events, as Wordsworth did when he went back to the Wye Valley after five years. It's not individuals who so much change their basic nature, more often it's our perceptions that do

There was nothing charismatic about Kishor Gandhi's personality. Indeed, his lifelong passion seemed to be to annul his own claims to worldly fame. Unlike others whose distinctions in the Civil Service, the Defence or the Corporate sector followed them even into the spiritual stage of their career (and at times were put to good practical use for a special position in the community's hierarchy) Kishor Gandhi had no pedigree of worldly greatness. Or so it seemed! Few are aware of the fact that early in his professional career with a doctorate in the Social Sciences, Kishor Gandhi had become the Head of the Agriculture and Credits Division of the apex Reserve Bank of India, serving directly under the legendary Governor C. D. Deshmukh—a position that would have, in all likelihood, taken him to the seat of the Governor of the RBI.

However, worldly success was not Kishor Gandhi's calling. He knew that it clashed with his real interest in life. The price and the trade-off for fame were simply not acceptable to him. During the Second World War, for instance, as the Head of the Statistical Department of the State Secretariat, he had discovered a scam in the purchase of valuable resources. When his recommendation of action for the wrong-doing was ignored by higher-ups in league with the Powers that Be, Kishor Gandhi chose to resign boldly from service rather than be a party to such blatant corruption and unpatriotic behaviour. Nor did the buck stop there. Chinu Gandhi, his closest brother, and the first manager of SABDA in Bombay, recalls that when he was offered a part-time job and placed in the same department as his brother (who was then the boss) by overzealous subordinates out to curry favour, Kishor Gandhi firmly put down such nepotism with an iron hand.

Indeed, to search for a life of upright moral and spiritual conduct seemed to be the cherished mission of Kishor Gandhi. Born on 5 March, 1915 into a traditional, God-fearing Jain family, he had three brothers and two sisters. His father Hiralal hailed from the village of Pithapur in Gujarat and came to

Bombay for business. His mother Champaben was a devout religious-minded woman with progressive views who never imposed her religious preferences on her children. The eldest son Sundarbhai Gandhi, himself a spiritual-minded person, passed away in the Ashram of Srimad Raj Chandra at Uttarsanda in Gujarat on his 60th birth anniversary. Chinu Gandhi himself has been a lifelong supporter of his brother's cause. Chinu's early spiritual poetry was seen by Sri Aurobindo himself.

Kishor Gandhi had his early education in a Boarding School at Suklateerth, Surat and acquired his Master's degree and his Doctorate in Bombay, the latter under the distinguished sociology Professor Ghurye. There was a brief spell of teaching before he gave up service and plunged straight into Sri Aurobindo's work. In his early youth, he was deeply influenced by Rasiklal Parikh, a Gandhian and a renowned Scholar of Sanskrit at Gujarat Vidyapith who was also a Director of the prestigious *Oriental Institute* of Pune. Kishor Gandhi's spartan habits, austere life, attempts at a perfect control in speech and action (total avoidance of loose talk, sarcasm and ill-will against anyone), his opposition to medicine and drugs, his ideal of "simple living and high thinking" can be traced back to the early Gandhian influence in his life.

One of the first spiritual efforts of Kishor Gandhi for the Mother's work was to edit the *Sri Aurobindo Circle* which Keshavdev Poddar (later renamed "Navajata" by the Mother) started in Bombay; it became the *Sri Aurobindo Society Annual* in 1970. His early association with Navajata for such works brought him to Pondicherry (for the first time on 7 February 1940) on and off in the forties, and he settled down permanently in the Ashram in the late forties.

Initially staying in the premises of the "Society House", Kishor Gandhi turned his attention, under the direct guidance of Sri Aurobindo, to the area where he excelled best, namely, scholarship. His impeccable intellect, accompanied by a rare methodological rigour rooted in an extraordinary eye for details, soon made him an authority on the texts of Sri Aurobindo. Most of his early writings on social topics had the approval of Sri Aurobindo and the best of his compilations such as *Lights on Life Problems* were actually seen by Sri Aurobindo. A photo-stand on his bedside table carried the Mother's message to him: "Kishor, my dear child, you can write the articles. It is a good idea and I approve of it." Signed by the Mother, it is dated 1963. Here was the realization by the human intellect of its own strength and limitation, and the need to be illumined by a higher Power.

Like Amal Kiran, his lifelong friend ever since their Bombay days, Kishor Gandhi was primarily an intellectual in the best sense of the term. Unlike others who used the Mother's advocacy of "Silence Mentale" for their mental inertia, Kishor Gandhi knew that a refined, developed and cultivated mind was a necessary corollary to the total transformation of the being. After all, he had Sri Aurobindo as the best model before him. He also knew that the Mind had to be

constantly broadened and deepened, one's ideals constantly redefined in the light of new theories and trends in metaphysical and socio-cultural domains. In their absence, institutions, founded even on the basis of the most idealistic and well-meant principles, inevitably gravitated to bigotry and obscurantism. The best of his works such as *The Social Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo* and *The Fallacy of Karl Marx* are examples in neat, logical and balanced thinking, carefully appraising evidence before coming to sound conclusions—evidence by the best Socratic or Russellian method of intellectual enquiry

Such enquiry also had to be taken to the outside world. And so, with the Mother's approval and active encouragement, Kishor Gandhi launched in the sixties what came to be known as the *New Age Association*. In her inaugural message to this body on 12 July 1964 explaining its role and mission, the Mother said:

“Never believe that you know.
Always try to know better.”

Whatever Kishor Gandhi took up, he carried out almost with a fanatical fervour. And so was the case with *The New Age Association*, where the leading members of the International Centre of Education participated. Each session was carefully structured, the topic unfailingly selected or approved by the Mother, the participants trained both in composition and delivery of speeches. A collection of the best of such speeches has been brought out in a handy volume and today serves as an intellectual companion to the training of the Mind. The sessions were held around Darshan-time and provided a rare intellectual forum where the Ashram students could interact with visitors and disciples. There was a wider dissemination of such activities through the publication of selected speeches in the “Students’ Section” of the *Mother India* as well as reports along with photographs published in the *Bulletin* of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

In the early fifties, Kishor Gandhi visited America and a number of European countries. In effect, he was truly an international person but few knew about his cosmopolitan travel background. A constant self-effacement rather than a boastful self-projection was his characteristic attitude to life. He saw virtue in India's regional cultures and spoke his native Gujarati language with the appropriate people, but none ever saw him having any regional alignment or parochial bonding. He was clearly above such human failings.

Apart from the *New Age Association*, Kishor Gandhi was responsible, till the very end, for *The Sri Aurobindo Circle* which appeared with an unfailing regularity. Any issue of *The Circle* is testimony to the enormous amount of labour and professionalism that went into it. Carefully structured into selections from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as well as prose and poetry by the Aurobindonians, *The Circle* never failed to impress or inspire us by the intel-

lectual standard that Kishor Gandhi always upheld. The expositions and poems there were invariably of a high order. The present writer who was invited by Kishor Gandhi to contribute in the last three issues was once told by him that he was "always careful and selective about the writers he invited" because the Mother had told him that "once we invited someone for an article, we were morally bound to publish him/her." That is why the Mother asked him to exercise caution in commissioning articles for *The Circle*

Nor did Kishor Gandhi fight shy of articles of a seriously introspective and critical kind. He did not subscribe to any official institutional line of thinking, and encouraged original views which lesser men may not have found to their liking. For his real strength lay in an unshakable faith in the Master. His niece Anupama Chatterjee recalls that recently when some doubts were raised by someone about the future of the Ashram, Kishor Gandhi's firm rejoinder was: "It is not even a question!" Indeed, such an assurance marked the strength of all his writings. Two of his early essays: "What is Sri Aurobindo Doing?" and "A Daring Attempt" reveal his deep insights into the mission of Sri Aurobindo upon earth. In his foreword to the *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* in four volumes, which he brought out in 1947 from Bombay under the banner of the *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, Kishor Gandhi wrote significantly:

Human values are not false or meaningless; they are incomplete approaches, partial and dim pointers to something to which they strain to arrive but cannot so long as they remain fixed in the human formula; it is only by relaxing the grip and breaking through the narrow and rigid circle of this formula and entering into the domain of the infinite spirit that their deep urge can be fulfilled and their labour come to a fruitful completion.

Such a noble and optimistic view of human nature in Kishor Gandhi always went hand in hand with a totally unassuming nature. The editorial Self in *The Circle* was always effectively invisible. Those who have seen his room and life-style feel amazed at his utterly simple and bare living. The house opposite the balcony of the Mother that he occupied towards the end of his life had the bare minimum of furniture, the walls badly in need of a coat of paint. Probably it would never occur to him to make any request to the authorities unless it was found absolutely necessary. His diary notings show his organized life and his concern for even the smallest details of day-to-day life. There was not a single letter to him which went unacknowledged. Some of the greatest things that I have cherished were the postcards that he wrote in his unsteady hand and the offprints of my articles that he carefully packed with his own hands and despatched. Despite his frail and indifferent health, he refused to ever retire from a life of service to the community. Towards the end he used to go in a vehicle to hold his classes at "Knowledge". Preeti Roy, his typist of more than

three decades, recalls some of Kishor Gandhi's rare moments of joy in public. In December 1995, he told her how delighted he was at the prospect of meeting his new students. That was the man and the spirit: constantly positive and working for a bright future. To the same Preeti he once said: "People should not call me an old man. I am not old!" To one of his students, Arpan, who came to visit him in the Ashram Nursing Home, he assured: "Wait and see, I shall be back at 'Knowledge' in no time." And to Arvind Akki who served him faithfully during the last stage he was perfectly undemanding.

Others might justify their bouts of socializing in an ingenious manner. To Kishor Gandhi the Mother's statements were straightforward enough. His niece Anupama recalls that he had turned down her request for attending her marriage reception even though she was getting married to a person connected with the Ashram. Towards the end perhaps he had mellowed, and apparently wished his nephew Sanjay to exchange a marriage ring in Sri Aurobindo's Room.

Those who came close to Kishor Gandhi knew that in his exterior he might be an austere person, but the outside concealed a tender self. His acquaintances witnessed his concern regarding their health, their personal and professional life. To his nephews Sanjay and Hemant in Bombay he wrote regularly, offering his guidance and good wishes, and updating himself with trends in business, science, industry and socio-political developments. He was like a child in his curiosity about such events. His small transistor, a gift from his brother, was his chief outlet to the world outside. It was his satisfaction to see the prophecy that he had made in his *Fallacy of Karl Marx* come true. The collapse of the "Iron Curtain" gladdened his heart, just as the denial of spirituality by our politicians and Westernised intellectuals deeply troubled him. He would urge me to write hard-hitting articles in the light of Sri Aurobindo in the mainstream national newspapers. Clearly, like his Master, he too was no world-weary recluse or anchorite.

To the bulk of humanity everywhere, Kishor Gandhi must appear a curious creature, spartan to the point of being puritanical. His Bartleby-like stoicism that said no to all human gratifications is at least one important trait he shared with Herman Melville's classic character. But unlike Bartleby, the Scrivener, he was a rounded personality with a more positive outlook towards life.

Images are always deceptive, always a far cry from the reality. In the humdrum passage of life, Kishor Gandhi's passing may soon recede into memory as another calendar event overtaken by the day's inevitable quota of gossip and excitement. Yet it is possible that in our autumn of life, in our more sombre moments, we might begin to rediscover the value of time and discipline, rediscover the meaning of detachment and dedication. Only then perhaps can we rediscover a new meaning to life and the true legacy of men like Kishor Gandhi.

BENDING BEFORE THY FEET

BENDING before Thy Feet from morn to morn
The silence in me grows from more to more.
To bow before Thee is to be re-born,
To know Thy Presence is to reach the shore!
I know not what Thou art... I only know
That gazing at Thee I am all a-glow:
Each time within Thine Eyes my soul is whirled
As in a reelèd calm of discipline;—
The warmth of all the roses in the world
Grows utter chillness when the warmth within
My being brims beneath Thy quiet Gaze..
Beloved! the grey stones of fate are cracked,
Once dusky obstacles along life's flowering ways,
Now that Thy Mercy like a cataract
Fills up the hollow goblets of our days
To serve Thee at Thy Feast of Thee when Thou
Wilt pour their Living Waters in exact
Measure into the cup of new creation
Whose emptiness is crying even now
In unborn thirst, fulfilment of whose cries
Is the bright crystal darkness in Thine Eyes!
Mother! there is a Fire in Thy Breath
Subjecting in us, to a fierce cremation,
All thought of shadow, agony or death
O Wonderful! I know my being rhymed
To a great Glory in Thee. . I am timed
Each moment to Thy Presence that I hear
Like a celestial Music far and near,
Echoed within, without, around, above,
Large-pinioned Benediction scattering wide
Rhythms of never-failing Grace and Love
From end to end of Life, on every side
Of Being and Nature, generous, unchecked
Even by brief resistances of pride,
By God-betrayals of exceeding lust:
The Light has vowed to make the world Its Bride,
Possessing every atom of its dust
Until it know Thy Motherhood and share
Birth-travail of a world it is about to bear.
Each moment, as it were, is as a chink

Of the Eternal through which I can see
 Thy fullest Beauty in Eternity:
 Mother! Thy seal is on each thought I think,
 And every pulse-beat Thou dost overwhelm
 With clearest purpose marking time to Thee.
 Each vision is a virgin in Thy Realm
 Sailing upon wide seas of self-control!
 In the wide universe Thou art unfurled,
 O Love! and yet, I know Thee best deep in my Soul,
 Thy lonely world within my lonely world!

7th Oct, 1933

1-15, Noon

HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA

Life—Mother—Master—Heart .
 Your opinion, please
 O how wonderful I am feeling.

—Harin

Sri Aurobindo's Comment

This is exceedingly beautiful, one of the best things you have done.

TWO POEMS*

HOUNDS

THE fire-sea hounds awake
In the deep
Calling the invisible snake
From its sleep.

Rapturous, intense and stark
They bear
The crimson-golden mark—
They dare

To bring their might from shores
Of the vast,
They usher from hidden doors
To the dust

The whiteness of the Beyond
And the rose
Of light's flame-pinioned
Repose,

The spell of intensity
From the height
And immortality
Infinite.

Wizards of the unknown
They sweep
To rouse the naked alone
God's earth-sleep.

31.7 1961

HER HANDS

I have not seen her sun-bare face
But only her garbless hand—
I have not climbed the heights of her rays
Nor reached her mystic land.

* From the late poet's unpublished diaries

Only with spirit's hush have communed
Her source of grace and power
For my shadow-lyre I have tuned
To the hand of sapphire shower

Her hands are wings, her hands are light
Releasing the vacant sod;
Her hands are thunders infinite
The creative motion of God

20 7 1961

ROMEN

THOSE WINGS

INVINCIBLE white wings in a space of peace,
Guardians of Truth, are gliding ever close
Above: their feathers sweep the vibrant air
That trembles at their mighty presence's touch.

Sometimes we feel their soft caress on us,
We are not alone in all our loneliness.
Our heartbeats throb within one heart of love
And in one fiery breath our breathings move.

Our being yearns to meet these calm white wings,
To fly in their sweet fragrance's liberty
And to be freed from all wrong thought at last
Into the bliss of God-ward ecstasy

So will it be Where those white wings are near
No darkness can persist; Truth will reign sheer.

RUTH

NAKED SONGS AND FIRE SONGS

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It is by the Divine Grace that the seeker after Truth first finds his way to the presence of the Master

The arrival at the Feet of the Master happens by some unexplainable magic Each pilgrim has a special and wonderful tale of his own to tell

Some come to the Master for the first time and are unable to leave. Others take their treasures received from the Divine Touch, then leave in order to fulfil whatever task they may be engaged in elsewhere, and await the magic of that touch to take its effect upon their souls. Yet others may feel compelled, as it were, to return to this wondrous source.

The second coming to the Feet of the Divine is of a very different nature, for this time it is a returning and a response to the irresistible pull. A living testimony that a further stride was taken on the integral path The seed has begun to sprout

Not without an inner preparation is this step taken, or is even possible. The psychic being demands some proof of readiness from the personality. It holds out a mirror for it to look into and therein bring to view that which is pure and that which is not in the personality.

To look into this mirror requires courage and a keen eye, for this is the moment when stock is to be taken in the proper perspective. The offer is made to the Divine by the Inner Being and with the acceptance and the approval of the personality of this act.

In the 'Naked Songs' series, the seeker may well find reflections of his own image at a particular stage of his own.

When the 'looking' takes place, the weighing done,—the stand taken, the soul calls out and its call is like 'A cry in the wind'—and it utters a 'Dedication', then makes its 'Offering' in the quiet of the 'Court', where the Inner Lover dwells. For it is the everpresent Inner Being, who sounds the chords, like an enchanted songster to the fascination of the heart and whispers to it the promise of the union

NAKED SONGS

1

Stark naked, tear-washed,
Rigid with attention
I stand.
Petrified moment, awesome spell,

Gazing and true
In blazing stare am held.
How fearful

No prop here, no trim, no place
To shield behind.
Nothing to save you,
If you slip, you fall—
Stand still
I did not know truth
To be so compelling,
So naked a rock,
So without a blade to grasp.

Nowhere to hide my fear
Or shame
For being so full of flaws.
I wish I were better,
More good.
What am I to offer
To this fearful eye,
Burning eye of love?

No mercy now, I stand revealed
Firm on the slab,
Stone to stone matched
My nakedness shames me,
Placed on the altar
My sacrifice offered
In capitulation to Thee

II

Maybe that tears will bear witness one day
When accounts are to be made
And when called upon,
There shall appear
A pure lake of tears,
A mirror of the soul.
The eye of the Lord of days
Will then gaze deep into that
Crystal pool

And clearly draw
 All past accounts
 To weigh.
 Then shall he call forth
 Deep from his heart
 The weeper of the lake
 And say,
 "Rise now,
 You are washed "

III

Perhaps when all the limbs are worn
 Wings will appear
 To raise you from the dust,
 Poor crawler of the earth,
 And bear you to a new abode.
 When all your loves are taken,
 Rent asunder from your breast,
 When there is no mother, no lover,
 No child to love,
 Friendless and unloved
 With no one to hold,
 You will stand.
 Then shall you bear your passion
 Unto me,
 You who were once man
 And became God

IV

Did you make me bare
 Of all things 'dear
 As trees that lose their leaves at autumn time?
 Did you pour pain's bounty
 Upon me
 Whilst others dwelt in joy—
 For a reason?

Was all that many-mansioned sorrow
 Your gift
 For the chosen

And was your love so great
That you gave all these things
To me?

Let then all pain fall
Quietly at your feet
Like flowers strewn
In worship.
Let my heart break into song
Of joy
And of reverence
For Thee.

GEORGETTE COTY

A MYTH IN THE MAKING

ACCORDING to present-day scientific theories the universe that we witness is more dominated by matter than by radiation. The transition from a radiation-dominated to a matter-dominated regime took place at the big bang moment some fifteen thousand million years ago. But how did it happen? Perhaps we need not be immediately concerned with this question. Nor can the General Theory of Relativity provide any description of such a singularly violent phenomenon. Instead, following Einstein's equations, let us simply focus our attention on how the radiation content decreases with time, eventually giving rise to the preponderance of matter. For the purposes of mathematics the radiation content is measured in terms of temperature on the Kelvin scale (K). Thus one second after the big bang the temperature of the universe was about ten thousand million K. In this hot blaze there began the cooking of elements that now make up this entire cosmos, including ourselves. Today matter-domination is such that the radiation surrounding us hardly corresponds to a couple of degrees K. In 1965 Penzias and Wilson observed just this background temperature, giving credibility to the big bang idea describing our very first origins.

But where did all this matter come from? From radiation—if we are to follow Dirac and the subsequent developments of Quantum Mechanics. Quantum Mechanics is the most successful theory of matter at the microscopic level and it tells us how matter can come out of energy. But that just raises the question of where the energy came from. According to Stephen Hawking the “answer is that the total energy of the universe is exactly zero. The matter in the universe is made out of positive energy. However, the matter is all attracting itself by gravity. Two pieces of matter that are close to each other have less energy than the same two pieces a long way apart, because you have to expend energy to separate them against the gravitational force that is pulling them together. Thus, in a sense, the gravitational field has negative energy. In the case of a universe that is approximately uniform in space, one can show that this negative gravitational energy exactly cancels the positive energy represented by matter. So the total energy of the universe is zero.”

A correspondent of *The Hindu* considers this to be a profound marriage of modern physical theories with that of Advaita spirituality. In his opinion Hawking's statement makes this universe unreal, conforming with the illusionist's philosophy. If there is no energy then matter as we perceive it does not really exist. “Does this not look like a marvellous piece of scientific explanation for the Advaita philosophy of Sri Sankara?”—asks the correspondent.

Can something arise out of nothing? Has Hawking forgotten that *ex nihilo nihil fit*, out of nothing nothing comes? Certainly not. He well realises that it is the total sum of energies that is zero, the positive and negative energies add up to

make the sum zero. Energy, a physical quantity, always exists. All this talk of seeing Adwaita in scientific monism therefore seems to be very dubious. In fact, seeing the unreality of the material world in a physical zero is undue, if not ill-founded, haste to bring these disciplines together. But, more importantly, Sankara's world, though illusory, has not come out of zero. What happened in his case is that, by some inexplicable process an illusory world has sprung up from Brahman that alone is real. Hawking's zero is not Sankara's blank featureless Absolute. Providing materiality to matter is one great hallmark of science that has made this world relevant for a complete wholesomeness. It has become more meaningful, holding the possibility of a richer purpose.

But the danger, though of a lesser magnitude, comes from the side of science itself. While we should applaud the spirit of its thrust we cannot appreciate its arrogance. Thus, when Hawking gives us a quantum theory of gravity and removes singularities in space-time, a great step is taken forward. The collapse of physics at the big bang moment is averted. He has made the universe, albeit in imaginary time, boundaryless. We can well appreciate his statement that the universe is completely self-contained and not affected by anything outside itself. "It would neither be created nor destroyed. It would just BE."

Maybe so. No doubt, Hawking's no-boundary proposal is a great breakthrough in theoretical cosmology, removing from description the big bang singularity in which all laws of physics cave in. If this can happen once, then it can happen at any other instance and there would no more be any physics! Hawking has saved us from falling into a pothole—because there never was a pothole in the universe. If we are thus assured of a universe that just is, then there is no need to make an appeal to God or to some other external agency, for there is nothing outside it. But, after having given us a boundaryless universe, Hawking himself crosses the boundary to say the following: "The idea that space and time may form a closed surface without boundary also has profound implications for the role of God in the affairs of the universe. With the success of scientific theories in describing events, most people have come to believe that God allows the universe to evolve according to a set of laws and does not intervene in the universe to break these laws. However, the laws do not tell us what the universe should have looked like when it started—it would still be up to God to wind up the clockwork and choose how to start it off. So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator. But if the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end. It would simply be. What place, then, for a creator?"

Hawking's poser regarding the place for a creator in the universe may be rhetorical, meant only to emphasise the mathematical merit of his formulation. But even that doesn't seem to be quite warranted. He himself says that a scientific theory is no more than a convenient model made to describe experi-

mental observations: "it exists only in our minds." Its validity lies in professional usefulness. This pragmatism is perfectly understandable and we owe the immense benefits of Quantum Mechanics almost entirely to it. In Quantum Mechanics the empirical rationalist has overtaken the speculative philosopher or the religious dogmatist. In it Niels Bohr stands defended against Einstein. But, ultimately, it all seems like dragging knowledge-bales through Matter's dust to "reach utility's immense bazaar." If so, we need not attach any deep meaning to Hawking's dismissal of the creator from his universe. After all, the creator just does not come in the domain of his empiricism. To talk about such a one is therefore unscientific. Bernard Shaw wanted to give credibility to men who believe in electrons by saying that they are in no way inferior to those who believe in angels. Now perhaps it seems to be the other way around.

Howsoever it may be, it is certainly pertinent to ask in what exactly does the claim of science lie to appropriate for itself the whole prestige of thought. It has changed the pattern of society; it has made the world a closer unit, it has improved the quality of life on a much larger collective scale, it has made deeper entries into the mysteries of nature, it has even liberated the human mind from pernicious creeds and taboos and superstitions; what was insubstantial has become concrete. In one word, it has given dignity to matter. This is a matchless gain. Perhaps it may take time to recognise the profound implication of this wonderful discovery that has, in a sense, brought a completer manhood to man. But science is not all and, following Godel, this can be proved to be so. Hence what is necessary is to avoid myth-making based on the grandiose achievements that have opened out newer vistas and newer possibilities in the occult-physical domain. There is a higher intuition that is perhaps trying to penetrate into the material and that cannot be received by too rigid or excessively rationalistic a mind. Nor can there be any self-pleasing complacency in this serious business. Scientific achievements need to be extolled, but these should not be converted into credos. The latter is exactly what we see in Marie-Simone Detoeuf's halleluiahs apropos of the big bang: "All of a sudden, the Big Bang created an enormous magma of particles. quarks, electrons. Forces slowly organised this magma: the quarks assembled into protons and neutrons, into nuclei, the nuclei and the electrons into atoms. The atoms assembled into molecules, stars, planets and after billions of years, into flowers, then men." Such is the new genesis of the universe, too poetic to be true or acceptable. It is too linear for a richer play of possibilities. In the context of recognised limitations of science, to paint such a flowery picture is not to be scientific. That would expose us to the charge of making a modern myth.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of October 1996)

SRI AUROBINDO gave the priority in the *Arya* to *The Life Divine* sequence. *The Life Divine* constitutes a triple glory in Sri Aurobindo's canon. It is basically a treatise on metaphysics, but it is also a work of prose art and a manifesto for the future. Of almost forbidding bulk, yet the very title 'The Life Divine' fascinates at once, and the power of the fascination never palls.

Sri Aurobindo drew a distinction between Western metaphysics and the Yoga of the Indian saints. In the West, an excessive importance has been given always to thought, intellect, the logical reason as the highest means and even as the highest end. "Thought is the be-all and the end-all" in philosophy; and even spiritual experience has been "summoned to pass the tests of the intellect, if it is to be held valid."¹ In India the position has been just the reverse. In the East generally, and in India particularly and continuously, while no doubt the metaphysical thinkers have tried to approach ultimate Reality through the intellect, they have assigned only a subordinate status to such mental constructions. On the other hand, "the first rank has always been given to spiritual intuition and illumination and spiritual experience."² Without their corroboration, unless they are made the base—mere intellectual constructions have been regarded as no more than exercises. Further, the Indian metaphysical thinkers—Yajñavalkya, Sankara, Ramanuja—have almost always been Yogis and Rishis. They have armed their philosophy "with a practical way of reaching to the supreme state of consciousness, so that even when one begins with Thought, the aim is to arrive at a consciousness beyond mental thinking."³

It is to the credit of a modern German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, that he too has come to realise the limitations of mere Reason; "thinking," he says, "only begins at the point where we have come to know that Reason glorified for centuries, is the most obstinate adversary of thinking."

"There were three important problems formulated by Kant in three *important* questions: 'What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope for?' These questions carry the content of the Indian concepts of *tattva hita* and *purushartha*."⁴ In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo gave through his superb prose answers to the inter-linked questions of philosophy in the steady light of his own spiritual experiences at Baroda, Alipore, Chandernagore and Pondicherry.

He explained in one of the later issues of the *Arya* "The spiritual experience and the general truths on which such an attempt should be based were already present to us... but the complete intellectual statement of them and their results and issues had to be found. This meant a continuous thinking, a high and subtle and difficult thinking on several lines, and this strain, which we had to impose on ourselves, we are obliged to impose also on our readers."⁵

As K. D. Sethna once wrote about Sri Aurobindo to a western correspondent:

"His is not an integral philosophy for the sake of philosophy, his is an integral Yoga, and all his philosophising is a statement in mental terms of what he has realised. *The Life Divine* is nothing except his experience, his realisation. Having attained in constant waking life, and not merely in a sealed Samadhi, the reality which he terms Gnosis, he has but laid out in intellectual exposition what the Gnostic consciousness is and what Yogic possibilities it holds and what the results of its full descent into our earth-existence will be. There is a mighty intellect in *The Life Divine* which we at once feel to be no whit less than Plato's or Spinoza's or Hegel's, but none of these giants was a full-fledged Yogi. Sri Aurobindo's intellect is an instrument used by a spiritual realisation: Not one sentence anywhere is inspired by the intellect alone."

In the course of a conversation about the book *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo is reported to have said on 20th February 1940:

"What I have tried to give in the book is a metaphysical foundation of Yoga and a new way of life. Any book of Philosophy has to be metaphysical... it is not the language but the thought-substance that may be difficult to follow. If I have written about Congress in the same language, then you would have understood."

What is important in the *The Life Divine* is not so much the intellectual framework, awe-inspiring though it is, but rather the nectarean thought-substance or spiritual content. Thus, as Jesse Roarke put it, Sri Aurobindo "can be called a philosopher—loosely—only if the term is taken in its largest sense—'love of wisdom' that is an attempt to know, to enlarge one's whole nature in Truth.. He deals, not in 'concepts' and provisional formulations, but in realities."

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

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THE INDIAN VISION OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

THE FOURFOLD SOCIAL ORDER

ONE of the most beautiful and profound features of the Indian vision of life is its balanced and integrated vision of human development. This was expressed in the form of three central ideals of the ancient Indian social order—what Sri Aurobindo calls the “Triple Quartet”. These master ideals are: Chaturvarna, the fourfold classification of humanity and the corresponding fourfold social order Purusharthas, the fourfold aim of life, and Ashramas, the four stages of human life.

We have discussed briefly some of these ideals, like for example the ideal of Purushartha, in one of our earlier articles. In this and subsequent articles we shall discuss in detail the deeper psychological truths behind these master-ideals of Indian Culture in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s insights and their relevance for the developmental needs of the modern and emerging society. This article examines the Indian ideal of Chaturvarna as illumined by Sri Aurobindo’s thought.

In the Indian view of development, evolution of the individual is governed by the law of Chaturvarna, the fourfold order of humanity. According to this Indian theory, there are four distinct and fundamental soul-types in humanity each with its own unique temperament, Swabhava, and its law of self-development, Swadharma, and the work and proper function of each individual has to be in harmony with his unique swabhava and swadharma. These four soul-types are the soul of knowledge, the soul of will, power and strength, the soul of production, mutuality and harmony and the soul of work and service, Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Sri Aurobindo explains the rationale behind this Indian theory from the standpoint of the Gita:

“The works of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, says the Gita, are divided according to the qualities (Gunas) born of their own inner nature, spiritual temperament, essential character (*svabhāva*). Calm, self-control, asceticism, purity, long-suffering, candour, knowledge, acceptance of spiritual truth are the work of the Brahmin, born of his Swabhava. Heroism, high spirit, resolution, ability, not fleeing in the battle, giving, lordship (*īśvara-bhāva*, the temperament of the ruler and leader) are the natural work of the Kshatriya. Agriculture, cattle-keeping, trade inclusive of the labour of the craftsman and the artisan are the natural work of the Vaishya. All work of the character of service falls within the natural function of the Shudra. A man, it goes on to say, who devotes himself to his own natural work in life acquires spiritual perfection, not indeed by the mere act itself, but if he does it with right knowledge and right motive, if he can make it a worship of the Spirit of this creation and dedicate it sincerely to the Master of the universe from whom is all impulse to action.... But

a work not naturally one's own, even though it may be well performed, may look better from the outside when judged by an external and mechanical standard or may lead to more success in life, is still inferior as a means of subjective growth precisely because it has an external motive and a mechanical impulsion. One's own natural work is better, even if it looks from some other point of view defective. . Action should be rightly regulated action, *niyatam karma*, but intrinsically one's own, evolved from within, in harmony with the truth of one's being, regulated by the Swabhava, *swabhāva niyatam karma*.”¹

The much denigrated caste system of India is originally based on this profound intuition into the psycho-spiritual structure of human personality. It is the social framework through which the architects of ancient India tried to work out in the collective life of man the ideal of Dharma. The later degeneration in the system must not blind us to the essential spirit and truth behind the system which is based on a deep spiritual conception of human development. Here again, Sri Aurobindo's luminous exposition of the truth behind the caste-system brings out the original intention and aim of this ancient Indian institution:

“Caste was originally an arrangement for the distribution of functions in society, just as much as class in Europe, but the principle on which the distribution was based in India was peculiar to this country. The civilisation of Europe has always been preponderatingly material and the division of classes was material in its principles and material in its objects, but our civilisation has always been preponderatingly spiritual and moral, and caste division in India had a spiritual object and a spiritual and moral basis. The division of classes in Europe had its root in a distribution of powers and rights and developed and still develops through a struggle of conflicting interests, its aim was merely the organisation of society for its own sake and mainly indeed for its economic convenience. The division of castes in India was conceived as a distribution of duties. A man's caste depended on his *dharma*, his spiritual, moral and practical duties, and his *dharma* depended on his *swabhāva*, his temperament and inborn nature. A Brahmin was a Brahmin not by mere birth, but because he discharged the duty of preserving the spiritual and intellectual elevation of the race, and he had to cultivate the spiritual temperament and acquire the spiritual training which could alone qualify him for the task. The Kshatriya was a Kshatriya not merely because he was the son of warriors and princes, but because he discharged the duty of protecting the country and preserving the high courage and manhood of the nation, and he had to cultivate the princely temperament and acquire the strong and lofty Samurai training which alone fitted him for his duties. So it was with the Vaishya whose function was to amass wealth for the race and the Shudra who discharged the humbler duties of service without which the other castes could not perform their share of labour for the common good. This was what we meant when we said that caste was a socialistic institution. No doubt there was a gradation of social respect which placed the function of the

Brahmin at the summit and the function of the Shudra at the base, but this inequality was accidental, external, *vyāvahārika*. Essentially there was, between the devout Brahmin and the devout Shudra, no inequality in the single *virāt purusa* of which each was a necessary part ”²

The fourfold social order exists or existed in some form or other in every well-organised, vigorous and progressive society. Sri Aurobindo explains the social necessity of the order.

“ it is noticeable that both in Europe and Asia there was a common tendency, which we cannot trace to any close interchange of ideas and must therefore attribute to the operation of the same natural cause and necessity, towards the evolution of a social hierarchy based on a division according to four different social activities,—spiritual function, political domination and the double economic function of mercantile production and interchange and dependent labour or service. The spirit, form and equipoise worked out were very different in different parts of the world according to the bent of the community and its circumstances, but the initial principle was almost identical. The motive-force everywhere was the necessity of a large effective form of common social life marked by fixity of status through which individual and small communal interests might be brought under the yoke of a sufficient religious, political and economic unity and likeness.”³

But the psychological principle behind this order becomes clear only when it is examined in the light of Indian insight. The Indian concept of Chaturvarna reveals the psychological principle behind this social phenomenon

In brief, the original idea behind Chaturvarna is that for a smooth psychological evolution of the individual it is preferable that professional occupation of the individual is in harmony with his natural and inborn qualities and temperament. Can there be a more sensible and rational management principle than this? Is this not the basic idea behind the ‘aptitude’ test conducted by modern organisations and professional institutes for selecting their employees or candidates? But a major difference between the modern and the ancient Indian approach to the problem is that in the former the predominant emphasis is on testing the intelligence or IQ of the candidate while in the latter the emphasis is on psychological qualities, capacities and temperamental inclinations of the candidate. But recently in the West a new system called “psychometric test” is becoming popular among organisations: this system aims at testing not the IQ of the candidate, but his psychological and temperamental suitability for the job. This is in perfect harmony with the Indian approach to career guidance and counselling. For, this inborn natural quality, capacity, temperament and inclination are surer and more reliable indicators of career choice, guidance and development than the IQ. An article in *New Scientist* says the following regarding psychometric tests

“Psychometric questionnaires measure factors such as independence, lead-

ership, sociability, perseverance and decisiveness. They are not usually timed, so you do not have to work against the clock. You may be given several sets of statements and invited to say which is most or least like you, for example: one gets a job done in the face of obstacles; finds it easy to influence others; limits social contacts to close friends, and tends to be a rather nervous person.

Slightly different questionnaires include lists of words, sometimes in pairs. You are asked to indicate those which most describe your personality. For example argumentative, adaptable, nonchalant, or light-hearted.

The results tell employers, among other factors, whether you are decisive, cautious, like working towards goals, seek to achieve something you consider significant, or enjoy variety. Some indicate whether you are a leader or follower, introvert or extrovert, conformist or non-conformist, prefer a supportive environment or don't care.

There are no correct answers to personality questionnaires. The results reflect your view of yourself and can indicate whether or not you are suitable for certain roles. It is best to be honest in your responses. For if you pretend to be what you are not, you may find yourself in a job which is totally unsuitable. Someone who lacks staying power and persistence is unlikely to make a good researcher, while an introvert will find life hard in sales.

A recent survey by the Institute of Personnel Managers showed an increase in the use of personality questionnaires by around 30 per cent in two years. According to George Sik of Saville and Holdsworth, one of the leading firms of occupational psychologists which devises many of these selection tools, 'Organisations use them not just for initial selection but also to take a close look at existing employees before moving them into another role'."

Thus the modern psychometric tests are nothing but the principles of Chaturvarna applied to the modern industrial and organisational environment.

So the ancient Indian social order is in its original idea not just a religious superstition but based on a sound psychological theory of organisation. We may summarise the psychological principles behind the ancient Indian social order as.

i) Outer social organisation must be an expression of the inner psychological organisation of the human being.

ii) Social occupation of individuals must be a means for their spiritual and psychological evolution by providing them with a field of work which is in harmony with their natural and informal temperament, qualities and capacities.

iii) For the smooth, healthy and progressive evolution of the society the ideal condition is that when Brahmanas preside over the institutions of higher knowledge and culture—education, research, science, religion, scholarship, creative thought, literature and the press—Kshatriyas wield the instruments of power—politics, administration and defense—Vaishyas organise the economy—industry, commerce, finance, and trade—and Shudras form the labour-force.

From these principles we can derive a distinctly psychological theory of

organisation. The main principles of this Indian organisational philosophy, expressed in modern terminology, are as follows.

i) Every human organisation will have four fundamental cadres corresponding to the four typical natures of human beings which in turn correspond to the four psychological faculties in a human being. These four cadres will be placed in a three-tier hierarchy.

ii) At the top of the hierarchy will be a cadre of Kshatriyas with the higher qualities and capacities of will—leadership, courage, self-control and self-mastery, tenacity, decision-making, nobility and strength of character and a forceful personality—leading the political, administrative and military sections of the society. In the same level there will be a parallel cadre of Brahmanas with the qualities and capacities of the enlightened intelligence—conceptual skills, intuitive wisdom, holistic vision, and insight into the higher aims and values of life—standing behind the Kshatriyas and guiding them in the realm of creative thought, vision, values, ideals and culture. These two cadres form the top-management positions in the organisation.

iii) A third cadre of Vaishyas with the qualities of the emotional and vital being in man seeks for mutuality, harmony and love, with the capacity for bringing harmony, order, organisation and innovative adaptability to the physical and vital life, organising the socio-economic system. This Vaishya cadre forms the middle-management position in the organisation.

iv) A fourth cadre of Shudras with the qualities and capacities of the physical being in man—perfection in material execution and craftsmanship, capacity for hard toil, obedience, dedicated and loyal service and all such qualities required for perfection in work at the grass-root or shop-floor level of the organisation—forms the labour-force. The Shudra cadre constitutes the first-line supervisory positions and the work-force.

Based on these governing principles a social order is evolved in which the subjective parameters like the spiritual aim and motive, intellectual, moral and cultural values, psychological temperament and capacity are given a much greater importance than objective consideration like economics, social and political aims, motives and skills. In this ancient Indian perspective, as Sri Aurobindo points out, “the spiritual life was to its view a nobler thing than the life of external power and enjoyment, the thinker greater than the man of action, the spiritual man greater than the thinker.”⁵ The standard of judgement held before the people is that the social worth and honour of an individual, group or order of the society has to be judged not by its economic and political power, wealth, utility or efficiency but on the basis of fidelity to the value-systems, to the respective dharma. Sri Aurobindo describes the social values and ideals of the ancient Indian culture

“... the honour of the Brahmin, which resides in purity, in piety, in a high reverence for the things of the mind and spirit and a disinterested possession and

exclusive pursuit of learning and knowledge, the honour of the Kshatriya which lives in courage, chivalry, strength, a certain proud self-restraint and self-mastery, nobility of character and the obligations of that nobility; the honour of the Vaishya which maintains itself by rectitude of dealing, mercantile fidelity, sound production, order, liberality and philanthropy; the honour of the Shudra which gives itself in obedience, subordination, faithful service, a disinterested attachment.”⁶

Thus the main purpose of the Indian fourfold social order is not socio-economic or political efficiency as it was in the West, but to create a suitable social organisation for the moral, psychological and spiritual evolution of the individual and community by providing equal opportunities for each individual (and the group) to grow in harmony according to his own swadharma. When this is ensured, and the outer social machinery is able to adapt itself with an intuitive plasticity to the inner evolution of the human consciousness and the changing environment, then the social, economic and political efficiency follows spontaneously as a natural result. Thus, by matching a social necessity for the division of labour to enhance the efficiency of organised collective action with the psychospiritual temperament of human beings, the great thinkers of ancient India evolved a social order which they believed would promote a smooth psychological and spiritual evolution of the individual and community.

For in the Indian view, this inner psychospiritual evolution of the human soul must be the primary objective of all development and the evolution of the outer economic, political and social machinery must be a spontaneous self-expression in the outer life of the inner growth of the Mind and Spirit in Man. Otherwise, as we are witnessing in our contemporary society, there will be a lopsided and unwieldy growth of the outer machinery at the expense of the inner growth of the human Soul with all the resultant problems facing the modern man.

In this Indian scheme, there is no scope for any “class struggle” because here the primary stress is on duties, contribution for the common good of all, mutual harmony and inner moral and spiritual growth through work and not, as in western capitalistic societies, claims of rights based on egoistic self-interest, competitive scramble and race for mutual domination by amassing more and more of economic and political power and the lust for the unlimited outer expansion of the individual and collective ego.

(To be continued)

M. S. SRINIVASAN

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THE THREE DISINFORMATIONS

A FEW years ago, the West was able to celebrate the anniversary of Columbus, discoverer of the “New World” with fanfare and pomp. But the New World was already quite old when it was discovered by the young Barbarians, much older in fact than the fledgling Western civilisation. And Columbus, however courageous and adventurous, was a ruthless man, whose discovery of the New World triggered an unparalleled rape in human history.

Yet, not only does the West still deify Columbus, but no one in the Third World has been capable of challenging coherently that undeserved status.

The truth is that today, not only in the Western world, but also in the entire so-called developing world, we are constantly looking at things and events through a prism that has been fashioned by centuries of Western thinking. And as long as we do not get rid of that tainted glass we will not understand rightly the world in general and India in particular.

For the stamp of Western civilisation will still take some time to be eradicated. By military conquest or moral assertiveness, the West imposed upon the world its ways of thinking, and it created enduring patterns, subtle disinformations and immutable grooves, which play like a record that goes on turning, long after its owner has attained the age of decline. The barbarians who thought they had become civilised, are being devoured by other barbarians. But today, the economic might has replaced the military killing machine.

The First Disinformation on India. Aryans vs Dravidians

When the early Christian missionaries arrived in India, they found it very hard to convert Hindus. Not only did Hinduism have a broad, well-structured base, but it was also so multi-faceted that it accepted in its fold creeds which sometimes ran contrary to its mainstream philosophy. How do you go about converting a religion which says that God takes as many shapes to manifest Himself as there are forms on this earth? The missionaries could not, as the Muslims had done, convert under threat of death, and they quickly realised the hopelessness of their task and soon turned towards more fertile ground: the Tribals and the Dalits. By financial incentive—and also by immense good work, because the unflagging spirit of missionaries can never be denied, particularly in the field of health and education—and patience, the missionaries managed to make important inroads, specially in the border states of East India, Goa and Kerala. This they achieved in great part by pitting the downtrodden Tribals and Harijans against the “arrogant” Brahmins and Kshatriyas. But there was a flaw in their policy: all belonged to the same Hindu fold and—even when converted—recognised its laws, particularly the reincarnation theory, which could make them Harijans in this life and Brahmins in the next. (Even today, this is visible in Velankani for instance, the miraculous Mecca of all Indian Christians,

which practises a blend of Hinduism and Christianity.)

So the missionaries, and particularly the Jesuits, who are great dialecticians, took up a new historical theory which had already been floated around by a few Western historians. "Once upon a time," they said, "there was a great civilisation called Bharat, or Hindustan, where lived good-natured, peaceful, dark-skinned shepherds, called the Dravidians, adoring good-natured pre-Vedic gods, such as Shiva. They had a remarkable civilisation going—witness the city of Mohenjodaro in Pakistani Sind—were educated, democratic and possessed a highly refined culture "

"But around 2000 BC," they continued, "the villains entered the scene: fair-skinned, ruthless and barbaric, nomadic Aryan tribes, adoring the haughty Indra, originating from somewhere in the Caucasus. These people colonised the entire peninsula and to forever mark their social boundaries, they devised the caste system, whereby they, the priests and princes, ruled over the merchants and labourers ." And to drive the wedge even deeper, the Jesuits added: "But you, the aborigines, the tribals, were there in India, before the Aryans, even before the Dravidians. You are the original inhabitants of India, you are the true Indians. ."

Thus was born the great Aryan invasion theory, of two civilisations, that of the low-caste Dravidians and the high-caste Brahmins and Kshatriyas, always pitted against each other, which has endured till today and has been used by all Western historians, and unfortunately by most Indian textbooks too

Sounds preposterous? Simplistic? Impossible? Yet this theory not only helped the missionaries to play the Untouchables against the hated Brahmins who, let it be said, managed single-handedly to preserve orally Hindu culture and religion for five millennia. It also suited the British, who found it an ideal channel to push forward their divide and rule policies. It also served the Muslim invaders, who used it to convert Harijans (and they still capitalise on that theory today). It even suited Nazi racism with its theory of Aryan supremacy, even though they only borrowed the inverted Aryan cross from India and did not even take pains to read Hindu philosophy, which is one of the least racist and most tolerant creeds in the world

A few voices have been raised against the Aryan invasion theory, which let us emphasise, has no archaeological evidence nowhere have traces of a struggle between the Dravidians and the Aryans been found—and an immense clash is bound to have taken place. The Dutch sociologist Konrad Elst for instance, holds the theory that it is possible "that the Aryans were originally from North India and the Dravidians from the South, kept in a separate mould by the great Deccan plateau, which seems to have also sheltered the South from later Muslim invasions " (*Indigenous Indians*, p 35) Evidence of the view that Vedic culture and Harappan (Dravidian) culture were instances of one and the same civilisation, he declares, has been accumulating, while on the other hand the

traditional arguments for the Aryan invasion theory have been discarded after close scrutiny

Sri Aurobindo, one of India's greatest yogis—a poet, philosopher, and surely its most ardent revolutionary,—spoke against the Aryan theory “We shall question many established philological myths,—the legend for instance of an Aryan invasion from the North, the artificial and inimical distinction of the Aryan and Dravidian which an erroneous philology has driven like a wedge into the unity of the homogeneous Indo-Afghan race ” (*India's Rebirth*, p 103)

Sri Aurobindo recalls that during his first stay in South India, he realised that although the racial division between the Northern Aryan and the Southern Dravidians is presumed to rest on a supposed difference between the physical types of Aryans and Dravidians and a more definite incompatibility between the Northern Sanskritic and the Southern non-Sanskritic tongues, he was impressed by the general recurrence of the northern or “Aryan” type in the Tamil race

How is it possible, he questions, that a handful of barbarians, entering a vast peninsula occupied by a civilised people, builders of great cities, extensive traders, not without mental and spiritual culture, could impose on them their own language, religion, ideas and manners? Such a miracle, he maintains, would be only possible if the invaders possessed a very highly organised language, a greater force of creative mind and a more dynamic religious form and spirit

Lastly, he also shatters the myth of the difference of language to support the theory of meeting of races “But here also my preconceived ideas were disturbed and confounded For on examining the vocables of the Tamil language, in appearance so foreign to the Sanskritic form and character, I yet found myself continually guided by words or by families of words supposed to be pure Tamil in establishing new relations between Sanskrit and its distant sister, Latin, and occasionally, between the Greek and the Sanskrit Sometimes the Tamil vocable not only suggested the connection, but proved the missing link in a family of connected words And it was through this Dravidian language that I came first to perceive what seems to me now the true law, origins and, as it were, the embryology of the Aryan tongues . the possibility suggests itself that they may even have been two divergent families derived from one lost primitive tongue ” (*India's Rebirth*, p 104)

But when will the world realise the wrongness of their historical theories on the beginnings of Indian civilisation? History would have then to be rewritten and the consequences of this new theory applied not only to Asia, but also to the entire history of the whole world. For if Vedic civilisation is indeed at least 5,000 years old, (some say 7,000 years old) if it is a unified culture, then it means that it not only influenced other civilisations in the neighbourhood, Iran, or even the Gulf, in pre-Muslim times, but also indirectly the whole planet; witness the slow migration of some Aryan tribe towards Europe, of which the wandering Gypsies emerging in Eastern Europe by the 14th century, may have been the descendants

The Second Disinformation: The Vedas

The second piece of disinformation concerns the Vedic religion. Ah, the Vedas! So much misconception, so many prejudices, so much distortion have been spewed about this monument of a book, this unparalleled epic. Danielou for instance, maintains that the original Vedas “were an oral Dravidian tradition, which was reshaped by the Aryans and later put down in Sanskrit.” But the real disinformation started with the missionaries, who saw in the Vedas “the root of the evil”, the source of paganism and went systematically about belittling it. The Jesuits, in their dialectical cleverness, brought it down to a set of pagan offerings without great importance. Henceforth, this theory was perpetuated by most Western historians, who not only stripped the Vedas of any spiritual value, but actually post-dated them to approximately 1500 to 1000 years BC. It is very unfortunate that these theories have been taken up blindly and without trying to ascertain their truth by many Indian historians and sociologists.

And even when more enlightened foreigners like Max Mueller, whose Sanskrit scholarship cannot be denied, took up the Vedas they only saw “that it is full of childish, silly, even monstrous conceptions, that it is tedious, low, commonplace, that it represents human nature on a low level of selfishness and worldliness and that only here and there are a few rare sentiments that come from the depths of the soul.” (*Foundations of Indian Culture*, p. 262)

If ever there was one who disagreed with the Western view, be it of Danielou, or Max Mueller on the Vedas, it was Sri Aurobindo: “I seek not science, not religion, not Theosophy, but Veda—the truth about Brahman, not only about His essentiality, but also about His manifestation, not a lamp on the way to the forest, but a light and a guide to joy and action in the world, the truth which is beyond opinion, the knowledge which all thought strives after—‘*yasmin vijnate sarvam vijnatam*’ (which being known, all is known). I believe that Veda be the foundation of the Sanatan Dharma, I believe it to be the concealed divinity within Hinduism,—but a veil has to be drawn aside, a curtain has to be lifted. I believe it to be knowable and discoverable. I believe the future of India and the world depends on its discovery and on its application, not to the renunciation of life, but to life in the world and among men.” (*India's Rebirth*, p. 90)

The Third Disinformation: The Caste System

Even more than the Aryan-Dravidian divide and the Vedas, the caste system has been the most misunderstood. If one wants to understand the truth, the original purpose, behind the caste system one must go back to the Vedas. “Caste was originally an arrangement for the distribution of functions in society, just as much as class in Europe, but the principle on which this distribution was based was peculiar to India. A Brahmin was a Brahmin not by mere birth, but because he discharged the duty of preserving the spiritual and intellectual

elevation of the race, and he had to cultivate the spiritual temperament and acquire the spiritual training which alone would qualify him for the task. The Kshatriya was Kshatriya not merely because he was the son of warriors and princes, but because he discharged the duty of protecting the country and preserving the high courage and manhood of action, and he had to cultivate the princely temperament and acquire the strong and lofty Samurai training which alone fitted him for his duties. So it was for the Vaishya whose function was to amass wealth for the race and the Shudra who discharged the humbler duties of service without which the other castes could not perform their share of labour for the common good ” (Sri Aurobindo, in *India's Rebirth*, p. 26)

Many Indian sages have gone even further than Sri Aurobindo, arguing that in the occult relation India had with the Universal Force, each one was born in the caste corresponding to his or her spiritual evolution. There are accidents, misfits, errors, they say, but the system seems to have worked pretty well until modern times when it got perverted by the vagaries of materialism. Can one accept such a theory? Sri Aurobindo, while praising the original caste system, does not spare it in its later stages. “it is the nature of human institutions to degenerate, there is no doubt that the institution of caste degenerated. It ceased to be determined by spiritual qualifications which, once essential, have now come to be subordinate and even immaterial and is determined by the purely material tests of occupation and birth .. By this change it has set itself against the fundamental tendency of Hinduism which is to insist on the spiritual and subordinate the material and thus lost most of its meaning, the spirit of caste arrogance, exclusiveness and superiority came to dominate it instead of the spirit of duty, and the change weakened the nation and helped to reduce us to our present condition . ” (*India's Rebirth*, p. 27)

But finally, have the people who dismiss caste as an Aryan imposition on the Dravidians, or as an inhuman and Nazi system, ever attempted to understand its original purpose and genius? Is it really worse than the huge class differences you can see nowadays in Europe? And can you really exclude it today, when it still survives so much in the villages—and even in more educated circles, where one still marries in the same caste, with the help of an astrologer?

At any rate, Hindus should not allow it to be exploited shamelessly against them, as it has been in the last two centuries.

Thus, once these three disinformations, that of the Aryans, the Vedas and the caste system, have been set right, one can begin to understand ancient India in its proper perspective.

FRANÇOIS GAUTIER

(Courtesy *Hindustan Times*, 29 June 1996)

THE WINGÈD BOWL

SUGGESTED BY A FRAGMENT OF A TALE
PAINTED ON A 12TH CENTURY JAPANESE SCREEN

WHEN Mōren came to live on the mountain he carried with him his begging bowl; he brought nothing else, not even, some people said, his mind.

The hut he settled in had been abandoned many years before, but with a bundle of twigs he swept the floor and with vines he tied down what remained of the roof, and he gathered bracken and made himself a bed.

The people in the village at the foot of the mountain were glad that he had come. The mountain had an austere reputation and they liked to see the wisp of smoke go up at dusk and the small flames flickering there after the sun had gone down.

When he came down on his daily visit with his begging bowl they all welcomed him, each in his way: boys mocked him and knocked off his hat, servant-girls bothered him for spells, farmers told him where they thought the rain had got to, cats gave him their silent welcoming grimace.

He always got his bowl filled.

But one day he did not appear at the usual time with his bowl. Instead, later, his bowl appeared. It advanced down the one street of the village, hovering elbow-height from the floor, stopping at each house but then moving on as the villagers were too surprised to fill it.

On it went, empty, until it came to the rice shop. Here it waited, tapping its lid. Mesmerized, the rice-shop man ladled out the steaming rice.

Whereupon it turned and went back through the village and up the mountain.

The next day the whole village waited. But as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened Mōren came down with his bowl for his daily rice. As the day before, it was the rice-shop man who filled up his bowl, this time adding some mushrooms and bean-sprouts.

"Tell me," said the rice-shop man, "You didn't come down yesterday."

"Didn't I?" said Mōren. "I must have forgotten."

"But your bowl came down."

"Did it?" said Mōren.

"How do you do it?" asked the rice-shop man.

"Oh I don't do it. It was the bowl's idea, seeing that I was forgetting to go myself. It is a very conscientious bowl."

The villagers all looked at each other, but let him go, letting him have his little joke. But it was true enough that afterwards the bowl came alone more often.

And they got used to it and after a while accepted it.

One day, however, it came down and hovered at the rice man's elbow when he was much too busy putting rice into his store-room, and so he ignored it. The bowl nudged at his elbow and made him lose count which made him angry. He grabbed the bowl and hurled it across the store-room where it lodged under a beam.

Later, finishing his work and forgetting about the bowl, he locked up the store-room. Before, however, he could get the key out of the lock the whole store-room lifted into the air and wafted down the street and straight up the mountain, to be followed by the entire village.

Mören raised his eyebrows a bit as it settled near his dilapidated hut, and he was still scratching his head when the rice-shop man and the rest of the village came panting up.

"Who? Wha'? How?" began everyone at the same time but it soon became clear that it was too much for anyone—particularly Mören. But later when someone opened the door to the store-room and the bowl floated out, it wasn't long afterwards that the clever ones worked it out.

The rice man, after having checked the lie of the land, made the best of a bad job and said, "Mören, listen! You need a new hut. You keep the store-room."

And Mören said, "The Lord provides."

Quickly the rice man organized the sacks of rice to be transported down the hill.

The begging bowl hovered at his elbow.

"And if there is anything else I can do..." The rice man said, beginning to walk away

The bowl nudged his arm, chattered with its lid. For Mören was already absorbed again in his mountain.

So the rice man sighed and motioned with his head, and the procession—the rice man, the begging bowl, the rags and tags and bobtails of the village—began the journey back down the mountain, leaving Mören, as always, with nothing lacking in his life.

NAVODITE

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Beautiful Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (Three Hundred and Sixty True Stories) by *Shyam Kumari* Published by the author Pp xv + 197 Rs 95/-

“ALL during her girlhood she was conscious of a more than human force behind her and often entering her body and working there in a supernormal way. This force she knew to be her own secret being. A few instances of its working may be given. She was about seven There was a boy of nearly 13, a bully who always used to mock at girls, saying that they were good for nothing. One day she asked him, ‘Will you shut up?’ He kept mocking. Suddenly she took hold of him, lifted him up from the ground and threw him down with a thump though she was so much smaller than he. The force that had come down into her and made her tremendously strong was recognised by her later in life as Mahakali...”

*

“ . In those days Nolini was Sri Aurobindo’s postman He used to bring the letters for everyone; we used to wait for him in the morning. And he knew that some special correspondence was going on between Sri Aurobindo and me, because the Mother might have been giving him the folded letters to put into the envelopes Each time he handed me my letter he lifted his eyebrows. I looked very innocent and took it and waited for him to go away before opening it. He would hesitate for a minute or two and then go away It happened like that three or four days, and then it got on my nerves, so I wrote to Sri Aurobindo, ‘What should I do? I think Nolini is going to ask me ’ Then Sri Aurobindo very blandly replied, ‘Let us hope he won’t ’ But still the silent inquisition of the lifted eyebrows did not cease! Then I wrote in desperation to Sri Aurobindo, ‘I am sure it is going to happen now. Please tell me what to do. Can I take him into the secret or not?’ Then Sri Aurobindo said, ‘All right but only him ’ So this secret remained a secret between Nolini and me for ten years Only in 1946, when I began to write a book on Sri Aurobindo’s poetry, I divulged *Savitri* to the world—with Sri Aurobindo’s approval *Savitri* came out in excerpts for the first time in that book of mine, *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo* Afterwards the Ashram published it in fascicles and then as a volume ”

*

“ .. Our next dog was Epave, meaning ‘Waif’. . it fell ill and its condition seemed to go from bad to worse. Sehra informed the Mother. The Mother went into a short meditation and then said, ‘I don’t feel it can recover ’ Soon after, Epave sank into a coma. Our sadhak-friend Barin Ganguly, a great lover of animals and

an expert veterinary doctor, tried his best to bring it round but to no avail. Sehra watched over the inert body all through the night following the evening when she had spoken to the Mother. At one point she felt as if she had to touch the dog to make sure it was alive, but suddenly she saw a faint form approach with outstretched arms and make the motion of taking up Epave. That very moment Epave gave a gasp and died. The next morning Sehra reported the night's experience to the Mother. The Mother said, 'Yes, I came to take your dog's soul.'

"When the cat Big Boy was about to die, Sri Aurobindo came down from his room and kept caressing it with his right hand."

*

You have just finished reading three of the many interesting vignettes from the book under review. Four years of labour have gone into the making of this work of collection and compilation. Third in the series of vignettes, the first and the second being *Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother* (360 True Stories) and *More Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother* (421 True Stories) respectively, this is a collection of stories remembered and told by the Mother's children about their experiences with her and Sri Aurobindo.

In her "humble attempt to record some incidents of the divine *lila*—a few drops from the inexhaustible ocean of love that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were", Shyam Kumari, a poet at heart, sadhika and literary aspirant, drew these stories from interviews with individuals, narrated by them from memories going back many years.

Divided into two parts, the first subtitled "Sri Aurobindo" contains 48 stories out of the 360 collected, and the rest are gathered under the heading "The Mother".

Stories about the reading and writing habits of Sri Aurobindo, his extraordinary command of the English language, his impressions of several authors, his humour, his autograph, his relics abound in the first part. Do you know that Sri Aurobindo wrote his poems on granite-gray paper, and seldom blotted out anything he wrote? Would you like to know Sri Aurobindo's reactions to pleasure and pain, prosperity and adversity, praise and blame? If you are interested in knowing how meticulous Sri Aurobindo was, here is an answer: "... One day Purani went to Sri Aurobindo in the afternoon and, referring to military matters, said, 'It's terrible to think that yesterday again the German submarines sank 65,000 tons of Allied shipping.' Sri Aurobindo said, 'No 67,500.' He did not want any approximations."

Several stories about the Mother's life-style, her help and protection, her guidance, her mysterious ways, her relationship with children and students are gathered in the second part. Do you know that three *vibhuts* of the Mother were

Marie Antoinette, Empress Josephine and Queen Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi? Would you like to hear from the Mother about Ping-Pong, a game invented by the Chinese? Don't you like to read the many miracles performed by the Mother? Here is a sip from the cup of miracles: "One evening Nolini came down from the Mother's room. Usually calm and placid, that day he was a little excited and told M who happened to be in his room, 'Just now the Mother performed a miracle. It was time for her evening meal but innumerable insects filled her room. (In Pondicherry during the rainy season countless insects enter lighted rooms.) The Mother said, 'How can I eat with so many insects flying around!' As soon as she spoke, within a few seconds all the insects vanished "

A large number of vignettes from the quick-witted and chirpy-humoured Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna), some based on Shyam Kumari's talks with him, and many culled from his writings, bring us to the end of the book. The readers can get to know about the healing powers of the Mother, her conquest of sleep, some famous people admired by her, and Sri Aurobindo's comments on his own literary works.

These vignettes create curiosity in the mind of the readers and inspire them to take a forward step towards the two spiritual Masters. Shyam Kumari's attempt to make the sadhaks recount their varied experiences with the Masters and to render them all accessible enough to engage a very wide reading audience is indeed laudable. To say that these vignettes offer a profound set of truths to the readers to experience is far from exaggeration. Since the admirers and devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are on the increase (one has to see the milling crowd in Pondicherry on Darshan days to believe this) we eagerly look forward to reading more and more vignettes. Shyam Kumari, always busy like a honeybee, knows the art of making people speak.

P. RAJA

The Poetry of Kamala Das by K. R. Ramachandran Nair, 1993. Published by Reliance Publishing House, 3026/7H, Ranjit Nagar, New Delhi - 110 008. Pp. 147 Rs. 175/-

The poetical works of Kamala Das deserves special attention because of the unique place it occupies in the realm of Modern Indian English poetry. This book by Prof. K. R. Ramachandran Nair, an erudite personality, is a commendable critical assessment of the poetry of one of India's most controversial writers.

The book opens with a preface by the author and the text is divided into twelve chapters. They present a study of Kamala Das's poetry by analysing and evaluating the individual poems in her five anthologies and an in-depth study of

the various features of her poetry. The author tells us everything that needs to be learnt about Kamala Das and her poetry. He has missed nothing in the discussion of this oft misunderstood, misinterpreted, controversial poet.

Prof. Ramachandran Nair introduces the poet with a brief biographical sketch and then proceeds to discuss Kamala Das as a writer.

The next chapter of his survey is an exhaustive study of Kamala Das's anthology *Summer in Calcutta*. Beginning with what led to the birth of her poems in this volume, the author goes on to examine them individually. "The Dance of the Eunuchs" is considered in detail for its theme, organisation, symbol and the use of imagery and paradox. The theme of disillusionment in *Love* is the major theme of the poet. The author sees Keatsian echoes in the title poem "Summer in Calcutta" and brings out the significance of the piece. The autobiographical element in her poems, such as "Punishment in Kindergarten" and "An Introduction" are considered in the light of Kamala Das's autobiography *My Story*. The irony, the confessional mode chosen by the poet, the powerful imagery replete in her poetry, the use of symbols and metaphors and what they indicate are elaborately discussed here.

Chapter III is devoted to a review of Kamala Das's second collection of poems *The Descendants*. The recurrent themes of love, lust and frustration in her poems are discussed here. The symbols and biblical overtones in the title poem "The Descendants" are followed by brief critical comments on the stylistic features of her poetry. Then there is a long discourse on the sea imagery in the anthology. Here the author has revealed his deep insight into the psyche of the poet. Pointing out the 'sea' as the dominating metaphor in her poems he says, "The sea represents a temptation to return to simplicity and innocence through death." To clinch his arguments the author quotes extensively from Kamala Das's *My Story*. This aspect of his writing adds credence to his thesis.

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters deal with *The Old Playhouse and other Poems*, *Tonight*, *This Savage Rite* and *Collected Poems* respectively. Prof. Ramachandran Nair has very meticulously examined the theme, structure and multifarious meanings of the poems in these collections. The author sees a Cummingsian strain in the style of her prose poems. However, he avers that the "Cummingsian manner fails to unite the several strands of passions and forebodings in the poem". Regarding *Collected Poems*, he deals with the poet's concern with the social issues and pure familial passions. He also makes scholarly judgements through striking comparisons between Kamala Das's poetry and other well-known and contemporary Indian and Western poets. Describing the Colombo poems of Kamala Das, he writes: "The central strain in the Colombo poems is the human soul that suffers, the human ethos that is fractured and mutilated."

Chapter VII gives a detailed account of Kamala Das's family background, the Nair Community that she belongs to, her family house—the Nalapat House,

the customs and traditions followed by them and how they act as a central symbol in her poetry

Chapter VIII speaks of the matrilineal system among the Nair Community, the basis of the Nair social organisation and in what ways the influence of the Nair Heritage is discernible in her poetry. In these two chapters the author has dealt with some crucial aspects of Kamala Das's poetry never considered seriously by other writers

In Chapter IX, the author discusses Kamala Das as a confessional poet and describes the general features of confessional poetry

In Chapter X he deals with the pivotal theme in Kamala Das's poetry which is Love-hunger and Frustration. Prof. Ramachandran Nair has done well here in refuting hollow criticisms made by some critics on Kamala Das's poetry.

Chapter XI "Words" is a fairly long discussion on the stylistic and linguistic devices employed by Kamala Das. The author upholds the poet's skilful use of language, symbol and metaphor. The use of irony and images and the functions they serve are further elaborated. Prof. Ramachandran Nair concludes with a brief survey of some of Kamala Das's recent poems. He also traces the poet's progress through several stages and her journey towards spirituality because of frustration and disillusionment.

The book is written in simple, yet vivid and powerful prose. Every argument and judgement is unfolded clearly and convincingly by suitably quoting from Kamala Das's works. A four-page bibliography and the list of reference books cited after each chapter add value to the book. Well-written and comprehensive, the book is an ideal companion for serious students of Indian Writing in English.

C P PRASITHA BALAKRISHNAN