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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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HE FOUND HER EYES WAITING FOR HIS

THEN sighing to her touch the soft-winged sleep
Rose hovering from his flower-like lids and flew
Murmurous away. Awake, he found her eyes
Waiting for his, and felt her hands, and saw
The earth his home given back to him once more....
He murmured with hesitating lips her name,
And vaguely recollecting wonder cried,
“Whence hast thou brought me captive back, love-chained,
To thee and sunlight’s walls, O golden beam
And casket of all sweetness, Savitri,
Godhead and woman, moonlight of my soul?
For surely I have travelled in strange worlds
By thee companioned, a pursuing spirit,
Together we have disdained the gates of night;
I have turned away from the celestial’s joy
And heaven’s insufficient without thee.
Where now has passed that formidable Shape
Which rose against us, the Spirit of the Void,
Claiming the world for Death and Nothingness,
Denying God and soul? Or was all a dream
Or a vision seen in a spiritual sleep,
A symbol of the oppositions of Time
Or a mind-lit beacon of significance
In some stress of darkness lighting on the Way
Or guiding a swimmer through the straits of Death,
Or finding with the succour of its ray
In a gully mid the crowded streets of Chance
The soul that into the world-adventure came,
A scout and voyager from Eternity?”
But she replied, “Our parting was the dream;
We are together, we live, O Satyavan.
Look round thee and behold, glad and unchanged
Our home, this forest, with its thousand cries
And the whisper of the wind among the leaves
And, through rifts in emerald scene, the evening sky,
God’s canopy of blue sheltering our lives,
And the birds crying for heart’s happiness,
Winged poets of our solitary reign,
Our friends on earth where we are king and queen.
Only our souls have left Death’s night behind

Changed by a mighty dream's reality,
 Illumined by the light of symbol worlds
 And the stupendous summit self of things,
 And stood at Godhead's gates limitless, free."
 Then filled with the glory of their happiness
 They rose and with safe clinging fingers locked
 Hung on each other in a silent look.
 But he with a new wonder in his heart
 And a new flame of worship in his eyes:
 "What high change is in thee, O Savitri? Bright
 Ever thou wast, a goddess still and pure,
 Yet dearer to me by thy sweet human parts
 Earth gave thee making thee yet more divine.
 My adoration mastered, my desire
 Bent down to make its subject, my daring clasped,
 Claiming by body and soul my life's estate,
 Rapture's possession, love's sweet property...
 A yearning godhead and a golden bride.
 But now thou seemst almost too high and great
 For mortal worship; Time lies below thy feet
 And the whole world seems only a part of thee,
 Thy presence the hushed heaven I inhabit,
 And thou lookst on me in the gaze of the stars,
 Yet art the earthly keeper of my soul,
 My life a whisper of thy dreaming thoughts,
 My morns a gleaming of thy spirit's wings,
 And day and night are of thy beauty part.
 Hast thou not taken my heart to treasure it
 In the secure environment of thy breast?
 Awakened from the silence and the sleep,
 I have consented for thy sake to be.
 By thee I have greatened my mortal arc of life,
 But now far heaven's unmapped infinitudes
 Thou hast brought me thy illimitable gift.
 If to fill these thou lift thy sacred flight,
 My human earth will still demand thy bliss:
 Make still my life through thee a song of joy
 And all my silence wide and deep with thee."

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, pp. 717-19)

THE SUPERCONSCIENT

WE might say then that there are three elements in the totality of our being: there is the submental and the subconscious which appears to us as if it were inconscient, comprising the material basis and a good part of our life and body; there is the subliminal, which comprises the inner being, taken in its entirety of inner mind, inner life, inner physical with the soul or psychic entity supporting them; there is this waking consciousness which the subliminal and the subconscious throw up on the surface, a wave of their secret surge. But even this is not an adequate account of what we are; for there is not only something deep within behind our normal self-awareness, but something also high above it: that too is ourselves, other than our surface mental personality, but not outside our true self; that too is a country of our spirit. For the subliminal proper is no more than the inner being on the level of the Knowledge-Ignorance luminous, powerful and extended indeed beyond the poor conception of our waking mind, but still not the supreme or the whole sense of our being, not its ultimate mystery. We become aware, in a certain experience, of a range of being superconscient to all these three, aware too of something, a supreme highest Reality sustaining and exceeding them all, which humanity speaks of vaguely as Spirit, God, the Oversoul: from these superconscient ranges we have visitations and in our highest being we tend towards them and to that supreme Spirit. There is then in our total range of existence a superconscience as well as a subconscious and inconscience, overarching and perhaps enveloping our subliminal and our waking selves, but unknown to us, seemingly unattainable and incommunicable.

But with the extension of our knowledge we discover what this Spirit or Oversoul is: it is ultimately our own highest deepest vastest Self, it is apparent on its summits or by reflection in ourselves as Sachchidananda creating us and the world by the power of His divine Knowledge-Will, spiritual, supramental, truth-conscious, infinite. That is the real Being, Lord and Creator, who, as the Cosmic Self veiled in Mind and Life and Matter, has descended into that which we call the Inconscient and constitutes and directs its subconscious existence by His supramental will and knowledge, has ascended out of the Inconscient and dwells in the inner being constituting and directing its subliminal existence by the same will and knowledge, has cast up out of the subliminal our surface existence and dwells secretly in it overseeing with the same supreme light and mastery its stumbling and groping movements. If the subliminal and subconscious may be compared to a sea which throws up the waves of our surface mental existence, the superconscience may be compared to an ether which constitutes, contains, overroofs, inhabits and determines the movements of the sea and its waves. It is there in this higher ether that we are inherently and intrinsically conscious of our self and spirit, not as here below by a reflection in silent mind or by acquisition of the knowledge of a hidden Being within us; it is through it, through that ether of superconscience, that we can pass to a supreme status, knowledge, experience. Of this superconscient existence through which we can arrive at the highest status of our real, our supreme Self, we are normally even more ignorant than of the rest of our being; yet is it into the knowledge of it that our being

emerging out of the involution in Inconscience is struggling to evolve.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, pp. 560-62)

IMMORTALITY

We renounce ourselves in order to find ourselves; for in the mental life there is only a seeking, but never an ultimate finding till mind is overpassed. Therefore there is behind all our mentality a perfection of ourselves which appears to us as an antinomy and contrast to what we are. For here we are a constant becoming; there we possess our eternal being. Here we conceive of ourselves as a changeful consciousness developed and always developing by a hampered effort in the drive of Time; there we are an immutable consciousness of which Time is not the master but the instrument as well as the field of all that it creates and watches. Here we live in an organisation of mortal consciousness which takes the form of a transient world; there we are liberated into the harmonies of an infinite self-seeing which knows all world in the light of the eternal and immortal. The Beyond is our reality; that is our plenitude; that is the absolute satisfaction of our self-existence. It is immortality and it is "That Delight".

Here in our imprisoned mentality the ego strives to be master and possessor of its inner field and its outer environment, yet cannot hold anything to enjoy it, because it is not possible really to possess what is not-self to us. But there in the freedom of the eternal our self-existence possesses without strife by the sufficient fact that all things are itself. Here is the apparent man, there the real man, the Purusha: here are gods, there is the Divine: here is the attempt to exist, Life flowering out of an all-devouring death, there Existence itself and a dateless immortality.

SRI AUROBINDO, *Kena Upanishad*

CONSCIOUSNESS: A CONSCIOUS FORCE

...THE word consciousness... is no longer synonymous with mentality but indicates a self-aware force of existence of which mentality is a middle term; below mentality it sinks into vital and material movements which are for us subconscious; above, it rises into the supramental which is for us the superconscient.... This is... the Indian conception of Chit which, as energy, creates the worlds.... We see, for instance, in the animal, operations of a perfect purposefulness and an exact, indeed a scientifically minute knowledge which are quite beyond the capacities of the animal mentality and which man himself can only acquire by long culture and education and even then uses with a much less sure rapidity. We are entitled to see in this general fact the proof of a conscious Force at work in the animal and the insect which is more intelligent, more purposeful, more aware of its intention, its ends, its means, its conditions than the highest mentality yet manifested in any individual form on earth. And in the operations of inanimate Nature we find the same pervading characteristic of a supreme hidden intelligence, "hidden in the modes of its own workings".

The only argument against a conscious and intelligent source for this purposeful work, this work of intelligence, of selection, adaptation and seeking is that large element in Nature's operations to which we give the name of waste. But obviously this is an objection based on the limitations of our human intellect which seeks to impose its own particular rationality, good enough for limited human ends, on the general operations of the World-Force. We see only part of Nature's purpose and all that does not subserve that part we call waste. Yet even our own human action is full of an apparent waste, so appearing from the individual point of view, which yet, we may be sure, subserves well enough the large and universal purpose of things. That part of her intention which we can detect, Nature gets done surely enough in spite of, perhaps really by virtue of her apparent waste. We may well trust to her in the rest which we do not yet detect.

For the rest, it is impossible to ignore the drive of set purpose, the guidance of apparent blind tendency, the sure eventual or immediate coming to the target sought, which characterise the operations of World-Force in the animal, in the plant, in inanimate things. So long as Matter was Alpha and Omega to the scientific mind, the reluctance to admit intelligence as the mother of intelligence was an honest scruple. But now it is no more than an outworn paradox to affirm the emergence of human consciousness, intelligence and mastery out of an unintelligent, blindly driving unconsciousness in which no form or substance of them previously existed. Man's consciousness can be nothing else than a form of Nature's consciousness. It is there in other involved forms below Mind, it emerges in Mind, it shall ascend into yet superior forms beyond Mind. For the Force that builds the worlds is a conscious Force, the Existence which manifests itself in them is conscious Being and a perfect emergence of its potentialities in form is the sole object which we can rationally conceive for its manifestation of this world of forms.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 18, pp. 88-90)

OUR SURFACE BEING

THERE are three occult sources of our action—the superconscient, the subliminal, the subconscious, but of none of them are we in control or even aware. What we are aware of is the surface being which is only an instrumental arrangement. The source of all is the general Nature,—universal Nature individualising itself in each person; for this general Nature deposits certain habits of movement, personality, character, faculties, dispositions, tendencies in us, and that, whether formed now or before our birth, is what we usually call ourselves. A good deal of this is in habitual movement and use in our known conscious parts on the surface, a great deal more is concealed in the other unknown three which are below or behind the surface.

But what we are on the surface is being constantly set in motion, changed, developed or repeated by the waves of the general Nature coming in on us either directly or else indirectly through others, through circumstances, through various agencies or channels. Some of this flows straight into the conscious parts and acts there, but our mind ignores its source, appropriates it and regards all that as its own; a part comes secretly into the subconscious or sinks into it and waits for an opportunity of rising up into the conscious surface; a good deal goes into the subliminal and may at any time come out—or may not, may rather rest there as unused matter. Part passes through and is rejected, thrown back or thrown out or spilt into the universal sea. Our nature is a constant activity of forces supplied to us out of which (or rather out of a small amount of it) we make what we will or can. What we make seems fixed and formed for good, but in reality it is all a play of forces, a flux, nothing fixed or stable; the appearance of stability is given by constant repetition and recurrence of the same vibrations and formations. That is why our nature can be changed in spite of Vivekananda's saying and Horace's adage and in spite of the conservative resistance of the subconscious, but it is a difficult job because the master mode of Nature is this obstinate repetition and recurrence.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 358-59)

SOME LETTERS

(Continued from the issue of September 2003)

There came a lack of interest in one type of work and a dislike for contact only with workmen and that type of people for the whole day. It must have been an attempt to bring dejection or dissatisfaction.

It is evidently some pressure on the vital to bring distaste. There is a vital movement that is restless and unable to stick to one thing for long—this is one of the characteristic workings of the universal vital Nature. The attack was trying to throw that upon the nervous being.

How is it that the word Vijnanamayakosha has been explained by commentators, especially in the Panchadashi, as the Buddhi? Had they in mind everything higher than Manas (i.e. Intuition etc.) when they translated Vijnana as Buddhi? Or had the word Buddhi so wide a meaning that it included Intuition etc.?

It is the error that came with the excessive intellectualism of the philosophers and commentators. I don't think *buddhi* includes intuition as something separate in kind from intellect—the intellectualists considered intuition to be only a rapid process of intellectual thought—and they still think that. In the Taittiriya Upanishad the sense of विज्ञान [Vijnana] is very clear—its essence is ऋतम् [Ritam], the spiritual Truth; but afterwards the identification with बुद्धि [Buddhi] became general.

After morning Pranam there is almost immediate contact with workmen. Does it to some extent dissipate the force received from the Mother? Usually I sit a minute or two in the Library House reception room after Pranam. In the evening I try to go directly to my room.

If you keep a few minutes for assimilation (in the morning), it should be sufficient.

How to recognise that a particular thought, feeling, impulse or action comes from the Mother and not from the universal forces or anywhere else?

It can only be done by discrimination, care, sincerity, a constant control with regard to the mind's movements and the growth of a certain kind of psychic tact which detects any mental imitation or false suggestion of its being the Mother's.

Again today just before coming to see Mother, a "vanity" came in, which I rejected, but the process disturbed the quiet and obstructed my receptivity. Was it something thrown in to obstruct?

Yes—the Mother noticed it. It is that—something thrown in to obstruct, to make a disturbing ripple in the quietude necessary for complete receptivity.

27 April 1933

There are many mediums and clairvoyants who have broken the veil to the inner worlds. Do they receive the higher forces well?

They are most of them in contact with the vital physical or subtle physical worlds and do not receive anything higher at all.

How is it possible to receive forces from above if the veil is not broken?

One can receive always through the psychic part of the being, even before the veil is broken.

Why have I not the physical energy which working-class men have? Is it possible for my body to become able to work physically for several hours as these people do?

It is a matter of training largely—just as these men could not do a tenth of the mental work of which you would be capable. Of course, with practice the difference could be bridged—and also the Yogic force could be brought into the body to sustain it for quite as hard a labour; but there too the body would have to learn to respond without feeling strain afterwards.

After evening Darshan I went to the reception room and sat for meditation. I found that at the heart level there was a sort of quiet and I could easily concentrate there for a few minutes without any strain. If I concentrate in the brain, there is strain. Brain concentration appears more troublesome and a little exhausting. With the concentration in the heart, there is a peace and bliss. Is this a glimpse of the Divine in the inner heart or of the active psychic?

It is a reflection in the heart of the presence and nature of the psychic being.

Brain concentration is always a tapasya and necessarily brings a strain. It is only if one is lifted out of the brain mind altogether that the strain of mental concentration disappears.

How is it that now the attacks come chiefly from egoism? Somehow the hostiles want to stimulate it. Or is it that the egoism is coming out for transformation?

It is probably coming out for transformation—although of course the hostiles try to take advantage of the movement.

28 April 1933

*Is there an equivalent in the lower nature of the impulses in the Higher Nature?
What is the equivalent of anger?*

It is a *rudra* power of severity and indignation (in the deepest sense of the word) against what should not be—the warrior force of Mahakali in combating the Asura.

Is the feeling of Viraha also rajasic or vital?

It depends. The pure feeling of Viraha is psychic—but if rajasic or tamasic movements come in (such as depression, complaint, revolt etc.) then it becomes tamasic or rajasic.

Is death a happening or change or is there any universal force behind it?

It is a universal force—the happening or change called death is simply one result of the working of the force.

C told me that Mother put her hand unusually long on my head at Pranam, though I did not feel it to be so. But this “recognition” brings in vital self-exalting, egoism, pride, etc. Moreover, what have I done that I should be more favoured than another.

There should certainly not be any egoistic reaction; but it has not anything to do with less or greater favour. It is simply according to the need of each that it differs.

*Is it good to hold the idea that all sadhana is done by the Divine rather than by me?
But there is a possibility of inertia and stagnation if this idea is taken too literally.*

It is a truth but a truth that does not become effective for the consciousness until or in proportion as it is realised. The people who stagnate because of it are those who accept the idea but do not realise—so they have neither the force of tapasya nor that of the Divine Grace. On the other hand those who can realise it feel even behind their tapasya and in it the action of the Divine Force.

29 April 1933

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO

A LETTER TO MOTILAL ROY

[This text first published in the April 2003 issue of *The Advent* is a draft of a letter to Motilal Roy. The final version of the letter, tentatively dated mid-1913, was published in the Supplement to the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Volume 27, pages 437-39. The draft has interesting passages not incorporated in the final version. —Ed.]

Dear M.

I have not written to you for so long a time, not out of indolence or because I have not received your letters, but because it was necessary to be silent—necessary for the work & necessary for your own development. You need not ever attribute my silence to ordinary material causes. Your letters & parcels reach us without any mishap. If I am silent, you must not allow anxiety to throw up waves disturbing the flow between my mind & yours, but keep a still mind & try to receive directions, distinguishing these from the thoughts of your own mind. Tantric Yoga is not yet of the first importance for us, the perfection of the basis of Vedanta is the one thing supremely important; for that cannot be perfect until this has developed at least to a certain point.

Now, first, as to Das' money. I have enclosed a letter to Das in which you will find all the facts about Biren & his transactions. But I will also answer the points you have raised. They were two, that you have the charge of supplying us with the money we need & that you do not wish to take anything except from those who are of the faith. Now, in the first place, I have given you the charge of meeting our personal *necessities*, i.e. Rs. 85 a month & clothes etc. Hitherto this was all that I absolutely needed because I had nothing else to do immediately except to carry on my Yoga & maintain our little household meanwhile. But that state of things must soon draw to an end. I hope after August, if not before, to begin work in various directions. My work is not limited to being a spiritual centre & maintaining my body, it is wide & various, educational, social, political & in such directions money will be wanted. It is impossible for you & your little circle to meet these large demands. I do not yet know whence the money will be provided. I have so far only sent a will, not physical request, for effective means to be created & there have been one or two small & uncertain movements in response of which this Das business is one. My charge to you still stands, but that is for necessities only. You must see for yourself that I cannot limit my work by limiting the possibilities of my resources for the work. Secondly, I have indeed limited myself in the past to those who were in entire sympathy with our ideas, since X & others failed me, and it is good for a while, it is good for you even now to have a rule like that. But this rule cannot bind me always....

SRI AUROBINDO

INVOCATION TO SUPERMIND

O HEIGHT beyond the stature of the mind,
O width outreaching finite heart's embrace,
Poised puissance on the limits of the world,
Enlighten us; we would no more be blind.
We seek ourselves behind each comely face,
And bind the myriad detail sense-unfurled
To one bright spear-point, and therewith we trace
Swift utterance which no thought-fetters bind.
Shining lance, far above rifted woe,
Reveal to earth the ending of thy quest;
When thou to the Holy Logos shall be pressed,
The Hidden Love behind all universe
Sends ruby fire and ever-living flow,—
And night is failing, dreams of self disperse.

February 21, 1935

ARJAVA

Sri Aurobindo's comment: A very fine sonnet with a very noble opening and a strong close.

SRI AUROBINDO SENDS HIS BLESSINGS TO THE INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL CONGRESS 1950

Send my blessings for the success of the Session.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE FIRST SESSION OF THE INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL CONGRESS HELD IN 1925*

My timidity makes it difficult for me properly to enjoy the honour you have done me to-day by offering a chair which I cannot legitimately claim as my own. It has often made me wonder, since I had my invitation, whether it would suit my dignity to occupy such a precarious position on an ephemeral eminence, deservedly incurring anger from some and ridicule from others. While debating in my mind as to whether I should avoid this risk with the help of the doctor's certificate, it occurred to me that possibly my ignorance of philosophy was the best recommendation for this place in a philosophers' meeting,—that you wanted for your president a man who was blankly neutral and who consciously owed no allegiance to any particular system of metaphysics, being impartially innocent of them all. The most convenient thing about me is that the degree of my qualification is beyond the range of a comparative discussion,—it is so utterly negative. In my present situation, I may be compared to a candlestick that has none of the luminous qualities of a candle and, therefore, suitable for its allotted function, which is to remain darkly inactive.

But, unfortunately, you do not allow me to remain silent even in the circumstance when silence was declared to be prudent by one of our ancient sages. The only thing which encourages me to overcome my diffidence, and give expression in a speech to my unsophisticated mind, is the fact that in India all the *vidyās*,—poesy as well as philosophy,—live in a joint family. They never have the jealous sense of individualism maintaining the punitive regulations against trespass that seem to be so rife in the West.

Plato as a philosopher decreed the banishment of poets from his ideal Republic. But, in India, philosophy ever sought alliance with poetry, because its mission was to occupy the people's life and not merely the learned seclusion of scholarship. Therefore, our tradition, though unsupported by historical evidence, has no hesitation in ascribing numerous verses to the great Shankaracharya, a metaphysician whom Plato would find it extremely difficult to exclude from his Utopia with the help of any inhospitable Immigration Law. Many of these poems may not have high poetical value, but no lover of literature ever blames the sage for infringement of propriety in condescending to manufacture verse.

According to our people, poetry naturally falls within the scope of a philosopher, when his reason is illumined into a vision. We have our great epic Mahabharata, which is unique in world literature, not only because of the marvellous variety of human characters, great and small, discussed in its pages in all variety of psychological circumstances, but because of the ease with which it carries in its comprehensive capaciousness all kinds of speculation about ethics, politics and philosophy of life. Such an improvident generosity on the part of poesy, at the risk of exceeding its own proper limits of accommodation, has

* This address was reproduced as an appendix of the Proceedings of the Indian Philosophical Congress held in 1950 for which Sri Aurobindo had sent his blessings.

only been possible in India where a spirit of communism prevails in the different individual groups of literature. In fact, the Mahabharata is a universe in itself in which various spheres of mind's creation find ample space for their complex dance-rhythm. It does not represent the idiosyncrasy of a particular poet but the normal mentality of the people who are willing to be led along the many-branched path of a whole world of thoughts, held together in a gigantic orb of narrative surrounded by innumerable satellites of episodes.

The numerous saints that India successively produced during the Mahomedan rule have all been singers whose verses are aflame with the fire of imagination. Their religious emotion had its spring in the depth of a philosophy that deals with fundamental questions,—with the ultimate meaning of existence. That may not be remarkable in itself; but when we find that these songs are not specially meant for some exclusive pandits' gathering, but that they are sung in villages and listened to by men and women who are illiterate, we realize how philosophy has permeated the life of the people in India, how it has sunk deep into the subconscious mind of the country.

In my childhood I once heard from a singer, who was a devout Hindu, the following song of Kabir:

When I hear of a fish in the water dying of thirst, it makes me laugh.
 If it be true that the infinite Brahma pervades all space,
 What is the meaning of the places of pilgrimage like Mathura or Kashi?

This laughter of Kabir did not hurt in the least the pious susceptibilities of the Hindu singer; on the contrary, he was ready to join the poet with his own. For he, by the philosophical freedom of his mind, was fully aware that Mathura or Kashi, as sites of God, did not have an absolute value of truth, though they had their symbolical importance. Therefore, while he himself was eager to make a pilgrimage to those places, he had no doubt in his mind that, if it were in his power directly to realize Brahma as an all-pervading reality, there would have been no necessity for him to visit any particular place for the quickening of his spiritual consciousness. He acknowledged the psychological necessity for such shrines, where generations of devotees have chosen to gather for the purpose of worship, in the same way as he felt the special efficacy for our mind of the time-honoured sacred texts made living by the voice of ages.

It is a village poet of East Bengal who in his songs preaches the philosophical doctrine that the universe has its reality in its relation to the Person. He sings:

The sky and the earth are born of mine own eyes.
 The hardness and softness, the cold and the heat
 are the products of mine own body;
 The sweet smell and the bad are of mine own nose.

This poet sings of the Eternal Person within him, coming out and appearing before his

eyes just as the Vedic Rishi speaks of the Person, who is in him, dwelling also in the heart of the Sun.

I have seen the vision,
The vision of mine own revealing itself,
Coming out from within me.

The significant fact about these philosophical poems is that they are of rude construction, written in a popular dialect and disclaimed by the academic literature; they are sung to the people, as composed by one of them who is dead, but whose songs have not followed him. Yet these singers almost arrogantly disown their direct obligation to philosophy, and there is a story of one of our rural poets who, after some learned text of the vaishnava philosophy of emotion was explained to him, composed a song containing the following lines:

Alas, a jeweller has come into the flower garden!—
He wants to appraise the truth of a lotus by rubbing it
against his touchstone.

The members of the Baul sect belong to that class of the people in Bengal who are not educated in the prevalent sense of the word. I remember how troubled they were, when I asked some of them to write down for me a collection of their songs. When they *did* venture to attempt it, I found it almost impossible to decipher their writing—the spelling and lettering were so outrageously unconventional. Yet their spiritual practices are founded upon a mystic philosophy of the human body, abstrusely technical. These people roam about singing their songs, one of which I heard years ago from my roadside window, the first two lines remaining inscribed in my memory.

Nobody can tell whence the bird unknown
Comes into the cage and goes out.
I would feign put round its feet the fetter of my mind,
Could I but capture it.

This village poet evidently agrees with our sage of the Upanishad who says that our mind comes back baffled in its attempt to reach the Unknown Being; and yet this poet like the ancient sage does not give up his adventure of the infinite, thus implying that there is a way to its realization. It reminds me of Shelley's poem in which he sings of the mystical spirit of Beauty:

The awful shadow of some unseen Power
Floats, though unseen, among us; visiting
This various world with as inconstant wing

As summer winds that creep from flower to flower.
 Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower,
 It visits with inconstant glance
 Each human heart and countenance.

That this Unknown is the profoundest reality, though difficult of comprehension, is equally admitted by the English poet as by the nameless village singer of Bengal in whose music vibrate the wing-beats of the unknown bird,—only Shelley's utterance is for the cultured few, while the Baul song is for the tillers of the soil, for the simple folk of our village households, who are never bored by its mystic transcendentalism.

All this is owing to the wonderful system of mass education which has prevailed for ages in India, and which to-day is in danger of becoming extinct. We have our academic seats of learning where students flock round their famous teachers from distant parts of the country. These places are like lakes, full of deep but still water, which have to be approached through difficult paths. But the constant evaporation from them, forming clouds, is carried by the wind from field to field, across hills and dales and through all the different divisions of the land. Operas based upon legendary poems, recitations and story-telling by trained men, the lyrical wealth of the popular literature distributed far and wide by the agency of mendicant singers,—these are the clouds that help to irrigate the minds of the people with the ideas which in their original form belonged to difficult doctrines of metaphysics. Profound speculations contained in the systems of Sankhya, Vedanta and Yoga are transformed into the living harvest of the people's literature, brought to the door of those who can never have the leisure and training to pursue these thoughts to their fountainhead.

In order to enable a civilized community to carry on its complex functions, there must be a large number of men who have to take charge of its material needs, however onerous such task may be. Their vocation gives them no opportunity to cultivate their mind. Yet they form the vast multitude, compelled to turn themselves into unthinking machines of production, so that a few may have the time to think great thoughts, create immortal forms of art and to lead humanity to spiritual altitudes.

India has never neglected these social martyrs, but has tried to bring light into the grim obscurity of their life-long toil, and has always acknowledged its duty to supply them with mental and spiritual food in assimilable form through the medium of a variety of ceremonies. This process is not carried on by any specially organized association of public service, but by a spontaneous social adjustment which acts like circulation of blood in our bodily system. Because of this, the work continues even when the original purpose ceases to exist.

Once when I was on a visit to a small Bengal village, mostly inhabited by Mahomedan cultivators, the villagers entertained me with an opera performance the literature of which belonged to an obsolete religious sect that had wide influence centuries ago. Though the religion itself is dead, its voice still continues preaching its philosophy to a people who in spite of their different culture are not tired of listening. It discussed according

to its own doctrine the different elements, material and transcendental, that constitute human personality, comprehending the body, the self and the soul. Then came a dialogue during the course of which was related the incident of a person who wanted to make a journey to Brindavan, the Garden of Bliss, but was prevented by a watchman who startled him with an accusation of theft. The thieving was proved when it was shown that inside his clothes he was secretly trying to smuggle into the garden the *self*, passing it on as his own and not admitting that it is for his master. The culprit was caught with the incriminating bundle in his possession which barred for him his passage to the supreme goal. Under a tattered canopy held on bamboo poles and lighted by a few smoking kerosene lamps, the village crowd, occasionally interrupted by howls of jackals in the neighbouring paddy fields, attended with untired interest, till the small hours of the morning, the performance of a drama, that discussed the ultimate meaning of all things in a seemingly incongruous setting of dance, music and humorous dialogue.

These illustrations will show how naturally, in India, poetry and philosophy have walked hand in hand, only because the latter has claimed its right to guide men to the practical path of their life's fulfilment. What is that fulfilment? It is our freedom in truth, which has for its prayer

Lead us from the unreal to Reality.

For *satyam* is *anandam*, the real is joy.

(To be concluded)

DAY OF SIDDHI

HE awoke to the day of Krishna. The Bay of Bengal
scintillated in the cosmic air.

A revelation of the supramental
sustained the range
to the future.

The way opened as history turned
toward the dawn.

JOSEPH KENT

THE MOTHER'S MESSAGES—INVITATION TO TRANSFORMATION

NOTHING but a radical change of consciousness can save humanity from the terrible plight into which it is plunged.¹

The goal is not to lose oneself in the Divine Consciousness. The goal is to let the Divine Consciousness penetrate into Matter and transform it.²

True spirituality is not to renounce life, but to make life perfect with the Divine Perfection.³

To know is good,
to live is better,
to be, that is perfect.⁴

Let the Truth be your master and your guide.⁵

Life is a journey in the darkness of the night. Wake up to the inner light.⁶

Life is a perpetual choice between truth and falsehood, light and darkness, progress and regression, the ascent towards the heights or a fall into the abyss. It is for each one to choose freely.⁷

Simple sincerity: the beginning of all progress.⁸

Sincerity, Fidelity are the two guardians of the Way.⁹

All service done sincerely to the Divine is sadhana.
And all increase in the urge to serve is a sure sign of progress.¹⁰

Never forget that you are not alone. The Divine is with you helping and guiding you. He is the companion who never fails, the friend whose love comforts and strengthens.... Have faith and He will do everything for you.¹¹

They always speak of the rights of love but love's only right is the right of self-giving.¹²

Divine Love, true love, finds its delight and its satisfaction in itself; it has no need to be received and appreciated, nor to be shared—it loves for the sake of loving, as a flower blooms.

To feel this love in oneself is to possess an immutable happiness.¹³

The Divine's love is an eternal truth.¹⁴

To live within, in constant aspiration towards the Divine—that renders us capable of regarding life with a smile and remaining in peace whatever the external circumstances.¹⁵

Give yourself, all what you are and what you do, to the Divine, and you will have peace.¹⁶

Be quiet and offer yourself calmly and confidently.

All that happens is always the effect of the Supreme's Will.

Human action can be the occasion but never the cause.¹⁷

Self-giving is true prayer.¹⁸

Our constant prayer is to understand the Divine's will and to live accordingly.¹⁹

(Compiled by Arun Vaidya)

References

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14. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
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THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS

(Continued from the issue of September 2003)

(7)

Mother Divine,

I came here first in August, 1949 and then finally in August, 1953.

After all these years of experience, after many waverings and stupidities, stumbles and pitfalls, I return once more through Your Grace, to ask from You Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. If my life has any meaning, it is to belong to Him totally, with all I have and I am. Will You now accept me as a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and set me firmly on the path so that I do not waver any more?

Very good.

I feel now that I must totally break away from the past and regard my physical birth on 11-9-1918 as my past birth. The first feeling of a new birth came to me when I came here for the first time and received Your blessings and then had the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. So far as I can remember it was on the 14th of August, 1949. If You agree and approve, I would like to observe my birthday, henceforward, on the 14th of August instead of 11th of September. May I go to You for pranam on the 14th of this month?

I leave, however, everything to Your luminous Will and gratefully prostrate myself at Your golden feet.

Your child

1-8-67

ABANI

*It is all right
Henceforth the 14th of
August will be your birthday
Come on Monday 14th
at 3.30 P.M. to
receive my blessings*

It is all right

Henceforth the 14th of August will be your birthday

Come on Monday 14th at 3.30 P.M. to receive my blessings

The Mother

(To be continued)

DYUMAN “THE LUMINOUS”—*KARMAYOGI*

The Strength of Dyuman’s character is his essential straightness of aim, fidelity to the highest he sees and intensity of will to receive the Light and serve the Truth.

10-4-1934

SRI AUROBINDO

OCCASIONALLY, late at night, one would observe an interesting and amusing sight inside the Ashram main building. The Mother would call from Her room on the first floor, “Dyuman!” Instantly, a man in his early thirties would rush out of his room below with a ladder in his hands, place it near the open terrace of his room, climb it and announce, “Yes, Mother. I am here.” He did this so he would not lose time using the staircase (which was further away from his room) and then crossing the corridor to reach the Mother. Should one keep the Divine waiting! The Mother would ask him some questions or give him some instructions and he would climb down the ladder, go back to his room, and carry out Her wishes. Thus was the magnitude of his devotion, dedication and urge to serve.

Chunibhai Desaibhai Patel was known as *Dyuman*—the luminous one—the name given to him by Sri Aurobindo. The Mother found him to be a wonderful worker when She met him for the first time. He joined the Ashram at the age of twenty-four (in 1927) and till his passing at the age of eighty-nine, he assisted, managed, and laboured for its growth and prosperity. This devotion was reflected clearly in a letter written by Sri Aurobindo in 1936 when replying to an inmate of the Ashram: “If Dyuman and a few others had not made themselves the instruments of the Mother and helped her to re-organise the whole material side of the Ashram, the Ashram would have collapsed long ago under the weight of mismanagement, waste, self-indulgence, disorder, chaotic self-will and disobedience. He and they faced unpopularity and hatred in order to help her to save it.”

He came from Gujarat, the land where the Narmada, one of the seven holy rivers flows and meets the sea. During the formative years of the Ashram, many sadhaks including Champaklalji, Puraniji and Pujalalji flocked around Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to further their *tapasya* for attainment to the Supramental yoga and also laid the foundation of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s vast and daring work. Dyuman, the *karmayogi*, was one of the pillars on whose selfless work and faithfulness the Ashram grew to its present stature.

Born on 19 June 1903 in Napada village near Anand, Gujarat. At the age of eight he was called away from school and married to Kashi-ba, also eight. When he was eleven, he realized that his life was not to be an ordinary one, but was meant for something higher. Since then, an unknown force guided his life. He was restless and kept searching for something without knowing what it was or where to find it. He travelled all over the country, went to Shantiniketan and Belurmath and when he came back home, he also met Gandhiji. He also came to know Lele, but his thirst was not quenched. Little did he know

then that his destiny lay south, beyond the Vindhyas, on the eastern shore of India, in a small town under French rule, lulled by the chant of the blue waters of the Bay of Bengal.

Bhakti-ba, a relative of Kamalaben, was aware of Chunibhai's restlessness. When she returned after visiting Pondicherry, she told him, "Your place is not here with us, but at the feet of Aravinda Babu in Pondicherry." Chunibhai forgot everything else—even Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, whom he revered—only one name filled his whole being: *Pondicherry*. He had heard of Sri Aurobindo in 1920 and had already started reading the *Arya*, and *The Secret of the Veda*. In his school, his boy-scout troop was called "Aravinda troop." Finally, Bhakti-ba got permission from Sri Aurobindo and arranged for his journey to Pondicherry. Chunibhai and his wife Kashi-ba reached Pondicherry on 11 July 1924.

They both had the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo in the Library House. Chunibhai told Him that he had come here for Yoga and Sri Aurobindo talked to him about it for about an hour. His ears heard every word and in his heart Chunibhai replied, "You are my all. This is my life, this is my home." Kashi-ba offered her gold bangles at the feet of Sri Aurobindo. One offered his life and the other her precious possession. That was the end of Chunibhai's search. At last he had found his home—his Guru—his life's fulfilment.

They went back to Gujarat after two months. Chunibhai wrote to Sri Aurobindo every week seeking the Guru's permission to stay permanently in the Ashram. The long wait finally ended when he came to the Ashram permanently in May 1927. He left behind his parents, his wife, and the non-cooperation movement of Gandhiji. He even left his fight for the freedom of India. The moment he joined the Ashram, he no longer felt the pull of all his old connections.

He met the Mother for the first time in 1927. Her remark to Sri Aurobindo was, "He will go very far." She asked him to help Satyen in serving rice in the Dining Room in the main building of the Ashram—that was 22 May 1927, and till his passing on 19 August 1992, his close connection with the Dining Room remained uninterrupted. It grew deeper and closer as he treated the workers there as his close family members. The Mother accepted him as Her close attendant—a faithful, dependable worker. On his part, he had already accepted Her in 1924 as the Mother, even though he had not even met Her!

This was the beginning of a close association between the Mother and Her child, Dyuman. Sri Aurobindo had given him that name on 24 November 1928 based on his request earlier that year. His only aim in life became to serve Her. Yoga was far away, but through his work, he started understanding the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. That is why one day the Mother told him, "You do my work and I will do yours"—meaning his sadhana. In those early years, the emphasis was on discipline and work. No sadhak could talk to another without informing Her. So when Kashi-ba came in 1930, the Mother asked him not to talk to her. He obeyed and met her only once in the presence of the Mother when she went to Her for *pranām* before leaving Pondicherry.

The Mother asked him to keep two notebooks. One was to note down his daily inner movements and the other was about the details of daily work. One was given to Her

at noon and the other at night. One day the Mother asked him if it was necessary to keep these diaries. He replied, “Not necessary, Mother.” She instructed him to inform Her whenever any difficulty arose. That was the end of his writing the diaries. The external need was over. Henceforth, his inner guide would guide him. She gave him a picture of Herself taken in Japan and told him to meditate in front of it before opening the Dining Room door in the morning and before closing the door at night.

His passion for gardening began when along with others he participated in a flower exhibition at the Pondicherry Botanical Garden in 1930. The people of Pondicherry were surprised to see the size of the carnations and discovered that these men of the Ashram were not making bombs but were engaged in growing flowers! It was at that time that the Mother asked them to get a sapling of a Service tree from the Botanical Garden. Manibhai, Ambubhai and Dyuman-da planted it at the place indicated by the Mother. They watered it and took care of it. Planted in 1930, the tree still stands high and mighty in all its majesty over the Samadhi—proud, protective and undaunted. From then on, he started his double work of Dining Room and gardening and this was soon followed by numerous errands as the Mother slowly started putting more confidential work into his trustworthy hands.

In the Dining Room, which was then located in the Ashram main building, the cooking was done by servants under the guidance of an inmate. When Tara-di and Lila-di joined the Ashram, they proposed to the Mother that they would cook for the inmates. Later they took charge of Datta’s kitchen, which came to be known as the Mother’s kitchen and was managed by Dyuman-da. He would carry Their food upstairs—a service that could only be done by a *punyātmā*, a meritorious soul. When the fruit room had a cold chamber, he arranged to get fruits from various parts of the country to have an uninterrupted supply for Them. The Dining Room was shifted to its present building on 4 January 1934. Life went on smoothly in Their service but the strain started with World War II. More and more people joined the Ashram and the money was not enough. Dyuman-da was worried. How to feed so many! One day, as he was walking down Gandhi Road and thinking about the funds, he was taken in his subtle body to visit Kubera’s treasures and realized that everything was there—he need not worry. Somehow or the other, the funds would come and the needs of the Ashram would be provided for.

Once in 1937-38, the Mother gave him a piece of Her jewellery and asked him to sell it as an inmate was in dire need of some money. That was the first time, but it was not to be the last! Soon, selling Her jewellery became one source of income for the Ashram to maintain the numerous devotees who had started pouring in. The Mother gave Her ornaments—the timepiece given by Her grandmother, the Durga crown, which She did not want to sell but had to because of adverse circumstances, and even her pearl necklace, which She was in the habit of wearing on Darshan days. However, She wanted to know whom these were given to as they carried a special aura and power and any mishandling would be disastrous for those who had bought them. She warned them against misuse. Dyuman-da became Her instrument for such work. Soon Her jewellery coffer became empty.

Her next step was to sell Her saris. That disturbed Dyuman-da a lot and he protested as Her children embroidered most of them for their loving Mother. But She insisted on selling them in one lot to a single person. The saris were brought out and Vasudhaben wept on seeing them. But who could imagine the play of Dyuman-da! He collected the amount that the Mother wanted from a disciple who was close to him, took away the saris and kept them in his room! The generous disciple did not want the saris even though they were paid for. However, he requested Dyuman-da to sell them piece-by-piece and offer the proceeds to the Mother.

The Mother also used to distribute saris to inmates and devotees who were present before each Darshan. Once She wished to give Her own saris to Her children but alas, the remaining saris were not enough. When Dyuman-da heard about this, he told Her that Her wish would be fulfilled and brought nearly 500 saris from his room from the lot that was supposed to have been sold! What joy, what inner fulfillment he must have felt to be an instrument to execute Her wish! Not only this, but no one really knows how many of Her wishes he fulfilled. For example, She once saw a blue Ford V8 car and wished to have a similar one. Dyuman-da collected the required amount from a friend and bought an exact replica of the car She wanted. But was he satisfied with this? No! She must have something better; so he again collected money from some friends and bought a Humber for Her. The Mother used that car till 1952. Imagine how closely he was connected with those devotees staying far away from Pondicherry that they immediately gave—in cash or in kind—whatever he wanted for the Mother, without a question or a doubt crossing their mind. The trust they had in him only reflected the trust the Divine Mother had in him. If Hanuman was the *Dasa* of Rama, then truly, Dyuman-da was no less a *Dasa* of the Mother.

The work of cleaning Sri Aurobindo's room was given to Dyuman-da, as Pavitra-da was unable to do it because of his knee problem. Dyuman-da cleaned Sri Aurobindo's room for five years and never even glanced at Him as that was the Mother's instruction and he obeyed it. Once he had to repair the beams of Sri Aurobindo's room as some bees had made holes in them. He had to climb a ladder, clean the beams with a vacuum cleaner, and seal them without dropping anything on Sri Aurobindo, who was lying on the bed directly below the beams. Surely that must have been the toughest work in his life-long service! And he was aware that the Mother had put him to test; he did his work to Her satisfaction.

The Ashram started growing rapidly with the School, Playground and many other departments. Dyuman-da's activities also increased; other than his regular work, he now also had the additional responsibilities of a trustee. The Mother created the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust on 1 May 1955 and She made Dyuman-da one of the Founder Trustees. She gave each of the four trustees the flower "Divine's Love" on the first day and the next day, She gave each of them the flower "Faithfulness". It was a duty he discharged till the end even though the other Founder Trustees had long since passed away. He *had* to stay, for that was the Mother's wish and She wrote it on his Birthday card in 1972:

To Dyuman
 Bonne Fête
 And a long, long, long life of happy and remarkably useful life.
 With love and blessings...

For 29 February 1960, the first recurrence of the leap year after the Supramental Manifestation, Dyuman-da decided that the entire celebration would be in golden colour. We were given golden-coloured dresses, the saris had a golden border, the Meditation Hall was decorated with golden satin curtains and the lights glowed golden. Her room was spread with golden satin. On the first floor corridor, he spread golden satin so She could walk on it to the Balcony Darshan. Her dress had gold buttons, and the cutlery She used was of a golden hue. She distributed gold-coated symbols to the Ashramites. The whole Ashram vibrated with a golden aura; truly a dreamland on earth! In the evening, the Service Tree was decorated with coloured lamps; in the quietness of the night, they glowed golden—a fairyland—a wonderland in the universe! She asked him, “Why do you want to do all this?” His reply was that even if the vibration touched one soul, he would be happy and fulfilled. Then the Mother asked, “And if I ask you to sell all these things off later?” His immediate reply without any hesitation was, “Yes, Mother I will do it.” A detached, unsentimental, disinterested worker.

One day when he saw that the Mother wanted to lie down after coming back from the Playground in the evening, he was worried. She must have a room of Her own. The Mother hesitated. Finally, She agreed to have one constructed on the second floor with money he would collect from his friends. She shifted to Her new room on 9 December 1953, but slowly, even that room turned into Her working place when She retired there in 1962.

That was not the end of his untiring endeavour. He found out that a parcel of land near the Lake was up for sale. Once again he collected funds from his friends so that the Ashram could purchase the land. Here his normal life pattern changed again. Until then his responsibilities included looking after the Mother, the Dining Room, the Granary, going to the market to buy vegetables for the Dining Room, the store, etc. Now he had to look after a farm. His dream was to grow vegetables and fruits without chemical fertilizers because the Mother was against their use. So how could he give Her food that was grown with chemical fertilizers? His life was simple because he had a single, one-pointed aim—to serve Them in whatever way he could.

He was a visionary and never stepped back for fear of overwork or paucity of funds to give shape to his vision. It was his idea to make the documentary film “Sri Aurobindo Ashram—Four Chapters.” It was filmed by Ajit Bose and was displayed in many centres of the Ashram. Where the money came from, no one knew, and neither did anyone need to know. The immense archival value of the documentary can never be measured. It is a treasure for future generations as it shows some of the activities of the Mother in real life. His preparation for the centenary of Sri Aurobindo in 1972 started many years in advance. He got a steam boiler in 1967 for the Dining Room, which was well geared to cater to

innumerable visitors who came for the celebration. For the second time in the history of the Ashram, the Service Tree glowed with coloured lamps in the evening:

There showered upon the floating atmosphere
Colours and lights and evanescent gleams
That called to follow into a magic heaven,...

He personally arranged the celebration of the Mother's centenary in 1978 and saw to it that the Dining Room met its requirements. The distribution process went on till the evening. Among other things, the most prized item was a folder containing the pieces of clothing worn by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He single-handedly managed the distribution and did not require any support or help from others. It was *his* work and he must perform it—the body *must* serve. The body obeyed his spirit in harmony and bliss.

Once when Indira Gandhi, then the Prime Minister of India, spent a night in the Ashram main building, she stayed on the first floor in Pavitra-da's room. A sentry was posted there on guard duty, but Dyuman-da sent him away and did the duty himself all through the night, all-watchful and guarding the Prime Minister.

4 April 1985 was approaching—the 75th anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's coming to Pondicherry. Dyuman-da thought it would be a good idea if we could visit the room in Sankar Chetty house where Sri Aurobindo had stayed at the time. However, the house belonged to someone not connected with the Ashram. This did not daunt Dyuman-da. He approached the owner who gladly agreed to his suggestion. The Ashramites and devotees had the opportunity to pay their respects to the Lord in His room where He had stayed on 4 April 1910.

Dyuman-da could do all this and many other things because he had the conviction, the courage, and the indomitable spirit and trust in the Divine as his assistants. Service, only to serve, was his motto. No going to the Playground for him—no cinema; no cultural activity of any kind. From early morning till late at night, he was occupied with various kinds of work. They too had such confidence and trust in him! Once when the Ashram was passing through a critical financial crisis Sri Aurobindo was asked what He would do if He had to feed five hundred people. He simply replied, "Why, I will send them to Dyuman!"

The Mother tested him but also played with him! In 1934 She asked him to go to Her kitchen and tell Lila-di and others that it was his birthday. That day they cooked eleven dishes and since then something special is always served in the Dining Room on his birthday. For a person who never joined Group (physical activities), the Mother called him to the Playground on one of his birthdays. She made him sit on the arms of two men and they carried him around the ground and She stood in front of the map of undivided India and Pranab-da greeted him by saying, "Bonne Fête à Dyuman!" This continued till 1958 when the Mother retired from Playground activities.

Dyuman-da was so selfless in his service to Her! She used to give books or other items to people on their birthdays but he never got anything. During the napkin or mes-

sage distribution, he used to stand by Her side and hand over the items to Her one by one. But he never got any! He never asked for these nor did he feel any resentment for not receiving them. She would often say, “You don’t care to have these things.” And Dyumanda’s answer always was, “Yes, Mother, as long as you are there I don’t care.” Yes, She gave him things. Once She gave him a picture of Ganesh and wrote behind it, “Let him become your generous friend.” Another time, She took his right hand in Hers and said, “Lakshmi is your friend.” And truly, how he assisted, managed, and laboured for the growth and prosperity of the Ashram. He never wasted money and tried to put a stop to wasteful spending, and naturally, faced criticism and opposition. A letter written by Sri Aurobindo on 6 March 1932 proves how priceless his actions were: “Your spirit of economy is very precious and extremely helpful to us, the more so as it is rare in the Ashram where the push conscious or subconscious is towards the other extreme.”

Years passed by in the service of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. As a trustee, he continued his usual work. He would bring food to the Mother three times a day, visit the granary and the Dining Room early in the morning, go to the market to buy vegetables for the Dining Room, visit the gardens, look after the Mother’s store, vacuum the 1st floor, look after Her kitchen, etc. When Amrita-da left his body in 1969, the added responsibility of the Central Office also fell on him. When the Mother retired completely in mid-1973, the monetary affairs of the Ashram fell on him. He worked relentlessly. When She left Her body, he saw to it that things continued without a break and remained as they had been during Her time. A disruption anywhere would damage the core of the Ashram.

Work increased with the passing away of Nolini-da and Pradyut-da. The devotees who were associated with them found in him their loving, caring, elder brother. Each additional responsibility got adjusted to his already busy daily schedule as if time stretched itself out to accommodate his spirit. His gait, his look, his talk never showed any sign of stress or strain, or hurry—his body adjusted that much. He had had a nervous breakdown in 1934. When he recovered, the Mother asked him to put on Pavitra-da’s hat and walk in the midday sun every day. Sometime back I came across some of his letters of earlier years written to the Mother about his failing health. I wonder by what method or in what manner he changed that failing physical body to acquire the tenacity and stature of uninterrupted service. It must have been the physical aspiration of a *Karmayogi* to change the capacity of the body by selfless work in Their service.

The Ashram was growing at a fast rate. More and more devotees started coming. He kept in touch with some of them through letters. Often, just a few lines, but that was sufficient to keep their contact with the Ashram. On the eve of Darshan, or on Darshan Day, after distribution late at night one would find him sitting with just a *dhoti* on, his upper body bare, deeply engrossed in writing letters. The *Karmayogi* at work. We would often complain about his late night work. He would be up very early in the morning, go throughout the day without even a short break, meet visitors and not neglect his daily routine, and go on past midnight. This was too much for us. But not for him. Devotees in India and abroad would be waiting eagerly for Darshan messages and blessings packets.

How could he while away his time in sleep or rest! That was the magnitude of his consideration.

Once on his early morning rounds, his all-watchful eyes picked up a cycle without a seat cover near the Ashram. He watched for a few days and then concluded that the person might be coming early in the morning to serve Nolini-da or to work at the Samadhi. It did not matter if he did not even know the name of the person. He got a seat cover and had it put on the cycle. On enquiry, the bewildered person found out that it was Dyuman-da's idea. At the Theatre, participants used to have their dinner in aluminium dishes. He happened to see this just once. The next time, they had dinner in stainless steel dishes. He moved fast, without wasting time pondering and dilly-dallying. The entire Ashram was his family. He would drop in at homes unannounced or uninvited, but not unexpectedly—especially on birthdays. Does anyone invite a family member?! Never. So it was with him. He was so informal and very close to one and all.

As Pondicherry was becoming over-populated, the rent of houses was also shooting up considerably. He moved at once. "We must have our own houses. We can't be at the mercy of the house owners." By that time the financial position of the Ashram had improved. Funds were available for buildings. Thus the projects of New Creation, Park Guest House and others began. In the afternoon after finishing the cash work and signing money orders, clad in *dhoti* and a white coat on his *fatua*, sunglasses on and a hat on his head, he would stride to the car waiting for him and drive off to the new construction sites before pushing off to Gloria—his dream farm. He would be back in the evening, sign the receipts of donations received, take his meagre dinner lovingly served by Swarnodi, and then would help inmates with their problems, or talk to devotees wanting to hear some words. In the dead of night, he would read or write letters not only in reply to the ones he had received, but would drop two lines to someone he remembered in the day and enclose a Blessing packet. And it often happened that the person was remembering him or had some difficulty and was in dire need of Blessings from the Mother! He had so much joy in giving; perhaps as much as the person who was receiving!

But that was not to be in his relationship with Kashi-ba. She settled down in Pondicherry in the eighties. Dyuman-da made it clear to her that she should not expect any special consideration from him. She stayed in a room given by Ambapremiji and was looked after by Ashokbhai. There was hardly any communication between them.

Dyuman-da was a poet at heart. He would not express his feelings in writing but would share the joy with others by calling them up to the first floor of the Ashram main building, and from the corridor window would show them the palm tree with fresh new green leaves sprouting. The beauty of it could not be seen from the courtyard. When the Service tree would be in full bloom, he would say the scenery was ethereal from Ravindraji's terrace on a full moon night! Or so often, he would describe the beauty of the *Kadamba* tree covered with golden "Supramental Sun" at the Gloria land.

When the Managing Trustee Counouma-ji's health began deteriorating in the 1980s, Dyuman-da got more involved in the day-to-day running of the Ashram. He consulted his colleagues and took decisions—always unassumingly, with no show of power or

position—with the same attitude of serving Them by serving the Ashramites and devotees. He became the Managing Trustee after Counouma-ji left his body in 1991. A huge responsibility indeed. For one who had served Them from the age of twenty-four, it was a culmination of Their faith and trust in him.

Now, devotees began demanding or requesting him to visit their place. He visited Orissa and Bengal to be with them, be a part of their celebrations. His health was failing. However, he had a wonderful way of curing himself too. He would give the body a rest and he would be up serving again. Even when he was admitted to the Nursing Home, he would sit up and sign the receipts or discuss the work. *Work* was his food and not his daily meal.

His next big assignment was to celebrate the golden jubilee of the School in 1993. He met Paru-di and Pranab-da to discuss the celebrations. It was his brainchild. He moved quickly to collect the addresses of ex-students. We did have the celebrations. But alas, without him. He left his body the year before.

Did nothing upset him or ever disturb him? Yes, occasionally. I have seen him pass through these phases. He had a wonderful method of coming out of these spells. He would sleep not only at night, but also throughout the day. I have seen him sleeping more than twenty-four hours and when he would get up, he would be his own self—the hurt or the disturbance vanishing as if it had not existed at all.

Though he looked very strict and stoic, in his heart he was like a child. He had a childlike trust in people. His room was never locked. It could be used by anyone to keep their mats or cushions for sitting in the Ashram or their books before going to the Group, anything at all. They would just walk in—even if he was sitting or sleeping—keep or take their things and go out. There was no need to ask or take his permission. At night he would sleep on the first floor with just a mat and a pillow, as was his habit since the Mother’s time.

On the eve of his birthday in 1992, he was presented with a new pair of *dhotis*. He was overjoyed. “Two new *dhotis*! I will wear them both!” He did so. After a few days he told me it was the first time in his life he had changed clothes during the day. Till the end he washed his own clothes. His life-style was so simple—in his entire life he had very little need of material things. But who could measure his inner gains? That happened to be his last birthday.

The most striking and admirable aspect of his personality was his attitude of clinging to the Mother, come what may. Often he would say that whatever happens or whatever one does, follow one thing—never leave the Mother, cling to Her. He would give a very beautiful and touching image: a toddler clings to the sari of his mother, never letting her go—following her wherever she goes—even if the mother had scolded him for doing something wrong. The toddler would cling to her sari crying his heart out, but would never let her be away from him. That was the way one should cling to the Divine Mother. It was the most important lesson I learnt from him. He was a workaholic. He would say, “When I die and am put on the funeral pyre, you will burn my body but my soul will jump out of the flame and take birth immediately to be able to serve the Mother.” That

was the *karmayogi* from the Narmada Valley.

He was a *Siddha Purusha* too. Did he have a premonition of his death? In a diary in his office, Dyuman-da used to note down the daily amount received for Dining Room expenses. As he would be very busy before Darshan, he used to note the amount in advance for the next few days, as the sum given was a fixed one. In August 1992, a few days before Darshan, he told me he had filled up the amount in advance in the diary. On the evening of 14 August, his talk was broadcast by All India Radio Pondicherry. His voice was resonant and young—not the voice of an eighty-nine-year-old man at all. The speech stirred everyone who heard it. The Darshan on 15 August went on till late afternoon. Dyuman-da distributed Darshan messages all day. The next day he had fever, but he refused to go to the Nursing Home. There were many devotees who had come from out-of-town and wanted to see him. He attended the funeral of Ichcha-di. The next morning, he was persuaded to go to the Nursing Home. He walked to the car by himself. The next day, we went to him with some work. He attended to that. He also did office work on the 19th, and then suddenly left his body in the evening. At the end of the month, I took out the daily diary to work on the accounts. To my disbelief, it was filled up to 19 August! Was it a premonition or a coincidence? Or was it *Ichchamrityu*? I remember vividly my last meeting with him on 19 August. He was sitting on his bed, we discussed office work, and then I left. But before closing the door of his room, I looked back. He was sitting on his bed looking in my direction, and with both his hands, he was doing *namaste*. I was surprised and thought I had seen wrong. But that night when the news of his passing reached me, I realized it was not a hallucination—he was bidding me *adieu*.

He must have heard the Mother call “Dyuman” from the other world and must have immediately rushed up that invisible ladder that connects this world with Hers and said “Yes Mother, I am here.” All ready to be at Her service there.

KRISHNA CHAKRAVARTI

DYUMAN’S PRAYER TO THE MOTHER, 4.12.1949

Work, work and work will be my motto—ceaselessly to work, work for all time. It has no night, no day. To go beyond time and there to work.

Speech less, advice less, preaching of the sermons less—but to work and to act and to live up to the highest idea.

My dear Mother, all love to you.

AMAL KIRAN WRITES ABOUT DYUMAN*

His inner contact with the Mother was such that he could draw her out of the deepest trance. This I was told by Udar in connection with the last hours of Sri Aurobindo. The Mother had gone away to rest sometime before the end was expected, so that Sri Aurobindo might have a passage free of the Mother's constant inevitable impulse to prevent him from his contemplated self-sacrifice to effect a radical step forward for the earth-consciousness. Dyuman was sent to call her inwardly out of her trance into which she had gone in the interval—between her leaving Sri Aurobindo's side and his taking his last breath. Without a whisper or a touch he is said to have informed her of the need to go back to Sri Aurobindo's room.

*

The Mother used to have meetings with some of the disciples in 1928 in the "Prosperity" Room in the Library House. Both Dyuman and I belonged to that group.

Once the Mother raised the question: "Who among you has progressed the most during the past year?"

The answer would not mean which sadhak or sadhika was the most advanced in general. It would declare which one had taken the most marked step forward during the preceding twelve months.

While recollecting this question, I turned to Dyuman and asked whether it had stuck in his memory too. He said "Yes." Then I asked him whether he recalled the answer. He looked at me but kept quiet. I smiled and said: "We thought of Nolini, Amrita, Champaklal, Pavitra and Anilbaran, all old timers. But the Mother named you." Dyuman's face beamed and he exclaimed: "So you remember this?"

I replied: "Who could forget so great a compliment?"

AMAL KIRAN

* Two extracts from "Looking Back at Dyuman", *Mother India*, November 1992, pp. 792-93.

WHAT BASICALLY IS SAVITRI?

WHAT basically is *Savitri*? It can be regarded, in its own language, as

Sight's sound-waves breaking from the soul's great deeps.

So to approach it I would try to concentrate in the heart-centre and plunge into it until I felt it as not only intense but also immense—and in that secrecy of warm wideness I would become all eyes and ears bent upon feeling *Savitri* as the outflow of my own true self. Here would be an attempt to enter into Sri Aurobindo through my own profundities and, catching a sense of identity with him, achieve in the form of this poem's super-art what the Rigvedic Rishis termed "the seeing and hearing of the Truth". Whatever is spiritually visioned has an inherent vibration which renders itself into a voice, an audible rhythm of the inmost being's self-visualisation. To experience *Savitri*'s spirit-disclosures in this intimate audiovisual manner within some psychic solitude of fathomless peace conjoined with power: there you have my ideal apropos of a phrase from Sri Aurobindo's epic.

But I may add that such an account as the above does not exhaust the reality of true readership. As Sri Aurobindo explains in *The Future Poetry*, the Mantra is seen-heard in the heart's abysm at the same time that it is sensed as descended from a height of heights. This sensing, if it is to be acute, reflects the experience we meet in those sapphics of Sri Aurobindo:

Swiftly, swiftly crossing the golden spaces
Knowledge leaps, a torrent of rapid lightnings.
Thoughts that left the Ineffable's flaming mansions
Blaze in my spirit.

Slow my heart-beats' rhythm like a giant hammer's;
Missioned voices drive to me from God's doorway
Words that live not save upon Nature's summits,
Ecstasy's chariots.

I should like to set my imagination a-thrill with the rapture-roll of these lines and with the picture they conjure up of a mighty descent from the Superconscient Ether into the human spirit and of a vast receptivity in that spirit's central organ. The central organ experiences at once an expansion and a subdual—its pulsation loses all common excitement and narrow sensation, it comes to know great prolonged gaps of silence between one throb and another. Within such a reflex and echo of the Rigveda's *param vyoman*, the supreme Void where all the Gods are seated together and the Mantra goes eternally vibrating—within that superhumanised heart the revelatory utterance of a poem like *Savitri* can be realised in all the authenticity of its marvellous origin at the top of Nature, the Overmind-Supermind level.

And how does that utterance precipitate itself with its sight-sound? Sri Aurobindo uses an image from the Rigveda: the chariot. It is as a mobile well-framed carrier of a luminous load that the Mantra arrives and appears in the mortal's consciousness. What psychological fact is shadowed out by this arrival and appearance in the shape of a skilfully fashioned vehicle on two wheels which resemble—to quote an Upanishadic idea—a stable centre from which and into which run the diverse lines of our nature like circling spokes? According to the Rigveda, such arrival and appearance point to the domain of the mind in a state of in-drawnness which yet has a calm connection with all the parts of the being and which lends itself to the formative *élan* from the lofty home of Truth and from the deep answering heart. The in-drawn illuminated mentality is the workshop here below of the hidden Gods. There, like an inspired cartwright, the seer gives a particularised mould to the messages that move from everlasting to everlasting. Rather, the mould which is already existent on Nature's summits gets its true replica for man in the shaping recesses of the mind. Ecstasy's chariots are projected into the cast of human language through the services of a mental seerhood. Hence *Savitri's* missioned voices from God's doorway call not only for a heart-consciousness of the right order but also for a mind-awareness properly tuned up.

To cut all this esoteric cackle of mine, I may sum up by saying that we should somehow so train ourselves in heart and mind that *Savitri* may be more than a superb communication to us: it should be a miraculous communion in which we shall feel as though we were its co-creators with Sri Aurobindo.

The Mother's presence is extremely intense today—as it should be to all who have pledged their future to her and to whom 21 February, along with 15 August, is the greatest occasion in history because something beyond history, a Grace of the Eternal, entered the historical stream to give it not only what it could never deserve but also what it could never dream of and desire. For, this stream belongs to the cosmic movement which has the transcendent behind it but never directly in it: its culmination would be the highest stratum of the world of the Gods, where the Many stand unified and harmonised in a Godhead synthesising in a single *summum bonum* the diverse goals of the various religions: the culmination would be the glory and passion of a World Religion such as would have been founded if the luminous creation of the Overmind plane had been precipitated in the wake of the Descent on 24 November 1926 and not been set aside by the Mother at the command of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo wanted not this natural crowning of the cosmic movement but the evocation of the Ineffable that was behind it, the secret Supermind transcendent of all religions, whose realisation would be rather the gift of a Super-Nature than Nature's own deserved and desired achievement in the course of history—in short, a Grace of the Eternal, which can only be received and never demanded as a right and which has been offered to terrestrial evolution by the birth of the Divine Mother amongst us, side by side with that of Sri Aurobindo the Supramental Avatar. From the viewpoint of Nature and history the dual embodiment of the Supermind is asking for the impossible. Have not all the prophets and saviours declared that, however irradiated the earth might be by the Spirit, the *grand finale* is always Yonder, never Here? Out of the mind, away

from the life-force, far from the body we must ultimately go if the Supreme is to be our unchanging and everlasting home: this has been the master-message of every system of spirituality. Even Vaishnavism and Tantra, which attempted to lay reshaping hands on embodied existence, knew how short they fell of the power of true transformation: even they pointed in the end to an earth-exceeding Within or a world-forgetting Beyond. All spiritual insight in the past has said that it is chimerical to hope for a mind all-knowing, a life-force all-effecting, a physical being which is perpetually young, immune to disease, free from death. Alone the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have proclaimed:

Earth's winged chimeras are Truth's steeds in Heaven,
The impossible God's sign of things to be.

And today—the 102nd anniversary of the Supernal Beloved's birth—the sign of the future to which our souls have been dedicated glowed bright in our consciousness, as though once again that Beloved were concretely in front of us and lavishing on us her unforgettable time-transfiguring smile.

21.2.1980

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

NIRODBARAN'S SURREALIST POEMS

MOON-EYE

THE gentle crimson lustre of Evening's Invocation
Blows Adoration's conch in the twilit sky:
Mantra-rapturous earth's tremulous trance
Makes restless the Dark with ecstatic emotion.
The bumble-bee buzzes to the star-flowers;
The breeze rustles through the white leafy clouds;
Where the Moon, in his blue room, from unconscious sleep
Wakes startled: Parting the windows
He views on this surging earth-ocean
The wave-play of Beauty's forms go dancing
With raised sail to infinite wakefulness
Scattering light-rays in all directions!
Who intoxicates it, who cradles it oh,
The Moon-Eye revealed—it's the World-Forgetful One!

DEBASHISH BANERJI

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN'S TWELVE YEARS

WHEN in 1972 Nirodbaran read out to the Mother most of Sri Aurobindo's letters written to him, she said: "Sri Aurobindo has answered all the problems in your letters. It is marvellous... There are extraordinary things in there. He seems to be joking all the time... but it is extraordinary... He has given you everything." All this went on between February 1933 and November 1938, the halcyon days full of heavenly exquisiteness. Indeed, what is there at all which is not in this guru-shishya exchange, a wonder of the sun talking to its sunshine? As regards the subject matter there was the wide field to range over: "Supermind, literature, art, religion, spirituality, Avatarhood, love, women, marriage, medical matters, sex-gland, any topical question, such as goat-sacrifice at Kalighat, political atrocities, sectarian fanaticism, hunger strike, India's freedom" including overhead poetry,—that was the kind of a rich pabulum served at this distinctive feast. 1200 pages of correspondence, plus an equally voluminous as-yet unpublished stack of manuscripts dealing with hundreds of poems of an aspirant poet-disciple, is something unparalleled in spiritual history. In fact, in the process of correcting and commenting on his creations, the Master himself became his collaborator. Through all this the Yogi was an Alchemist also, "engaged in making the cub a tiger." Was that an experiment to transform the common clay into supramental gold, to bring about a radical change in the material that was here in the form of a pliant and chosen pupil?

But it can never be a straightforward task, particularly when the thousand evils of nature have to be dealt with. Quite often was the shishya haunted by a "plucky devil" even as he moved on the sunlit path. And then he had the "wooden headed" logic that failed to understand the manner of working of the incarnate Divine; or else he continued to be for a long time "the Man of Sorrows". Yet in spite of the presence of Grand'mère Depression or that old Mother Gloom-Gloom, there had always been the assurance of the important thing that flows from the presence of the guru, his protective benevolence. He is told "to go on till the psychic truth behind everything becomes manifest." When there is the soul and there is the unfailing Grace, there can also be the chance of "supramental ropening"—and, sure enough, Nirodbaran grabbed that chance fully. He got the soul's reward in the form of a

Life that is deep and wonder-vast

which has the "inevitable quality" expressing "things with an absolute truth."

During those exquisite halcyon days Nirodbaran once raised a question about the relative merits of several Fine Arts such as music, poetry, painting, sculpture and in the ranking put music at the top of his list. His reason was because of its universality and direct appeal to our sense of perception. He wanted to have Sri Aurobindo's "expert and thoroughly satisfying opinion" on the matter. But Sri Aurobindo was sufficiently well on his guard and did not commit the mistake of Paris in offering the crown of glory to one of the Muses, thereby inviting the wrath of others. The situation could have been something

gravely dangerous in its far reaching consequences, leading even to the destruction of a whole civilisation; this could have damned the arbiter forever. Yet he saw some worth in the criterion of “direct appeal” and wondered whether modern painting and poetry were proceeding in that direction to vie with music. While drawing the conclusion “maybe or maybe not” he gave us a very luminous answer and, in the process, drew a diaphanous portrait of Nirodbaran himself: “It is perhaps true that music goes direct to the intuition and feeling with the least necessity for the use of the thinking mind with its strongly limiting conception as a self-imposed middleman, while painting and sculpture do need it and poetry still more. At that rate music would come first, architecture next, then sculpture and painting, poetry last. I am aware that Houseman posits nonsense as the essence of pure poetry and considers its appeal to be quite direct—not to the soul but to somewhere about the stomach. But then there is hardly any pure poetry in this world and the little there is is still *mélangé* with at least a homeopathic dose of intellectual meaning. But again if I admit this thesis of excellence by directness, I shall be getting myself into dangerous waters. For modern painting has become either cubist or abstract and it claims to have got rid of mental representation and established in art the very method of music; it paints not the object, but the truth behind the object—by the use of pure line and colour and geometrical form which is the very basis of all forms or else by figures that are not representations but significances. For instance a modern painter wishing to make a portrait of you will now paint at the top a clock surrounded by three triangles, below them a chaos of rhomboids and at the bottom two table castors to represent your feet and he will put underneath this powerful design, ‘Portrait of Nirod’. Perhaps your soul will leap up in answer to its direct appeal and recognise at once the truth behind the object, behind your vanished physical self,—you will greet your psychic being or your Atman or at least your inner physical or vital being. Perhaps also you won’t. Poetry also seems to be striving towards the same end by the same means—getting away from mind into the depths of life or, as the profane might put it, arriving at truth and beauty through ugliness and unintelligibility. From that you will perhaps deduce that the attempt of painting and poetry to do what music alone can do easily and directly without these acrobatics is futile because it is contrary to their nature—which proves your thesis that music is the highest art because most direct in its appeal to the soul and the feelings. Maybe—or maybe not.”

But it seems that this correspondence-period was a great apprenticeship-period preparing the chosen disciple for another kind of work. Nirodbaran was a doctor who had qualified himself from Edinburgh in 1924 to practise medicine. But soon after his return to India he was destined to arrive at the feet of the Master in Pondicherry. When he joined the Ashram he was first given a job in the Building Service Department and then was in-charge of the Timber Godown; eventually he landed in the Dispensary.

But then there was also the curious phenomenon of the doctor writing poetry instead of medical prescriptions. About his strange “case-history” Amal Kiran writes as follows: “Nirodbaran became quite often a sheer medium through whom a strange species of poetry poured without his being able to make head or tail of it. Of course, what he served as a channel for proved to have a comet’s tail, a brilliance from beyond the earth,

and a veritable godhead seemed to glow from behind or above the mere mind... The poet's unawareness of the wonder he was transmitting was, however, only one facet of the strange development he was going through." Nirodbaran had started writing surrealist poetry whose inspiration came from some inner yogic consciousness. But at times there was also the overhead greatness in his poetic utterance, catching its "authentic note with enough frequency to make it an appreciable element." But often the Master had to "doctor the doctor" to bring perfection to the tyro's initial attempts. Soon, however, started coming poetry in abundance and with flawless expression.

Nirodbaran's dual preparation as a doctor and a poet seems to have dovetailed into the most important role he was to play during his twelve years with Sri Aurobindo. In 1938, after the accident on 24 November, he made the first entry into the sanctum sanctorum as a doctor. He had on an earlier occasion complained about his twenty thousand rupees towards medical tuition fees having gone down the drain, the simple reason being that his professional knowledge did not find much application here in the Ashram. But then least would have he imagined that the sum would fetch for him the prospects of serving the divine patient. Add to this fortune the double fortune to have become a poet and later, because of that qualification, the Master's personal secretary for literary works. At the time he received this enviable gift of attending on Sri Aurobindo, Nirodbaran was just 35. During the next twelve years there were to take place world-transforming events changing the very course of civilisation and shaping in a decisive way the evolutionary destiny. The Yogi's action was in full play and Nirodbaran was a human witness on the spot to record it and inform us about it. We can never be sufficiently thankful to him for this act of his.

We have in Nirodbaran what he, with an observer's keen eye, glimpsed and perceived. It is not a report in the nature of something written centuries later. In the Gospel, for instance, it is impossible to tell how much history is preserved. "The accounts, and John's in particular, are theology rather than history," says a commentator. "The writers wished to show the clash predicted by Jesus between the powers of darkness and the powers of light, between Truth and men, like Pilate, who would never grasp it. They revelled in the story of the Roman governor who could not decide between right and wrong, truth and falsehood: because Pilate, in this case, was all men." Nirodbaran doesn't suffer from a possible disregard of an unbeliever. On the contrary, just to illustrate the point, the events of the World War II such as we have in his accounts throw an altogether different light on the history of the time. Luckily for us, as well as for the scholars to come, here is a gold mine of authentic material, even to see the occult sense behind what was happening on the surface. There are more things than we can dream of and multi-winding is the path.

Nirodbaran kept faithful records of the conversations Sri Aurobindo used to have with his attendants every evening. In the preface to *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* the author writes: "The eve of the November Darshan, 1938. The Ashram humming with the arrival of the visitors. On every face signs of joy, in every look calm expectation and happiness... A sudden noise! 2.00 a.m. Then an urgent call to Sri Aurobindo's room... Purani

answered it. Dr. Manilal, who fortunately had arrived for the Darshan, was called. Presently, some of us came... Yes, a fracture and of a serious type..." The large crowd of anxious devotees that had gathered for the Darshan, however, had to go back disappointed, "accepting Fate's decree with a calm submission." As Sri Aurobindo lay on the bed, there subsequently "followed regular conversations with those disciples who were given the privilege of serving him from then onwards for twelve years." The close, free and warm informal atmosphere that grew around him during the evening sessions, reminds us of the Upanishadic scene. Practically everything under the sun was discussed, he himself being that sun, the source of light that casts no shadow. "There was not a subject that was not touched upon, not a mystery that he did not illumine, not a phenomenon that passed unnoticed, humorous or serious, superficial or profound, mundane or mystic. Reminiscences, stories, talks on art and culture, on world-problems and spiritual life poured down in abundant streams from an otherwise silent and reticent vastitude of knowledge and love and bliss. It was an unforgettable reward he accorded to us for our humble service." These talks "show Sri Aurobindo's encyclopaedic knowledge and bear out the truth of his remark that if he wrote all that he knew, it would be ten times more than what he had already written." Purani and Nirodbaran recorded the lively meetings independently and we should be grateful to both of them for this precious gift of theirs. We have in it the Master's profound spiritual insights on current events as well as on a variety of social and cultural subjects. Nirodbaran quotes Sri Aurobindo, that "the Divine gives himself to those who give themselves." Indeed, this is what our poet-doctor did and this is what he received in God's plenty!

No wonder therefore that his *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* should occupy a unique position in the vast body of the Aurobindonian literature. It is an intimate biographical account pertaining to the last triumphant period of the Avatar's earthly sojourn. Very rarely does a book get the recognition of a classic in the author's own lifetime. There are instances when the early reception accorded to creative works had to be revised with the passing of time as, not too long ago, it happened in the case of Tagore's Nobel-winning *Gitanjali*. W. B. Yeats, who was greatly impressed by it and who was instrumental in promoting it, himself changed his views later. But Nirodbaran's *Twelve Years* has acquired that exceptional privilege, and fairly deservedly too, of something which will endure the test of generations. Not that there is something extraordinary in it and that people will go to it with the fervour of reading, say, Valmiki or Kalidas or Dante or the dialogues of Plato. It may perhaps come more in the class of works like the immortal Bhagavata Purana and will be cherished by those who have opened out to the greatness of the one whom they adore in their heart. Essentially belonging to the genre of Gurubhakti, and "devotional outpourings" as the Foreword tells us, it is yet a little masterpiece in its own right which also has the distinction of being translated into a dozen of Indian and foreign languages. When the author read out the book to the Mother, she remarked: "It is extremely interesting and very instructive."

Written in a simple and straightforward pleasing style, a narrative based on the writer's direct personal contact and association with the Master, the book is a precious

treasury of the daily happenings in the House of the Unknown. The one who always appeared very far away, inaccessible, withdrawn, aloof like a snow-clad mountain somewhere in the mysterious south, never-smiling, unconcerned in regard to the matters of the world,—that is the kind of picture people had conjured up about him. But now he seems to draw closer to us as we begin to go through the account given in these 300 and odd pages. The personal of the impersonal starts emerging vividly, with several intimate details of the daily routines. How “the most sublimely enigmatic person of the Modern Age, one whom thousands have felt a veritable God-Man” ate, and slept, and walked in his room, or how he wrote from his famous but inscrutable “silent mind”, or else how his divinity took a human shape in contacts with his attendants or how he corresponded with a few disciples almost until the end,—these have always been the fond curiosities of devotees and it is these which have been amply fulfilled in Nirodbaran’s document. Here is a typical description of the part of a day’s routine in the life of the incarnate Supreme.

“At first Sri Aurobindo was served three meals daily but breakfast was soon stopped as it was too early for his appetite. However, even his first meal gradually came to be delayed till late in the afternoon. Sri Aurobindo reserved a big part of his day for what he called his personal work of concentration. After his morning ablutions, he would go through the newspapers, and then the Mother would come for a while to discuss things of importance. It was often three or four o’clock in the afternoon by the time Sri Aurobindo was ready for his first meal. The Mother would then come, lay out the dishes on a wheeled table which had been made for him, and push it close to the bed. Sri Aurobindo relished good food and was partial to sweets, specially *rasagolla*, *sandesh* or *pantua*, but he had no attachment to any particular dish... This was his principal meal of the day. At night he had a light supper, its timing being flexible, as it depended on the Mother’s endless round of activities.” Did he sleep at night? But the dharma of the physical had to be respected. If he took food, it is understandable that he slept also. But his sleep was not *tamasic* or dull inconscient like ours; it was yogic. His feet would remain uncovered perhaps, because, beings from the subtle worlds would come to offer their *pranāms* to him.

We continue to read the book again and again to live in that gracious and benign presence. Let us take a couple of examples to enjoy its charm, its lovability and flavour. Let us also profit from it, that we may be wise and do the things of life in the understanding of the values of the spirit.

The first thing that we perhaps notice in the evening conversations with the disciples is the extent to which Sri Aurobindo, though confined to his cave of tapasya, was alert to the happenings in the world. Not only did he follow the significant developments during the Second World War, but also applied his yogic force in definitively reorienting their course. His public announcement recommending the acceptance of Cripps’s Mission in 1942 vis-à-vis the independence of India bears ample testimony of his active interest. It is a pity that it was rejected by the country’s wise men of those days. Apropos of that the Mother said: “Now calamity will befall India.” Sri Aurobindo, however, never ceased to be up-to-date regarding the world affairs. Apropos of these two events Nirodbaran writes: “We shared with Sri Aurobindo his hopes and fears, his anticipations, prog-

nostications and prophecies. He allowed us some glimpses into his action and gave a calm assurance of the victory for the Divine cause.”

During the early phase of the War, Hitler was marching triumphantly with his panzer divisions destroying Paris. “Having won the Battle of France decisively,” reports Nirodbaran, “Hitler now turned his attention to winning the Battle of Britain. He fixed 15 August 1940 as the day on which he would complete his conquest of Western Europe and broadcast from Buckingham Palace. When Sri Aurobindo heard of this he remarked ‘that is the sign that he is the enemy of our work...’ But 15 August turned out to be a turning point for Britain. On that day 180 German planes were shot down in British skies... A month later, on the same date, 15 September 1940, Sri Aurobindo said smiling: ‘England has destroyed 175 German planes, a very big number. Now invasion will be difficult. Hitler lost his chance after the fall of France. He has really missed the bus!’ ” Another force was set up against him. In the Mother’s War Sri Aurobindo took full charge of the situation. Behind Hitler’s success Sri Aurobindo saw the working of a powerful Asura in the task of “enslavement of mankind to the tyranny of evil.” This would have been a setback for the course of spiritual evolution for which Sri Aurobindo was working.

Not only did he apply his yogic force when such catastrophic events were taking place; he and the Mother also made a monetary contribution to the War fund. In their letter to the Governor of Madras dated 19 September 1940 they declared: “We feel that not only is this a battle waged in just self-defence and in defence of the nations threatened with the world-domination of Germany and the Nazi system of life, but that it is a defence of civilisation and its highest attained social, cultural and spiritual values and of the whole future of humanity. To this cause our support and sympathy will be unswerving whatever may happen; we look forward to the victory of Britain and, as the eventual result, an era of peace and union among the nations and a better and more secure world-order.” Who in this land of ours had the idea of the disaster that was waiting for mankind in the victory of the Nazi way of life, of Hitler’s running over nations and countries? None. It seems that we had lost our heads and our souls. If at all there was the charismatic appeal to the gullible to side with the devil in his doings. The one who had proclaimed himself as the Lord of the Nations, the Asuric power of Falsehood, had found in Hitler his perfect instrument in the gruesome task of annihilation of the world. Here was Mahatma Gandhi with the ethico-religious mind recommending submission to the Falsehood that was at the basis of this dark creation. The *Times* letter in July 1940 addressed to the Britishers runs as follows: “I want you to fight Nazism without arms, or, if I am to retain the military terminology, with non-violent arms. I would like you to lay down the arms you have as being useless for saving you or humanity. You will invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of the countries you call your possessions. Let them take possession of your beautiful island, with your many beautiful buildings. You will give all these but neither your souls nor your minds. If these gentlemen choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourselves man, woman and child, to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them.” Putting such an ultra-Christian doctrine on the highest pedes-

tal of ethical excellence, making it an eminent principle of administration in the daily mode of life of the individual as well as of a whole society is not only to dwarf them; in fact, in its cruellest sense it is to turn all towards anti-humanity. And what is the efficacy of such a doctrine in its functioning? It sucks away the life-blood of a nation; it strangles the spirit of freedom and happy enterprise; it kills with a dark knife the very soul of man. A great humane and respectable virtue meant for another kind of pursuit is converted into a deadly weapon of destruction to push everything into the abyss of spiritual oblivion, into the sunless worlds that are enveloped in blind gloom, *andhena tamasāvṛtaḥ*, as the Isha Upanishad would declare. Was the Mahatma promoting the Rule of the Asura? It seems so, if not consciously and deliberately but unwittingly. Did not the same thing happen at the time of Cripps's Mission in 1942? Woe to the nation who turns its blind eye to the Rishi dedicated to the Divine cause.

India's willing participation in the War effort was necessary and the British Prime Minister of the time, Winston Churchill, had made a proposal through Sir Stafford Cripps to the Indian leaders with the possibility of Dominion Status to the country after the War. Sri Aurobindo saw in it India becoming free and remaining united and extended his explicit and precise support to it. In a telegram dated 31 March 1942 he writes to Cripps: "I have heard your broadcast. As one who was a nationalist leader and worker for India's independence, though now my activity is no longer in the political but in the spiritual field, I wish to express my appreciation of all you have done to bring about this offer. I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself, and organise in all liberty of choice, her freedom and unity, and take an effective place among the world's free nations. I hope that it will be accepted, and right use made of it, putting aside all discords and divisions. I hope too that friendly relations between Britain and India replacing the past struggles will be a step towards a greater world union in which, as a free nation, her spiritual force will contribute to build for mankind a better and happier life. In this light, I offer my public adhesion, in case it can be of any help in your work." Sir Stafford Cripps replied: "I am most touched and gratified by your kind message allowing me to inform India that you who occupy a unique position in the imagination of Indian youth, are convinced that the declaration of His Majesty's Government substantially confers that freedom for which Indian Nationalism has so long struggled."

The proposals made by Cripps had essentially the following points: The Dominion status to India after the War envisaged a common allegiance to the Crown but in no respect subordinate to it; India would be free to frame its own constitution; the task of organising the military, moral and material resources would be the responsibility of the Government of India in cooperation with the peoples of India. In the event of non-acceptance of the proposals "the responsibility for the failure," warns Cripps in unequivocal terms, "must rest with them." Sri Aurobindo knew the British psychology of doing things in stages and explained it so to his disciples, that the proposals effectively amounted to freedom which also assured unity. Not only that. He sent Doraiswamy Iyer, his disciple and the famous Madras lawyer, as an envoy to Delhi with a brief pleading the leaders to accept the proposals. Mahatma Gandhi proclaimed that the Cripps-proposals

were a post-dated cheque drawn on a bank that was crashing. He also retorted that as Sri Aurobindo had retired from politics he had no business to interfere in these matters. In the rejection of the proposals in spite of Sri Aurobindo's advocacy, the Mother saw a greater calamity befalling India, reports Nirodbaran. We know the bloodbath that followed in the wake of India's partitioned freedom. We are still reaping its consequences.

(To be concluded)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

THY PROMISED CHANGE

THY promised change is here,
The things once far are near;
My soul's long night has passed
To dawning Truth-light vast.

An inner flame uncurls,
Its upward current hurls
Surrounding darkness back
And frees from veiled attack.

My heart is open wide
To thee my Master-Guide;
My mind becomes a hush
Awake to thy still touch.

In streams a bliss-force flows,
Thy Presence constant grows;
The walls of ego's case
Dissolve in thy embrace.

LARRY SEIDLITZ

THE COMPOSITION OF SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of September 2003)

Savitri and the Record of Yoga

14

THE passage in *Savitri* where Sri Aurobindo has written most clearly and unmistakably about the plane of Intuition is in Book Ten, Canto Four, in Savitri's last long speech before the "flaming moment of apocalypse"¹ when the Incarnation thrusts aside its veil and Death is vanquished. There, after lines on the "vastitudes" of a "cosmic Thought" (Higher Mind) and the "blaze of sight" of what is evidently the Illumined Mind,² with its "Oceans of an immortal luminousness" and its "Flame-hills assaulting heaven with their peaks",³ the description of the "radiant altitudes" rising from mind to Supermind continues:

A highest flight climbs to a deepest view:
In a wide opening of its native sky
Intuition's lightnings range in a bright pack
Hunting all hidden truths out of their lairs,
Its fiery edge of seeing absolute
Cleaves into locked unknown retreats of self,
Rummages the sky-recesses of the brain,
Lights up the occult chambers of the heart....⁴

Sri Aurobindo placed Intuition in the middle of the series of overhead planes, with Overmind and Supermind beyond it. Then why is it introduced here as a "highest flight"? Perhaps because, as is said in the fifth line of the above passage, it marks the beginning of a "seeing absolute" which has access to the highest truths of existence. Sri Aurobindo explained that Intuition differs from Overmind in that it "sees in flashes" and combines these flashes, while Overmind "sees calmly, steadily, in great masses and large extensions of space and time and relation, globally".⁵ From this point of view, Overmind could be considered not so much a higher plane than Intuition as a wider one. What Savitri says when she goes on to speak of Overmind appears to support this distinction:

Then stretches the boundless finite's last expanse,
The cosmic empire of the Overmind,
Time's buffer state bordering Eternity,
Too vast for the experience of man's soul....⁶

In "The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds", the point where Aswapati reaches the

plane of Intuition proper seems to come near the end of Book Two, Canto Fourteen, after he emerges out of the psychic world. We have already detected the “truth-touch”⁷ of the Intuition in the symbol of the “luminous finger” in the preceding canto. There it was shown that the problem of existence is only half-solved by the realisation of the Self on an illumined plane of mind, bringing the liberating experience of the universal witness Purusha unaffected by the troubled movement of Prakriti. Even in the peace of the Self, Aswapati was made to feel the absence of the “nameless Force”, the Bliss and the Love of our “sweet and mighty Mother”.⁸ But this was done by a ray of Intuition falling on the plane below it. It is perhaps the same “finger” in another form that beckons him next into the world-soul which is “creation’s centre”⁹—not higher, but deeper than the worlds he has reached so far:

A depth he felt answering to every height,
A nook was found that could embrace all worlds....¹⁰

The description of his state of awareness on coming out of this realm suggests that Aswapati is now living in the true intuitive consciousness. This is confirmed by the nature of the experience that follows. The plane of Intuition is a “height” to which the “depth” of the world of soul, from which he has just emerged, answers in a special way and for which it is an ideal preparation. In the passage from Book Ten partially quoted above, we have seen that Intuition is a “highest flight” that “climbs to a deepest view”. The intuitive vision, Sri Aurobindo goes on to say in the same passage,

Lights up the occult chambers of the heart...
Strips bare the secret soul of all that is...
And tears away the veil from God and life.¹¹

As Aswapati, leaving the world-soul, proceeds along “a road of pure interior light” towards “the source of all things human and divine”,¹² his “knowledge... by identity” is described in a manner that resembles the above lines on Intuition, especially in the phrases “stripped bare” and “without its veils”:

His knowledge stripped bare of the garbs of sense
Knew by identity without thought or word;
His being saw itself without its veils,
Life’s line fell from the spirit’s infinity.

Sri Aurobindo defined Intuition as a form of knowledge by identity:

Intuition is a power of consciousness nearer and more intimate to the original knowledge by identity; for it is always something that leaps out direct from a concealed identity.¹³

The psychic consciousness, too, as described in Book Two, Canto Fourteen of *Savitri*, possesses a kind of knowledge by identity:

Thought was not there but a knowledge near and one
 Seized on all things by a moved identity,
 A sympathy of self with other selves,
 The touch of consciousness on consciousness
 And being's look on being with inmost gaze
 And heart laid bare to heart without walls of speech
 And the unanimity of seeing minds
 In myriad forms luminous with the one God.¹⁴

This “moved identity”, however, is not exactly the same thing as the higher forms of knowledge by identity on the planes of the “spirit’s infinity”. With regard to the psychic, Sri Aurobindo clarified that

its power is not knowledge but an essential or spiritual feeling—it has the clearest sense of the Truth and a sort of inherent perception of it which is of the nature of soul-perception and soul-feeling....¹⁵

Yet by virtue of its innate divinity, the psychic can participate in the ascent to higher planes of consciousness without itself having to be transformed:

It is not the psychic but the mind that gets raised and transformed and its action intensified by the intuitivising of the consciousness. The psychic is always the same in essence and adapts its action without need of transformation to any change of consciousness.¹⁶

This seems to be what happens when Aswapati’s soul passes on, watched by “nameless Gods”, until he has a vision of “the deathless Two-in-One” and the Goddess who stands behind them. This passage comes between what we have determined to be Illumined Mind (Book Two, Cantos Twelve and Thirteen) and what the poet has explicitly identified as Overmind (Canto Fifteen). We saw in the last instalment that the psychic world described in the first three paragraphs of Canto Fourteen is not part of the “vertical” series. But in the canto’s last paragraph, Aswapati resumes his ascent through the higher worlds. Judging by its position, therefore, the vision at the end of Book Two, Canto Fourteen would appear to have been intended to illustrate experience on the plane of Intuition, which must be passed through to reach Overmind.

It must be added, however, that the vision which Aswapati has by means of the Intuition is evidently not confined in its content to realities belonging to a particular plane. For the intuitive consciousness, imaged elsewhere in *Savitri* as

An eye awake in voiceless heights of trance,
A mind plucking at the unimaginable,¹⁷

may turn towards what is above or below it. But, being an “outleap of a superior light”,¹⁸ its natural movement is to bring us into contact with the highest truths of being. The divine figures that now appear to Aswapati’s inner vision seem to represent all the planes above Intuition itself, from Overmind to Sachchidananda. It is as if the essential structure of the manifestation and its relation to the Unmanifest were disclosed in one revelatory flash.

In an early draft of this passage (c. 1938), all the elements of the later expanded version were already present:

Only his naked soul moved like a flame
Passing between tremendous Presences
That looked at him with moveless eyes of Gods,
And stood before the timeless Two in One,
And saw behind the mighty Goddess veiled
Of whom the world is the inscrutable mask,
And behind her the nameless Infinite.

Here we meet in rapid succession the Overmind Gods, the supramental Ishwara-Shakti, the transcendent Mother and the ineffable Absolute. This was written ten years or so after Sri Aurobindo had jotted down, in a notebook he used for the *Record of Yoga* in 1927, the diagrams that were mentioned in a previous instalment. In the second diagram,¹⁹ three “Absolutes” are listed that correspond closely to the present passage in *Savitri*. The first is the Avyakta Paratpara, the unmanifest Supreme, defined as “self-involved Sachchidananda, Parabrahman”.²⁰ This is evidently the “nameless Infinite” at the end of the above passage (changed in the final text of *Savitri* to “the Unknowable”). The “Second Absolute” is “Aditi—M. [the Mother] containing in herself the Supreme. The Divine Consciousness, Force, Ananda upholding all the universes”. This is clearly the “mighty Goddess veiled” in the lines above. What is said about her was amplified considerably in later versions of *Savitri*, where she is described as

The sole omnipotent Goddess ever-veiled
Of whom the world is the inscrutable mask;
The ages are the footfalls of her tread,
Their happenings the figure of her thoughts,
And all creation is her endless act.²¹

Finally, the “Third Absolute” listed in the diagram is the “Eternal Manifestation” presided over by “Parameswara + Parameswari”, who are “the timeless Two in One” in the 1938 version of *Savitri* and “the deathless Two-in-One” in the published text.

This diagram and another written on the preceding page are connected in content and terminology with two entries in the *Record of Yoga*, found in the same notebook, whose relation to *Savitri* prompted this inquiry into the planes of consciousness represented by the later cantos of Book Two. We are now in a position to look more closely at that relation. The second of the two short diary entries is of more interest for this purpose than the first, in which on 26 January 1927 the vision of “Parameswara-Parameswari”, but not Aditi, had been mentioned. On 1 February, Sri Aurobindo wrote, this time abbreviating “Parameswara-Parameswari”:

A step forward in Darshana (Aditi holding P^a-Pⁱ in all living things, less vividly in all objects). This is not yet entirely universalised but it is increasing.²²

The second and third “Absolutes” defined in the diagram described above occur here. These correspond obviously enough to the “mighty Goddess” and the “Two in One” in the *Savitri* draft written a decade or so later.

This would appear, then, to be an example of an experience noted in the *Record of Yoga* at the time, which years afterwards was worked into *Savitri*. The example illustrates, nevertheless, the difficulty of correlating *Savitri* with any kind of chronological account of the development of Sri Aurobindo’s inner life even with the help of the *Record of Yoga*, however valuable such a comparative study may be. Though the vision of the “Two-in-One” and the “sole omnipotent Goddess” in Book Two, Canto Fourteen of *Savitri* strongly resembles the Darshana of “Parameswara-Parameswari” and Aditi recorded in Sri Aurobindo’s diary, we cannot necessarily conclude that the *Record of Yoga* gives us the date on which the spiritual event narrated more elaborately in *Savitri* really happened. If we assume that Sri Aurobindo, when he wrote this passage in *Savitri*, was recounting a decisive experience from a previous stage of his sadhana, we may suppose this to have occurred originally somewhat earlier than 1927—probably during the long period before the end of 1926 when no diary was kept or from which, in any case, none has survived. Or else he took legitimate poetic liberties with the actual experience when he incorporated it in his epic.

For Aswapati is depicted as having this vision in a state of profound inwardness. Its overwhelming intensity even causes him to lose consciousness at the end. The diary entry, on the other hand, refers to what Sri Aurobindo was seeing when he looked at “living things” and “objects” in the world around him, the normal meaning of “Darshana” in the *Record of Yoga*. Besides, this Darshana was not a single unique experience, but something that was “increasing” and on its way to being “universalised”. We have found, moreover, that the vision in *Savitri* occupies the position where Intuition ought to come in the scheme of “The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds”. But by the end of 1926, Sri Aurobindo had already achieved the fundamental Siddhi of the Overmind—although it was not until October 1927 that he coined the word “overmind” itself²³ and it would be several years before he described what had happened on 24 November 1926 as “the descent of Krishna into the physical”, adding that this meant “the descent of the Overmind

Godhead preparing, though not itself actually, the descent of Supermind and Ananda".²⁴ Therefore, it was in the context of a sadhana to bring the overmind transformation to a completion and begin the ascent beyond it that on 1 February 1927 he recorded seeing, everywhere he looked, Aditi holding Parameswara-Parameswari—the infinite Mother sustaining the supreme Lord of the worlds and, one with him, the supreme cosmic Power.

(To be continued)

RICHARD HARTZ

Notes and References

1. *Savitri* (1993), p. 664.
2. These lines are listed by Jugal Kishore Mukherjee under the headings "Sight in the Higher Mind" and "Sight in the Illumined Mind" in his book *The Ascent of Sight in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri* (*Mother India*, December 2001, pp. 939-40).
3. These "flame-hills" may be compared with the "summits" that "bear up the sleepless Flame" (*Savitri*, p. 280) in "The Heavens of the Ideal", which we have identified as Illumined Mind.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 659-60.
5. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1154.
6. *Savitri*, p. 660.
7. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 949.
8. *Savitri*, pp. 286-87.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 294.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 290.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 660.
12. *Savitri*, pp. 294-95. This "pure interior light", if it is that of the intuitive plane, is what Sri Aurobindo has described as "the first direct light from the self-awareness of essential Being" (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 148).
13. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 946.
14. *Savitri*, p. 292.
15. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 269.
16. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1158.
17. *Savitri*, p. 39.
18. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 948.
19. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 11, p. 1350. For a discussion of the first diagram in relation to the *Record of Yoga* and *The Mother*, see *Mother India*, May 2003, pp. 404-5.
20. After "Parabrahman", Sri Aurobindo wrote "(Parameswara-iswari)". That is, the "Two-in-One" of *Savitri* who appear under the Third Absolute in relation to the Eternal Manifestation are present, though unmanifest, even in the First Absolute.
21. *Savitri*, p. 295.
22. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 11, p. 1264.
23. "Overmind" first occurs in the *Record of Yoga* on 29 October 1927. Earlier in that year, the words "supermind", "supramental" and "supramentality" (as well as composite terms such as "supreme supramental supermind" and "supreme supramental mind in the supreme supermind") were used for what were evidently various levels of the plane Sri Aurobindo called "overmind" from 29 October 1927 onwards. Before that date, what then became "supermind" had been referred to in his diary as "divine gnosis". For a discussion—including a chart—of this complex and shifting terminology, see my article "Planes of Overmind in the Record of 1927" in *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research*, December 1994, pp. 224-30.
24. Letter of 29 October 1935, published in *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 136.

THOSE HARPS

THERE is a longing in our hearts
As though, once heard, some lyric harps
Have never ceased faintly to thrum
Eternally to invite our souls
To resonate with them.

This tremulous longing to conjoin, to find a way will never fade
Though to our sense the road is most uncertain.
Our beings ever searching, searching in confusion wade.
The mind upon their song has shed a curtain.

But when it slips away consenting
And at last sinks into sleep,
The harps begin their sending.
We steal right through the meshes of mind's deep.
Their voices rise and fall and rise again now beckoning.
Towards that faint sweet sound we now are wending

At first the notes are far and calling, calling.
We know our search is ending
When clear arpeggios ripple near with occult throb
Ananda comes cascading, the melody your heart, your flesh all blending.
Within your very core and in each cell is born a rapturous sob.

Be still my soul and listen.

MAGGI

MAN, ANGEL AND GOD*

RAINER MARIA RILKE'S POETIC VISION AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

(Continued from the issue of September 2003)

III

LITTLE does Rilke say to us about the relation of the Angels to God. "That He throws their whole radiance again back into them" characterises more the Angels than God and does not say more than that the raying out of the Angels into God is not accepted by Him as a means of their dissolution, rather He out of His Will for creation "throws it back into them". So we may attempt to grasp more deeply from the being of God, as Rilke conceived it, the image of the world and the inner world in order to vision their relatedness to the Absolute.

"I began with the *things* that have been the true familiar ones of my lonely childhood, and it was already much that I, without foreign help, brought myself to the animals. But then Russia¹ opened herself to me and presented me with the brotherhood and darkness of God in which alone there is communion. So also I *called* Him that time the God who had broken into myself from beyond and I lived long in the antechamber of His name on my knees... Now you would hardly hear me calling Him, it is an indescribable discretion between us and where once there was nearness and penetration new farnesses extend, as in the atom which the new science also conceives as a universe in the small. The graspable vanishes, transforms itself, instead of the possession one learns the relatedness and there arises a namelessness which again must begin with God to be perfect and without evasion." God is a namelessness, the ungraspable to which we are related. And now something very essential: "The feeling-experience steps back behind an infinite lust for everything feelable". Not with this or that inner feeling-experience is Rilke concerned, but with the great readiness for everything feelable. And since there is nothing which would not be feelable, would not be transformable into one's own inwardness, this will is "an infinite lust" for all being.

Earth thou dear one, I will. Oh believe it would not need
your springs any more, to win me to you—*one*,
alas, already a single one is too much for the blood.
Namelessly I am decided to you from afar.
Always you were right, and your holy idea
is the intimate death.

An all-including readiness which does not give to the single experience an over-emphasised

* *Mother India*, March 1956.

1. Russia long before Communism; Russia of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy (Author).

significance but understands it as a part of one's own life-movement spreading out and deepening ever more carries in itself the true will for transformation. God shall not be in man the short moment of an inmost feeling-sensation, but become wholly the all-penetrating basic feeling of his existence. The active consciousness of an immediate relation to one's own soul man shall never leave. So it is necessary to set to work in order not to exclude from the "lust" anything feelable, and to leave nothing unaccomplished behind. It is essential that there should be pure glorious feeling-experiences, as they, if they come out of the inwardness of the soul, show always the true way. But that they one day may become the basis of every further deepening and perfecting of feeling, it is necessary to accept into one's self everything without exception more and more true and pure and to place it into the inmost depth of feeling which is possible to experience, until it can be felt as one's own. It is necessary, in one word, not only to prepare man for a feeling-experience of God, but to make him so inward that some day out of this experience may grow a permanent state. With this, God becomes something that has to be created in the life of man, worked out and figured from within. Each endeavour to make the "visible" "invisible" helps, "bee"-like, the growth of this God who will "carry in himself everything that is effective and essential around us; because he will be the greatest space, full of all power. This only one will attain; but all creators are ancestors of this solitary one. There will be nothing except Him, because trees and mountains, clouds and waves have only been symbols of that reality which He finds in himself. In Him everything has flown together and all powers which otherwise fight each other in a confused manner are trembling under His will. Even the ground under His feet is superfluous. Like a prayer-carpet He rolls it up. He does not pray any more. He is. And when He makes a gesture, He will create, fling into infinity many millions of worlds. In them the same play starts: maturer beings will create themselves and then grow solitary and after a long battle educate at last one who has everything in himself, a creator of this kind of eternity, a very great One in space, One with plastic gestures. Thus each generation tendrils like a chain from God to God and each God is the whole past of a world, its last meaning, its unified expression and at the same time the possibility of a new life." Thus we are then "workmen":

squires, disciples, masters
and build you, you high nave
and sometimes comes a serious traveller,
goes like a splendour through our hundred spirits
and shows us, trembling, a new grip.

It is not possible here to enter into this grand vision—the realisation of the "No-longer-sayable" on earth. The truth of its core will be proved some day. Its expression points to the height of the level of consciousness from which Rilke has received this inspiration. That God "began Himself so infinitely great on that day" when He began us, who shall be a "garment" to Him, that He now "ripens" and we "may will" Him, that He is only grasped "by action", yes, that at the bottom every action is only a prayer, for

thus our hands are dedicated,
 that they may create nothing which would not implore;
 whether one paints or mows,
 merely out of the wrestle of the instruments
 unfolds devotedness—

all this is a magnificent vision whose recognition is not new in the East, and it is absurd to try to understand it in this way that God would have been for Rilke just a son of man; as he presupposes Him in all his annunciations as the “infinite way”, “the direction of love”, the “No-longer-sayable”. But it may very well be confusing and appear as if there were talk about two Gods: one who has been since eternity and the other whom we yet have to build. In truth, He who has already eternally been wants to be built by us, by each single one, so that one day we may with our whole being have dwelling in Him. So each one will work at *his* God independently of all others.

For to each a different God will appear,
 till they recognise, near to weeping,
 that through their miles-far opinions,
 through their perceivings and negations,
 different only in a hundred of His own,
one God moves like a wave.

God will realise Himself in us. That is the mystery of creation, that is its meaning. And on this realisation of God in us we must work without interruption. Then comes “back all deep and inward Here, which the Church has appropriated to a Beyond... all Angels, praising, decide themselves for the earth.”

“The separatedness, the final beyondness of God has astonished and disturbed me since I was a child.” “Why should those go on pilgrimage, who never left Him?” God is to Rilke the deep subjective which, as it were, begins in the darkness of the unconscious, increases itself—beyond things, animals and men as beings who have become inward, in the “world-inner-space” which slowly widens itself—into the glorious light of His own Angels, and behind which he becomes the “nameless direction of love”, the Infinity into which our “heart-days” run out “parallel”. There is nothing excluded from this most inward unity. Even terror, madness and death are included in this All of Divine Being. “To prove the identity of terror and delight—these two faces of the same divine head, yes, this one *single* face, which only presents itself in one way or the other according to the distance out of which, or the condition in which, we perceive it”: such was Rilke’s most urgent concern. And we know how right he was, know it from the great ancient tradition of the seers and sages who recognised the Divine in all existence and all existence in the Divine. By a living expression of the overcoming of earthly contradictions, God measures His realisation in man. It does not satisfy Him to continue in a final highest unity beyond the contradictions—beyond good and evil, truth and error, life and death,

personality and impersonality. It is His will, fulfilling itself as cosmic evolution, to lead creation towards ever greater harmonies. Therefore His demand on man, therefore our task:

To participate is not presumption,
in the indescribable fulfilment,
ever more inward becomes the interwovenness,
being borne along will not suffice.

Stretch your practised powers till they span
the gap between two contradictions
for the God must find
counsel in the man.

Still, in the Angels, even if this does not find expression by Rilke, remain last seemingly insurmountable contradictions. But beyond these glorious beings—

Rose, O pure contradiction, delight
to be no-one's sleep under so many
lids.

Beyond the Angels blooms the Divine Rose, the Bliss of "pure" resolved contradiction; under the budding lids of its revealed petals, sleeps beyond all infinity and eternity a nameless "No-one".

(Concluded)

JOBST MÜHLING

(Adapted from H. E. Holthusen's translation.)

MY GOD!

The Mother to Dyuman: "You do my work; I will do your work."

This was told by Dyuman-bhai himself to a friend of his who simply stood aghast when he heard it.

WHEN 'TRANSFORMATION' FLOWERS FELL FOR MARY HELEN

I REMEMBERED thee in morning light
When 'Transformation' flowers fell
And in the Bay of Bengal's night
Whose eternal waters rise and swell

In waves entranced by moon-delight
That break upon these timeless shores.
I marked thee in the song-bird's flight
And shared with earth her deep remorse

When beauty fled the anguished soil
That felt no more a well-loved tread
Or gentle hands of cheerful toil
Whereon thy gracious presence shed.

Though Heaven's arms around thee close
I hold thee in the perfumed rose.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

Nirodbaran's comment: "Very fine".

"Transformation": The spiritual significance given by the Mother for the flowers of *Millingtonia Hortensis*, the Indian Cork Tree.

THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

1. The Purana Phenomenon

IN the vast spaces of Indian literature, the Puranas are a phenomenon of vital importance as a continuation-link with the past and the future. It is of some concern to the conservators of Indian culture that this body of significant recordation in historical times has not been studied as widely and deeply as it should be to enrich ourselves. Now that we are in the 21st century, we should at least draw closer to some of the Puranas for this could help us have a healthier view of all our yesterdays and rejuvenate us to face all our tomorrows.

In the last century, some leading academics initiated serious attempts to make the common reader interested in these great works which were too often brushed aside by Western-educated professors as “puerile puranic stuff”. Yet, quite early in the century we had Sri Aurobindo writing in the *Arya* on the need to get back to the Puranas if we wished to understand the Vedic and Upanishadic past as well as the great literatures that have been inspired by them. He said:

“The Puranas have been much discredited and depreciated in recent times, since the coming in of modern ideas coloured by western rationalism and the turning of the intelligence under new impulses back towards the earlier fundamental ideas of the ancient culture. Much however of this depreciation is due to an entire misunderstanding of the purpose, method and sense of the mediaeval religious writings. It is only in an understanding of the turn of the Indian religious imagination and of the place of these writings in the evolution of the culture that we can seize their sense.”¹

How can such a vast body of writing be termed totally subversive of our cultural past and be no more than puerile pontifications of fictional claptrap? Some of the statements set sailing around general conversation have also alienated the common reader from the Puranas. “Totally Puranic mad”, “a veritable king in singing self-Puranam” are some of the Tamil proverbs that create a negative view of Puranic literature. Yet, the same Tamil language (as surely it is in other Indian languages) has given high praise to Puranas in its literature. The Supreme is known as the Ancient One, the Puranan, as in *Silappadhikaram*: “The truth, the pure, the Ancient, the seer” (*porulan, punithan, puranan, pulavan*). The writing and recitation of Puranas has also received high commendation in the classics. The Tamil hymn *Tiruvachakam* says:

I shall speak with a glad heart
The puranam of Sivan
To destroy in toto all the sins
Of my past.

The ancient Tamil dictionary, *Namadeepa Nighantu*, has thirteen words to indicate what is ancient. Of them, Puranam is one. The same work gives four words to refer to ancient history: *muturai, puranam, mutuchol, kathai*. Thus the Purana has been received as the

religious and spiritual compendium of the Indian experience; at the same time it has been accepted as a record of India's political and social history.

Writing two decades after Sri Aurobindo, the eminent scholar, V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, spoke highly of the historical value of the Puranas. In an essay contributed to the *Poona Orientalist* more than sixty years ago he said:

“The Ramayana gives the hint that the term Purana meant a prophecy made in ancient times. This means that though the Puranas were reduced to writing about the fifth century B.C. much of the material they treat of goes back to the remote antiquity. In fact the Vedic legends are reproduced in a different form in these Puranas. There is a significant verse in the Vayu Purana and repeated by the Matsya Purana which says that the Purana was first remembered by Brahma and then came out the Vedas from the mouth of the Creator:

*Prathamam sarvasaasthraanaam puraanam brahmanaa smrutham
Anantharam cha vakthebhyo vedanthasya vinismruthaah.*”²

From Dikshitar we also come to know how the western scholars spoke of the Puranic literature as Kshatriya literature as against the Vedas being Brahminical literature. According to him such a division was wholly untenable and that there are Kshatriya hymnologists in the Vedas also and only a small portion of the Puranas deal with the Kshatriya dynasties, the rest being about Manus, Prajapatis and sages.

According to Dikshitar, the Puranic literature (which consists of eighteen Major Puranas and as many Minor Puranas not to mention the innumerable Sthala Puranas) “is altogether an encyclopaedia of information and therefore very useful in writing a history of Indian culture and civilisation. By culture and civilisation we mean a history of Indian polity, of Indian society, a history of religion and philosophy, legal history, a history of arts and crafts, architecture and iconography.”³ Dikshitar's own books drew out much authentic material from the Puranas to explain ancient Indian polity as well as that of the Mauryas and Guptas, while his epoch-making *Purana Index* is an invaluable support to any historical research in India.

The Indian spirit has devised various ways to keep this vast body of work alive ever since the first Purana was compiled. We have no idea of the first Purana, though Vishnu Purana is referred to as the oldest. However, in ancient times, yagas were held regularly and once the elaborate rituals of the morning were over, a scholarly member imbued with good memory and mastery of the spoken language spoke of history, culture, legends, the ethical codes of Dharma and the practises of aspirants for the spiritual life. In the course of time, these memory tanks must have become so complicated that Vyasa compiled them into eighteen distinguishable works. The term Vyasa means “a compiler” and since within a few centuries of such compilation further literature branched forth, the originals were called the Major or Maha Puranas. Those that came later were termed Upa-Puranas.

Once temple worship began to replace the huge satra-yagas, localised Puranas began to be written. Relating the temple or holy place with a legend from one of the earlier

Puranas, the local Purana was structured as a compendium of miracles, faith, ritualism, local flora and fauna. Altogether they made a handbook for the local residents to lead a life of piety and helped them imbibe a sense of pride in their place of residence. They could go to new places in search of adventure or livelihood or pilgrimage, but they always came back to their original place of residence, keeping total faith in their “kula daivam” represented by the presiding deity of the local temple and recorded in the Sthala Purana. Till today, listening to lectures on the Puranas given as a series (Hari Katha Kalakshepam, which literally means spending the time telling stories of the Lord) has kept the Puranas a living experience for the common man.

In this context, one may also remember that the Puranas teach ethical ways of living through the stories as well as direct teachings. Sri Aurobindo says that the teachings imbedded in the Puranas are a natural consequence of the Classical Age in Sanskrit which revelled in sense-induced pleasures leading to a certain degeneracy in public morality. The Puranas became the instruments to get the Indian mind back to its spiritual homeland that begins with the Vedas.

Of the eighteen Major Puranas, the Vishnu, Bhagavata, Naradiya, Garuda, Padma and Varaha Puranas uphold the primacy of Narayana; the Brahma, Brahmanda, Brahmavaivartsa, Markandeya, Bhavishya and Vamana Puranas speak of the superiority of Brahma; Shiva is the supreme presence in Vayu, Linga, Skanda, Agni, Matsya and Kurma Puranas. As mentioned earlier, the Vishnu Purana is considered to be the oldest (2nd century A.D.) and has been described as the best of them all, the “Purana ratna”. The Bhagavata appears to be the youngest and is set around the 6th century, a date supported by Swami Tapasyananda.

As in the Upanishads, the Puranas also are presented as answers to questions addressed to the Suta Puranika Ugrasravas by the sages residing in the Naimisharanya forest. Did Suta belong to the Kshatriya caste? This too has been debated a good deal. Dikshitar has his own reservations in accepting this view. According to him the term Suta has different meanings like a great sage or a charioteer or one belonging to a mixed caste. Since it is not quite conceivable that a Suta of a lower caste gained admission to the sanctum of the sacrificial halls and was elevated by the assembled sages as a *medhaavi* and a *mahaabhaaga*, the Suta Pauranika of the Puranas must be taken as a great sage who had a command over an assembly for several days (or months) together.

Tradition has outlined a structure for the Puranas as well. According to the Amara Kosa, a Purana should deal with cosmogony (*sarga*), dissolution and renewal (*pratisarga*), chronology (*vamsha*), cosmology (*manvantara*) and genealogy (*vamsaanucharitham*). The Puranas do not always conform to this pattern. The range of the subjects dealt with in these compendiums is much wider and often do we tarry for long in particular Puranic spaces for the sheer beauty and wonderment of the conception and telling, as when we hear of the symbolism of the mystic lotus as a seat of Brahma in the Padma Purana. The Garuda Purana is a treasure trove of astronomy.

The most important consideration for us is that the Puranas are a continuation of the Vedas. The Vedic deities are very much here, though they have undergone a lot of

transformation in consonance with the movement of the religious temper of the Indian as the centuries pass by. For instance, the symbolic beginnings of the Savitri-Satyavan legend presented as an Upakhyana by Vyasa in the Mahabharata are to be found in the Vedas; some of the Puranic retellings bring in subtle changes and extensions without losing the core-significance of the tale. The same legend is handled by Matsya Purana (cantos 208-214) which came much later than the Mahabharata.

We find that in the Purana, it is Aswapathi who arranges the wedding of Savitri with Satyavan. Rishi Narad comes and warns him. Aswapathi is worried but he decides that “a daughter is given away only once” (*sakrut kanyaa pradeeyanthe*), using the words uttered by Savitri in Vyasa’s Upakhyana. A significant addition is a canto of thirty-five verses in which Savitri and Satyavan wander around in the forest watching the glories of nature. Only Savitri is aware that her husband’s hours are numbered. Satyavan speaks romantically pointing to the mango tree, the Ashoka, the Kimsuka trees full of fiery blossoms, the wind that blows sweetly, the Karnikara trees, the creepers that close in on the footpath, the earth lovely with flowers, the drone of bees that sounds like Cupid readying his bow and arrow “to strike at couples like us”. With the music of the nightingales, “the forest is beautiful like you” (*vibhaati chaarutilakaa tvamivaishaa vanasthali*). He also points out the loving pairs of koels, bees, crows, Teetar birds, the sleeping lion and lioness, the tigers and the deer moving in pairs, the elephants, the Chakravaka birds. The fascinating paean to Nature is followed by the rest of the narrative, with some minor modifications, especially in the words of wisdom spoken by Savitri. The Upanishadic command of honouring one’s mother, father and teacher is presented by Savitri in her opening words:

*Imaam lokaam maatrubhaktayaa pitrubhaktayaa tu madhyamam
Guru sushrushayaa chaiva brahmalokam samashnute*

By worship of mother this world is gained; by worshipping father the middle and by worshipping one’s teacher Brahmaloaka is gained.

At the conclusion of their conversation, Yama releases Satyavan’s life saying he is pleased with Savitri’s prayerful attitude and blesses them with five hundred years of married life (it is four hundred years in Vyasa).

Hence, contrary to the Western assault on our psyche about the Puranas being nothing more than a bundle of old wives’ tales, the works become cleansing and transformatory agents as man struggles forward in his spiritual journey. As the example of the Savitri legend shows, the Puranas made the ancient legends a contemporaneous experience for the listeners:

“... the Puranas carried forward this appeal to the intellect and imagination and made it living to the psychic experience, the emotions, the aesthetic feeling and the senses. A constant attempt to make the spiritual truths discovered by the Yogin and the Rishi integrally expressive, appealing, effective to the whole nature of man and to provide outward means by which the ordinary mind, the mind of a whole people might be drawn

to a first approach to them is the sense of the religio-philosophic evolution of Indian culture.”⁴

In the context of Aurobindonian studies, the Vishnu and Bhagavata Puranas call for special attention. Of the incarnations, Sri Aurobindo was drawn most to Krishna. Just as Krishna literature in India is enormous, the inspiration of Krishna-Vasudeva on Sri Aurobindo is also immeasurably great. There are various ways in which Krishna is seen in the writings of Sri Aurobindo. The Krishna of *Essays on the Gita* is wisdom-incarnate, obviously a historical figure (we have references to him as “a knower of Brahman” in the Chhandogya Upanishad), and the internal guide for the aspirants engaged in action, the charioteer in control of the horses, “the symbol of the divine dealings with humanity.”

Krishna in Sri Aurobindo is also the director of our spiritual journey. Even if you deny him, He is there, firmly ensconced in our hearts. He is an experience who holds you in thrall:

One is there, Self of self, Soul of Space, Fount of Time,
Heart of hearts, Mind of minds, He alone sits, sublime.
Oh, no void Absolute self-absorbed, splendid, mute,
Hands that clasp hold and red lips that kiss blow the flute.
All He loves, all He moves, all are His, all are He!⁵

Finally, beyond the statesman and charioteer of the Mahabharata, and the Yogeshwara-Teacher on the Kurukshetra, is the sheer Presence which assures us of Ananda Consciousness that strikes down all the worries, sorrows and frustrations of life on earth. This is the Flute-player of Brindavan, the Anandamaya Purusha who transmits the Delight of Existence throughout creation. All creation holds hands with Him in the Ras Lila of life. That is the ecstatic Avatar who is very much one of us. Sri Aurobindo issues an open invitation for us to join the Ras Lila:

Come then to Brindavan, soul of the joyous; faster and faster
Follow the dance I shall teach thee with Shyama for slave and for master.
Follow the notes of the flute with a soul aware and exulting;
Trample Delight that submits and crouch to a sweetness insulting.
Then shalt thou know what the dance meant, fathom the song and the singer,
Hear behind thunder its rhymes, touched by lightning thrill to his finger,
Brindavan’s rustle shalt understand and Yamuna’s laughter,
Take thy place in the Ras and thy share of the ecstasy after.⁶

This has been the eternal call to the aspirant community from times immemorial. The Puranas have taught us the entire background of the Krishna phenomenon, immersed us in the experience of the Avatars, and made each of us feel specially related to Krishna as a babe, as a prankster, as a lover, as an ambassador, a friend, a charioteer, a Yogacharya. Two Puranas, the Vishnu and the Bhagavata, particularly zero in on the Supreme’s avatar

as Krishna, and Sri Aurobindo considered them as best among the Puranas.

Divided into six Amsas of 126 chapters, the Vishnu Purana contains 6000 slokas. The Varaha, Narasimha, Krishna and Kalki incarnations are detailed along with the stories of legendary personalities like Dhruva, Kakudmi and Pururavas. The Purusha-Prakriti duo is very clearly imaged in this Purana which gives a detailed account of the birth and nature of Lakshmi. Most important of all, the Purana concludes with a teaching of yoga by Kesidhwaja to Kandikya Janaka. Though the narrative has been rich in histories so far, it now appears as though all these strivings on earth are but focussed on yoga that leads to realisation. After explaining the steps of yoga, Kesidhwaja launches upon a sublime description of Narayana:

One who has taken up yoga to cleanse his mind must meditate on this cosmic form which has been hailed as being capable of destroying our accumulated sins. As Agni unites with wind to raise big flames for burning and destroying a bush, Vishnu resides in the hearts of yogis and burns up all sins. Hence the aspirant must hold this glorious Form which is the source of all Shaktis. This is pure Dharana. The mind wanders no more and remains one with this Supreme which is beyond the three "ways". This is the auspicious refuge for yogis (*subhasraya*)... the Dharana needs an Adhara. The following is the Form of Hari which has to be meditated upon. He has a joyous face, eyes like beautiful lotuses, beautiful cheeks, a gracious forehead broad like a seat, beautiful ear-drops dangling from well-formed ears, a conch-like throat, a vast chest holding Lakshmi and the Srivatsa stamp, the waist with triple-folds and a deep navel, eight or four huge shoulders, equally formed thighs, crystalline garment, ornaments like the crown, necklaces and shoulderbands. Such is the image of Vishnu to be meditated upon. Besides, one should image Him as holding in his six hands the bow, the mace, the sword, the discus and the Akshagarland and the other two in the pose of giving refuge and boons. If one meditates upon the four-shouldered Lord, one must add the conch, the discus, the mace and a lotus. The fingers should be seen wearing various rings.

Kesidhwaja then tells Kandikya that as Dharana yoga progresses, the image will be very much continuous in the yogin's thoughts, whether he is walking, eating or sleeping. Henceforth images like ornaments, hands and garments must be slowly reduced till the meditation rests solely on the Supreme without any of these attributes, nor should one go in search of another image to focus upon. This leads to Samadhi. Feelings like "me" and "mine" do not attack the soul anymore for he is totally immersed in the meditation upon the Supreme. So close is he to the Lord that he experiences the Divine as Ramakrishna Paramahansa did. That was the aim of Sri Aurobindo when he wrote to his wife Mrinalini in 1905 that he wanted to attain and experience God. He did not have in mind the popular conception of God which has too often been a kind of routine since several centuries. For Sri Aurobindo the Supreme was to be gained as a partner so as to make Him the inspirer, leader, the charioteer of his life. The Narayana Darshan in the Alipore Jail and the Siddhi of 24th November, 1926 were both a descent of Krishna into Sri Aurobindo underlining the Master's assurance that an unfailing aspiration always draws towards itself the answering Grace.

The Vishnu and Bhagavata Puranas are thus a definite help to salute the yoga of Sri Aurobindo. He held the former in high esteem. But the Bhagavata Purana, in particular, received high commendation from him as “a still more remarkable production full of subtlety, rich and deep thought and beauty.” Approaches to the Purana can help us understand its role in sustaining Sanatana Dharma and why Sri Aurobindo stood facing the Ganges in Jai Krishna’s garden house at Uttarpara and addressed a vast audience about his prison-experiences: “I looked at the Prosecuting Counsel and it was not the Counsel for the prosecution that I saw; it was Sri Krishna who sat there, it was my Lover and Friend who sat there and smiled. ‘Now do you fear?’ ”

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

(*To be continued*)

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1. *Foundations of Indian Culture* (1953), p. 352.
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ODE TO A MAIDSERVANT

(With due apologies to Mr. John Keats and his *Ode to Autumn*)

WOMAN of wiles and endless artfulness
Close bosom friend of the maid next door,
Gossiping with her and giggling sans cesse
(When thou shouldst be at the Department Store
Purchasing groceries for thy master's house),
Discussing with her all the neighbours' doings,
And sharing juicy scandals and shocking news
Regarding this one's tiffs and that one's wooings;
And cursing the cook and nursing some old grouse
That never fails thy rancour vile to rouse,
For about the cook indeed strong are thy views!

Who hath not seen thee often at thy chores?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on the unswept floors
MGR's charisma still haunting thy mind;
Or beside an unmade bed sound asleep
Drowsed by the cool of the morning, while thy broom
Spares all the cobwebs and the thickening dust;
And sometimes like a miser thou dost keep
Little knick-knacks secreted in thy room,
Bought or purloined or perhaps from the groom
Received as tokens of his love and trust.

Where are Time's ravages? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thy work is as keenly felt,—
When cups and saucers made of china-clay
Are smashed to bits, as by blows with hammers dealt;
When washing comes back dirtier than before,
And furniture gathers dust and mouldy grows,
And things just vanish leaving no trace behind,
And goods weigh less but the price paid is more.
One feels thy power then, and surely knows
What it is to hire a maid! And all these woes
Lead one to acquire a philosophic mind!

ANIRUDDHA SIRCAR

TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of September 2003)

The Eye For the Native Strength

ALTHOUGH the Western glories were not unknown to them, they were quite often bold enough to claim the Indian superiority over Western gods of drama and poetry. Both were steeped in the Upanishads, the epics and the dramas. Tagore was more prone to the West than Sri Aurobindo, but from time to time he was staunchly native and seems to be more partial than Sri Aurobindo.

In the Western dramas, human characters drown our attention in the vortex of their passions. Nature occasionally peeps out, but she is almost always a trespasser, who has to offer excuses, or bow apologetically and depart. But in all our dramas which still retain their fame, such as *Mrit-Shakatika*, *Shakuntala*, *Uttara-ramcharita*, Nature stands on her own right, proving that she has her great function, to impart the peace of the eternal to human emotions. The fury of passion in two of Shakespeare's youthful poems is exhibited in conspicuous isolation. It is snatched away, naked, from the context of the All; it has not the green earth or the blue sky around it; it is there ready to bring to our view the raging fever which is in man's desires, and not the balm of health and repose which encircles it in the universe.¹

Tagore should have spoken about the two different spirits in the Shakespearean and the Kalidasian models. That would have made his criticism more balanced. Sri Aurobindo points out the basic difference between the Elizabethan and the Hindu plays in very clear terms, even though he is strongly indicating the cultural superiority of Hindu Dharma.

"To the Hindu it would have seemed a savage and inhuman spirit that could take any aesthetic pleasure in the sufferings of an Oedipus or a Duchess of Malfi or in the tragedy of a Macbeth or an Othello. Partly this arose from the divine tenderness of the Hindu nature, always noble, forbearing and gentle and at that time saturated with the sweet and gracious pity and purity which flowed from the soul of Buddha; but it was also a necessary result of the principle that aesthetic and intellectual pleasure is the first object of all poetic art."²

In Tagore, we do not see this immediate seizing of the points of difference. There is a digressive looseness in his prose. But, when he talks of Kalidasa's concentration on Nature and the lack of that in Shakespeare, he is as strong in his comparative criticism as Sri Aurobindo and as acutely conscious of the Indian glory as the poet of patriotism. Tagore passes from general to particular with the smoothness of a creative critic.

"Strangely enough, in Shakespeare's dramas, like those of Kalidasa, we find a secret vein of complaint against the artificial life of the king's court—the life of ungrateful treachery and falsehood. And almost everywhere, in his dramas, foreign scenes have been introduced in connection with some working of the life of unscrupulous ambition. It is perfectly obvious in *Timon of Athens*—but there Nature offers no message or balm to

the injured soul of man. In *Cymbeline*, the mountainous forest and the cave appear in their aspect of obstruction to life's opportunities. These only seem tolerable in comparison with the vicissitudes of fortune in the artificial court life. In *As You Like It* the forest of Arden is didactic in its lessons. It does not bring peace, but preaches, when it says:

Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?"³

Tagore goes on with his examples from *Tempest*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Winter's Tale*. For Tagore, the Indian literature reflects a free individual, who looks at Nature to realize his soul beyond himself. Like Sri Aurobindo, Tagore is not afraid of talking about Shakespeare's limitations.

"I hope it is needless for me to say that these observations are not intended to minimize Shakespeare's great power as a dramatic poet, but to show in his works the gulf between Nature and human nature owing to the tradition of his race and time. It cannot be said that beauty of Nature is ignored in his writings; only he fails to recognize in them the truth of the interpenetration of human life with the cosmic life of the world. We observe a completely different attitude of mind in the later English poets like Wordsworth and Shelley, which can be attributed in the main to the great mental change in Europe, at that particular period, through the influence of the newly discovered philosophy of India which stirred the soul of Germany and aroused the attention of other Western countries."⁴

Sri Aurobindo would have used the word psychic awareness in place of Tagore's phrase "mental change". But in both we see this fascination for the Indian glories, like the Upanishads, the epics, the great Hindu plays and the Buddhist principles of life. And they were not exaggerating; they were giving us the facts, inner and outer. As Sri Aurobindo is a better summariser of the two, let us observe the conclusive note to his masterful essay on Hindu drama.

"If we expect a Beautiful White Devil or a Jew of Malta from the Hindu dramatist, we shall be disappointed; he deals not in these splendid or horrible masks. If we come to him for a Lear or a Macbeth, we shall go away discontented; for these also are sublimities which belong to cruder civilisations and more barbarous national types; in worst crimes and utmost suffering as well as happiness and virtue, the Aryan was more civilized and temperate, less crudely enormous than the hard and earthy African peoples whom in Europe he only half moralised. If he seeks a Pèrre Goriot or a Madame Bovary, he will still fail in his quest; for though such types doubtless existed at all times among the mass of the people with the large strain of African blood, Hindu Art would have shrunk from poisoning the moral atmosphere of the soul by elaborate studies of depravity."⁵

The tonal difference is obvious. This and many passages from *The Foundations of Indian Culture* indicate Sri Aurobindo's repugnance of the forceful imposition of Western superiority over things Indian. Tagore is mellow when he speaks of his native strength;

Sri Aurobindo blends the mellow and the biting modes in his days in Baroda and Calcutta. Later in his life, in Pondicherry, he threw away the razor, except for some occasional moments when the bite was back without its old severity, as we see in his counterattacks against Russell in two letters.⁶

GOUTAM GHOSAL

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6. See *The Future Poetry*, SABCL, Vol. 9, pp. 554-55.
 "I have not forgotten Russell but I have neglected him, first, for want of time..."

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FROM A LETTER TO THE MOTHER DATED 3 NOVEMBER 1964

YOUR response to my last letter was that the way is very long and often uneventful. That cast a little grey cloud over a certain part of me, and I kind of prepared for a long winter ahead. I think you meant by uneventful a paucity of spiritual experiences. But of course the way need not be uneventful in other respects. For every moment contains an event, even a spiritual event in a certain sense, if it can be made a sadhana to regard it so. Aridities, fluctuations, in drive and fervour, distractions, lapses, falls, etc. are all events of Divine Providence, a species of communication from the Lord that tells me something I need to know, or presents me with something I need to cope with in the right manner. Every happening, interior and exterior, is a stimulus and goading from God that must have a very definite utility, though I may feel unelated about it and unaware of what God intends. I do not know if it is possible to have this attitude at every moment with the ordinary consciousness, but I do apply it to troublesome situations.

So, for example, after several months of relative quietude, a retired army sergeant's family moved into the unoccupied house next door. This includes a perpetually wailing infant, two noisy pre-school children, a very talkative couple with radio, harmonica, firecrackers, loud toys, and other things. And the houses are so built that even ordinary conversation level can be easily heard and is distracting. Thus are gone the solitude and exterior peace I was enjoying. This is a crystal-clear event of Divine Providence, custom-tailored for as by the very hands of the Lord Himself. A few months back, I recall having had hopes that a single quiet individual would move in, perhaps an ashramite; but I dismissed this hope as poor faith, thinking that surely God would arrange for the best; and so he has.

At first, it did not go well: feelings of disturbance, irritation and grumbling, even reprisal with counter noise—all this came out of me. God was saying, "See, look what you have in you; now do something about it!" The trouble is, this faith that every event is God Himself in disguise is only strong and courageous before the event. At the actual time of the ordeal all these accompanying feelings of certitude and bravado are gone and you are left with that denuded 'dark faith' which Christian writers so extol as a more true and pure faith. It is an awful feeling to have one part of yourself itching to explode in anger and another that says unconvincingly, "This is the Lord, all is well." But this dark faith works if held onto long enough; it makes an inroad, simmers down the unwanting lower self's upheaval, and eventually prevents it from coming up at all.

At the present time the family's noise at most evokes fleeting, mechanical responses from the lower self that can hardly get a toe-hold. If the noise is overwhelmingly distracting, and my activity permits it, I can retire into a more quiet inner room, but without vexation over them or myself. This, I think, is a stage of equality, though not the highest.

So this has been one of the 'big' events it has pleased the Lord to permit happen to me. It has and continues to be an important exercise, a purificatory one, whose results I

hope will extend God's way in the best, though at first it must be a way of crosses, trials and tribulations.

ANONYMOUS

A DREAM

I have a dream that everybody will one day get together. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. believed in peace and liberty. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said there should not be any "White Only" signs.

PATRICK
(Age 7 years)

(Patrick is a first-grade student in a private California school and this reflection is a part of the assignment he had done on 7 January 2003.)

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of September 2003)

THE history of English poetry is strewn with the unsuccessful attempt to acclimatise the sensitive and subtly individual rhythms of the hexameter to the rugged terrain of English verse. “Even Tennyson in his lines on Milton, where he attempts this combination, seems to be walking on stilts,—very skilfully and nobly, but still on stilts and not on his own free God-given feet. As for other attempts which followed the Spenserian line of approach, they can best be described in Tennyson’s own language—

Barbarous hexameters, barbarous pentameters”¹

Sri Aurobindo explains the problem of quantitative metres and English poetry. It is a long continued problem. He says: “At the very beginning of these attempts a double thesis was raised; two separate problems were closely associated together which are in their nature distinct, although they can be brought into close relation. There was, first, the problem of the naturalisation of classical metres in English poetry, and there was, mixed up with it, the problem of the free creation of quantitative English verse in its own right, on its own basis, with its own natural laws, not necessarily identical with those laid down in the ancient tongues. The main attempt then made was not to discover a true English principle of quantitative metre,—what was done was to bring in classical metres built according to the laws of quantity proper to a classical tongue but of doubtful validity in a modern language. Chaucer, influenced by mediaeval French and Italian poetry, had naturalised their metrical inventions by making accentual pitch and inflexion the basis of English metre. This revolution succeeded because he had called to his aid one of the most important elements in the natural rhythm of the language and it was easy for him by that happy choice to establish a perfect harmony between this rhythm and his new art of metrical building. The metrical movement he perfected—for others before him had attempted it—passed easily into the language, because he caught and lifted its native rhythm into a perfect beauty of sound captivating to the ear and moving to the inner witness and listener silent within us—the soul, to whom all art and all life should appeal and minister. This great victory was essential for the free flowering of poetry in the English tongue; the absence of any such *coup d’œil* of genius was one chief reason of its failure to flower as freely in so many human languages,—no creative genius found for them the route which leads to the discovery of a perfect plasticity of word and sound, a perfect expressiveness, a perfect beauty of rhythm. But with the Renaissance came a new impulse, a new influence; an enthusiasm was vividly felt by many for the greatness of structure and achievement of the Greek and Latin tongues—an achievement far surpassing anything done in the mediaeval Romance languages—and a desire arose to bring this greatness of structure and achievement into English poetry. As Chaucer by the success of the accentual structure in verse and his discovery of its true and natural rhythm was able

to bring in the grace and fluidity of the Romance tongues, so they too conceived that the best way to achieve their aim was to bring in the greatness of classical harmony and the nobility and beauty of Greek and Latin utterance by naturalising the quantitative metres of Virgil, Ovid, Horace. It was also natural that some of these innovators should conceive that this could be best done by imposing the classical laws of quantity wholesale on the English language.”²

Sri Aurobindo clearly mentioned that “to get a true theory of quantity, the ear must find it; it cannot be determined by mental fictions or by reading with the eye: the ear too in listening must exercise its own uninfluenced pure hearing if it is not to go astray. So listening, we shall find that intrinsic or inherent quantity and the positional sound-values are not the only factors in metrical length, there is also another factor, the weight-length; it may even be said that all quantity in English is determined by weight, all syllables that bear the weight of the voice are long, all over which the voice passes lightly are short. But the voice-weight on a vowel is determined in three different ways. There is a dwelling of the voice, a horizontal weight-bar laid across the syllable, or there is its rapid passing, an absence of the weight-bar: that difference decides its natural length, it creates the inherent or intrinsic long or short, *lāzily*, *swēētmēss*. There is again a vertical ictus weight of the voice, the hammer-stroke of stress on the syllable; that of itself makes even a short-vowel syllable metrically long, as in *heavily aridity*, *channel*, *canal**; the short vowel syllables that have not the lengthening ictus or vertical weight and have not either the horizontal weight of the voice upon them remain light and therefore short. It is evident that these words are respectively a natural dactyl, second paeon, trochee, iamb, yet all their syllables are short, apart from the stress; but what true rhythm or metre could treat as other than long these stressed short-vowel syllables? In the words, *narrative*, *man-eater*, *brutality*, *contemplative*, *incarnate*, we see this triple power of length at work within one word,—weight-bar long syllables stressed or unstressed, hammer-stroke-weighted short-vowelled longs, natural unweighted short syllables. It is clear that there can be no true reduction of stressed or unstressed or of intrinsic long or short to a sole one-kind principle; both stress and vowel length work together to make a complex but harmonious system of quantity. But, yet again, there is a third factor of length-determination; there is consonantal weight, a lingering or retardation of the voice compelled by a load of consonants, or there is a free unencumbered light movement. This distinction creates the positionally long syllable, short by its vowel but lengthened by its consonants, *strength*, *swift*, *abstract*; where there is no such weight or no sufficient weight of consonants buttressing up the short syllable, it remains short, unless lengthened by stress. But we must consider separately how far this third or consonantal element is operative, whether its effect is invariable and absolute as the classicists would have it or only produces its result according to circumstance.”³

* The double consonant here, as in other words like *happy*, *tell*, can make no difference even in the classicist theory, because it is a mere matter of spelling and represents a single, not a double sound,—the sound is the same as in *panel*.

Four rules or sets of rules can be formulated which will sum up the whole base of the theory:—

1. All stressed syllables are metrically long, as are also all long-vowel syllables even without stress.

All short-vowel syllables are metrically short, unless they are lengthened by stress— or else by a sufficient weight of consonants or some other lengthening sound-element; but the mere fact of more than one consonant coming after a short vowel, whether within the word or after it, or both in combination, is not sufficient to confer length upon the syllable. Heaviness caused by a crowding of consonants affects the rhythm of a line or part of a line but does not alter its metrical values.

Each word has its own metrical value which cannot be radically influenced or altered by the word that follows.

2. The English language has many sounds which are doubtful or variable in quantity; these may be sometimes used as short and sometimes as long according to circumstance. Here the ear must be the judge.

3. Quantity within the syllable itself is not so rigidly fixed as in the ancient languages; often position or other circumstances may alter the metrical value of a syllable. A certain latitude has to be conceded in such cases, and there again the ear must be the judge.

4. Quantity metres cannot be as rigid and unalterable in English as in the old classical tongues; for the movement of the language is pliant and flexible and averse to rigidity and monotone. English poetry has always a fundamental metrical basis, a fixed normality of the feet constituting a line; but it relieves the fixity by the use of modulations substituting, with sometimes a less, sometimes a greater freedom, other feet for the normal. This rule of variation, very occasionally admitted in the classical tongues but natural in English poetry, must be applied or at least permitted in quantitative metres also; otherwise, in poems of some length, their rhythms may become stereotyped in a too rigid sameness and fatigue the ear.”⁴

Sri Aurobindo further explained: “A metre which cannot be read as normal English is read, in which light syllables are forced to carry a voice-weight which they have no strength to bear and strong stresses are compelled to efface themselves while small insignificant sounds take up their burden, is not a real and natural verse movement; it is an artificial structure which will never find an agreed place in the language.

No make-believe can reconcile us to such rhythms as Sidney’s

Īn wīnd / ōr wā|tēr’s / streām dō rē|quīre tō bē / wrīt. /

Here two intractable iambic feet followed by a resolutely short syllable are compelled to dance a jig garbed as two spondees followed by a solitary long syllable: so disguised, they pretend to be the first half of a pentameter,—the second half with its faultless and natural metre and rhythm is of itself a condemnation of its predecessor. Neither can one accept Bridges’

Flōwerŷ dō|maīn thē flūsh |ŋg sōft | crōwdīng |lōvelīnēss | ōf Sprīng |

where length is forced on an inexorable short like the ‘ing’ of ‘flushing’ and ‘crowding’ and a pretence is made that an accentual iamb, ‘of Spring’, can be transformed into a quantitative spondee. Still worse, still more impossible to digest or even to swallow, is his forced hexameter ending,

Thē sē|rēnelŷ sō|lēmn spēlls.|

There two successive accentual trochees and a terminal long syllable are turned by force or by farce into a closing dactyl and spondee. Such are the ungainly antics into which the natural movements of verse have to be compelled in this game of thrusting the laws of quantity of an ancient language upon a modern tongue which has quite another spirit and body. What is possible and natural in a clear-cut ancient language where there is a more even distribution of the voice and both the short and long syllables can get their full sound-value, is impossible or unnatural in the English tongue, for there the alternation of stresses with unstressed short and light sounds is a constant and inescapable feature. That makes all the difference; it turns this kind of verse into a frolic of false quantities. In any case, the method has invariably resulted in failure from Spenser to Bridges; the greatness of some of the poets who have made this too daring and unnatural effort has not been great enough to bring success to an impossible adventure.”⁵

K.D. Sethna in his book *Sri Aurobindo—The Poet* has elaborately illustrated the classical hexameter’s typical pace:

“Sri Aurobindo holds it essential for the classical hexameter’s typical pace that not only a suggestive rhythmical function but also a full metrical value should be given, as in the ancient languages, to quantity, to the time taken by the voice to pronounce the vowel on which a syllable is supported. English builds on stress, the vertical weight on a vowel. In quantity we deal with the horizontal vowel-mass. A word like ‘shadows’ is by stress prominent in the first syllable; by quantity in the second. So it would seem that the two linguistic modes can be completely at loggerheads. One cannot blindly attempt to solve the problem by seeing to it that words are chosen so that quantity and stress may coincide. First of all, words like ‘poet’ and ‘rival’ in which they do coincide are not frequent enough to supply the basis of a metre: words like ‘mother’ and ‘river’ are quite frequent. Secondly, according to Sri Aurobindo, the unstressed long is the very soul of the quantitative movement. Unless it comes into its own in English, there can be in that tongue no avatar of the Greek or Latin harmony: to build the Homeric hexameter without it as an important part of a foot on many occasions is to miss Homer’s tone and rhythm. But it cannot get its full value if stress dominates the metrical arrangement. Realising this, experimenters have tried to do away with stress-value and built their lines totally on classical principles. But to un-stress English is to un-English the language. The one way out, in Sri Aurobindo’s

view, is: the metre must somehow assimilate stress to a quantitative system.

“Sri Aurobindo suggests that, within a certain recent sphere of English poetic expression, this has already been done, though mostly in an unconscious way. The sphere is that of so-called Free Verse, where Whitman is the most impressive figure. Looking at ‘the greatest effects’ with the new instrument, Sri Aurobindo comments on Whitman and other writers: ‘we find that consciously or unconsciously they arrive at the same secret principle, and that is the essential principle of Greek choric and dithyrambic poetry turned to the law of a language which has not the strong resource of quantity. Arnold deliberately attempted such an adaptation but, in spite of beautiful passages, with scant success; still when he writes such a line as

The too vast orb of her fate,

it is this choric movement that he reproduces. Whitman’s first poem in *Sea-Drift* and a number of others are written partly or throughout in this manner.’ ”⁶

“Sri Aurobindo works out the conscious and complete theory of true English quantity in which stress suffers no cavalier dismissal and yet serves a quantitative end.

It can so serve, he says, because by its hammer-stroke on a syllable it masses the voice there and confers on it a special sort of length. Hence we may distinguish a length through vertical weight in addition to a length by horizontal volume. True quantity in English must reckon with two varieties of longs, that are valid under all circumstances. And in the genuine English hexameter—as also in other forms, like Sapphics and Alcaics—both the syllables of a word such as ‘shadows’ must be taken, each for a different reason, as legitimately long.

A pair of important points emerges from this example. As the first half of ‘shadows’ is, by classical measures, intrinsically short, a stress must be seen as constituting a long by vertical weight irrespective of the intrinsic quantity of a syllable. Not that a stressed intrinsic short is equal in value to the intrinsic long under the ictus; yet their difference is only a matter of *nuance* within the same prosodic category. Again, as the second half of ‘shadow’ is, by English measures, a short or a ‘slack’, as the current terminology goes—in spite of its intrinsic length, ‘slack’-shortness must be seen as no bar to length when the horizontal volume is present.”⁷

The Descent of Ahana is one of the poems in which Sri Aurobindo has experimented on classical quantitative metre and tried to naturalise it in English: thus of his later poems *Descent* is written in Sapphics; another, *Ocean Oneness* in Alcaics and a third *Thought the Paraclete* in modified hendecasyllabics, but these can only be called preliminary skirmishes with the problem, and complete success may be claimed only when the hexameter too has been tackled and mastered. And it would appear that in two long poems—*The Descent of Ahana* and the unfinished epic *Iliion* Sri Aurobindo has largely mastered the elusive and leonine hexameter as well. *Ahana*’s verse, however, has the

additional embellishment of rhyme, while—as we will see later—*Ilion* is unrhymed like the normal hexameter. Rhyme is used in *Ahana* because it is a poem of partly reflective thought and partly of lyrical feeling, swinging between the poles of statement and prayer, argument and prophecy. *Ilion*, on the other hand, is an epic in its comprehension and majestic movement.

(*To be continued*)

NILIMA DAS

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THE INDIAN APPROACH TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from the issue of September 2003)

The Evolutionary Status of the Golden Age

WE were discussing the achievements of the Gupta age and its lessons for human development. From the point of view of ancient Indian social ideals the Gupta empire is the best possible and the most successful attempt towards a balanced development of the society; it was perhaps the best possible achievement under the existing conditions and the highest social and political ideals of the age. But when we look at the Gupta age and its achievements from a deeper perspective and in the light of some of the modern ideals there are some glaring deficiencies. However, to a large extent, these deficiencies are due to the inherent limitations of the age and we cannot put the blame entirely on the leaders of the age.

So let us try to have a clear understanding of the evolutionary condition of the Gupta age before passing our strictures on its accomplishments. Here Sri Aurobindo's vision of social development can be a great help in arriving at the right understanding of the evolutionary conditions of the age.

According to Sri Aurobindo, every civilisation passes through five stages of development: symbolic, typical, conventional, individualistic, and subjective. The symbolic age belongs to the primitive infrarational stage of the human cycle. The mind of this age viewed the whole world and the events of life as a symbolic expression of some supraphysical powers. To the symbolic mentality all the religious and social institutions and all the movements and phases of life are symbols of some mystic, spiritual, cosmic and occult forces and influences which govern human life.

The society of the symbolic age is predominantly religious and spiritual. The human society is viewed as an expression of some cosmic and divine powers which govern the world and, as a result, the tendency to make every act and movement of life something sacred and religious and a sacrifice to the divine powers. The collective life was organised according to this central vision but with an infinite flexibility in outer forms. In India the Vedic period belongs to the symbolic age.

From this symbolic mentality the human civilisation passes on to the typical age. The typical mentality is predominantly psychological and ethical. The human society is viewed as an expression of some fixed psychological powers within man and the human types which represent these powers. The collective life was organised accordingly, with an emphasis on the ethical and psychological development of human being. This is the principle behind the caste system in India. But in the typical age, the psychological and ethical motives predominate and the economic, social and political motives are subordinated to these higher ideals. In India, the epical period, the Age of Ramayana and Mahabharata, belongs to the typical age.

But with the passage of time the outer forms begin to predominate the inner truth, ideal or motive. The ideal begins to recede, stand in the background and finally remains only in the mind of the thinkers, with very little influence on the social life and practice of the masses. This is the beginning of the conventional age. In this stage of the cycle society gets rigidly stratified in a fixed outer form and tends to be minutely regulated accordingly to the conventions and laws laid down by the code-makers and kings. But in the beginning of the conventional age, though the society lives predominantly in the outer forms, the inner ideal which gives birth to the form is still living and not dead and the outer forms consciously illumined and inspired by the ideal. This was the period which was normally characterised as “Golden Age” by the historians. The Golden Age of the Gupta belongs to the conventional age of Indian civilisation.

We can get a deep insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the Gupta Age when we understand the psychological characteristics of the culture of the conventional age. In the symbolic and typical stage of civilisation, the cultural mind of the age which shaped its values and ideals lived either in the intuitive spiritual mind or in the deeper psychological and ethical temperament and created from within outwards, trying to shape the outer life from an inner centre. But in the conventional age, the cultural mind of the age lived predominantly in the externalised intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and vital temperament, looked within or upwards to an ideal—which is not conceived by itself but by the previous age—for inspiration and tried to give a new and novel intellectual and aesthetic form to the ideal. So, as long as the vitality of the civilisation was abundant and vigorous, the creative output of the conventional culture may have been prolific in quantity and rich in variety but mostly inferior in quality compared to the previous ages.

The conventional age is usually great in organisation. For the symbolic and typical phases are less united and organised but more free and flexible in social and political life than the conventional age. This need for unity, order and organisation was one of the causes which precipitates the conventional age. When a civilisation or culture is under the danger of disintegration under external aggression or internal conflict there arises an intense psychological need in the collectivity for unity, order and organisation. And the evolutionary Nature responds to this need by creating the suitable human types which can fulfil the need. The warrior, conqueror, organiser and the legislator take over the reigns of leadership from the sage, thinker and the ethical idealist who were the leaders of the previous age. The mind of the warrior and the organiser always tends towards close control, regulation and mechanisation. This naturally leads to the conventional age. But if the leaders of the age are enlightened and benevolent and have the living sense of the great ideals bequeathed to them from the previous age, the negative effects of the age are considerably minimised and the positive features of the age come to the front. Then this phase of the civilisation becomes the golden age of peace, prosperity, order and stability, preserving and consolidating the gains of the past ages.

Such was the Golden Age heralded by Samudra Gupta and Chandra Gupta in India and August Caesar of the Roman Empire.

The Bronze in the Gold: Shortcomings of the Gupta Age

Now we are in a position to make a more realistic and sympathetic assessment of the defects of the Gupta period and examine what are the lessons we can draw from them for the future.

The first major shortcomings of the Gupta age are a highly centralised organisation and the concentration of power in an all-pervading bureaucracy. The central government and its administration may be enlightened and benevolent; but an excessive reliance on the centralised state machine and its organised wisdom and power than on the inherent genius and initiative of the people is not conducive to an intense varied and vigorous collective life. Such an approach to administration tends to concentrate power in a ruling elite and upper classes and wrests the initiative from the masses. The civilisation as a whole may attain great heights of power and prosperity and cultural greatness but most of these benefits will again go to the enrichment of the power, splendour and prosperity of the upper classes with very little improvement in the condition of the masses. Studies of modern scholars reveal that during the Gupta age most of the popular and democratic institutions like janapada or the village council and the village panchayat which were vigorous and alive during the earlier epochs of the Vedic and epic age were either disappearing or robbed of their power and prestige.

For example, in the earlier Vedic and epic age the village was a vital centre of economic, social and political life. And the village headman, the *grāmani*, was an important representative of the people who participated even in the top decision-making bodies of government. But in the Gupta regime the *grāmani* became an insignificant cog in the state machine and, instead of remaining as a true representative of the people voicing the grievances and aspirations of the people to the government, became a part of the bureaucracy, collecting taxes for the government and executing the royal decrees.

It is not that the Gupta emperors were not aware of this problem of what is now called as “distributive justice”. As we have already seen, the Gupta emperors made a conscious effort to diffuse the Indian cultural values to the masses. But the method employed, discriminating charity in the form of religious endowments, is not always the best and the most effective way for spreading culture. Patronising charity, even when it is sincere and enlightened and free from the subtle self-flattering moral vanity which normally accompanies it, can never lead to enduring distributive justice. When the ideal of charity or giving *dāna* becomes an ingrained and integral part of the culture of a civilisation as it was in ancient India, it can definitely have an equalising effect on the economic life of the community. Still this approach does not encourage self-reliance but creates dependence on the charity of the upper classes. The only long-term strategy towards distributive justice is to create the right environment in which people are given the freedom, motivation, opportunities, resources and the knowledge for self-government and self-directed progress towards self-determined goals. This cannot happen as long as the economic, social and political power and the intellectual and cultural energy of the nation remains concentrated in a small group belonging to the ruling elite or the upper classes.

The formation of a ruling class and the concentration of power in it is to a certain extent inevitable and a part of the method of Nature in human development. It is all the more good and desirable for the community or nation if it can somehow ensure that this ruling class is made of the highest and the best available talent in the community. But even then the function of the ruling class or the "power elite" is not to perpetuate their hold on the community but, as Sri Aurobindo points out, "progressively to enlighten and train the whole body consciously to do for itself its own work"¹ and "recognise in good time the right hour for its abdication and for the imparting of its ideals, qualities, culture, experience to the rest of the aggregate or to as much of it as is prepared for that progress."² But this never happened in ancient India even during her Golden Age. The upper classes obstinately clung to their powers and privileges and this was one of the causes of India's decline.

One of the reasons for this may be the lack of sufficient social and political awakening in the community to the modern ideals of social and political liberty and equality. Ancient Indian thought had the ideal of spiritual equality of all in the oneness of God. But the ideal was not translated sufficiently in the social life in terms of economic, social, political and cultural opportunities for the lower classes and women. Though in the Gupta regime the caste system was less rigid than in the period just before and after, still the evils of the caste system were rampant. Fa-Hsien, the Chinese pilgrim who travelled India during the Gupta regime describes how the outcaste chandalas who lived on the outskirts of a city or town in miserable conditions had to beat the drums when they entered into the city so that the people may keep away from them.

The other defect of the Gupta-type of administration, organised through an elaborate and centralised bureaucratic machinery diffused into the community on a large scale, is that it saps the creative vitality of the individual and the smaller groups within the nation. Not only does the individual lose his importance and become a cog in the big state machine but the smaller groups and the communities lose their power and vitality. The natural tendency of a large imperial government is to favour the big and large systems like the big corporate guilds, international commerce, large universities while the smaller groups and communities like the village, town, and the local educational and cultural institutions receive very little attention.

When we look back into the past cultural history of India, the most originally creative periods are when the nation was divided into small kingdoms and republics: first during the Vedic age when the spiritual foundation of Indian civilisation was laid by the inspired mystic poets of the Vedas; after this during the Upanishadic age the highest spiritual truth of man and God and the world was revealed in a body of inspired spiritual literature of such depth, beauty and profundity which was unsurpassed in the history of the world; then in the epic age most of the social and ethical ideals of the Indian civilisation were conceived and expressed in magnificent epical literature. In these periods the entire society was suffused with a high idealism. There were classes but without the rigidity of the caste system. The collective life was fluid, mobile and flexible, trying to express as faithfully as possible the original vision and ideal of the Aryan culture with an organic

and instinctive spontaneity; the society was not chained, cabined or compartmentalised with elaborate organisation and bureaucratic control or rigid stratification and not yet subjected to the minute regulation of the Shastra. As a result life flowed freely, abundantly and indivisibly in the community. Each individual lived intensely as if the life and energy of the whole community flowed through him.

In some of these early phases of the evolution of Indian civilisation, like for example the Upanishadic age, the whole community, irrespective of class and caste distinctions, was inspired and moved by the spiritual ideal and motive. In the Upanishadic literature we hear of a wealthy Shudra seeking spiritual knowledge. This shows that in the Upanishadic age a Shudra could become wealthy and also seek the highest spiritual knowledge. A Kshatriya king sitting humbly at the feet of a cart-driver who was a great sage in possession of Brahmagyana, a young boy of low birth and of a doubtful parentage seeking spiritual knowledge from a Brahmin sage and accepted by him, another king who was a great philosopher and a yogi taming the vanity of a learned Brahmin sanyasi are well known examples.

Such intense and creative vivacity of the communal life was possible only in small autonomous communities in which there was not much of distance—socially in status or geographically in space—between the ruling classes that govern, the intelligentsia which shape the thought, values and ideas of the society, and the productive, commercial and working classes which trade, produce and toil. As a result, there was free and quick flow and diffusion of ideas in the society. Modern communication and transportation technology has helped man to transcend the barriers of space and obviated the necessity of smaller space for the diffusion of ideas in the community. But still these modern developments cannot compensate for the rich, intense and direct psychological interaction which occurs between the various sections and strata of the society in a small community. Nor can modern communication technology break the psychological barriers created by social status in a rigidly stratified and hierarchised society. The second condition for a rich and creative communal life is that people in the community as a whole are sufficiently morally advanced to have an inherent sense of justice, equality and fraternity and, above all, self-discipline so that there is no necessity of an external authority, control and regulation.

All these conditions were to a certain extent present in the communal life of ancient India before the advent of the large imperial powers like the Maurya, Gupta and Mughal empires. Compared to the creative vitality of the early Indian communal life in the Vedic, Upanishadic and epical age, the creativity of the later imperial periods of the Maurya and Gupta were relatively inferior in originality and quality.

The large empires in India like those of the Maurya, Gupta and Mughals made some lasting contributions to the Indian civilisation in economic, social, political and military organisation; they also made some fine and excellent contributions to the cultural life of the civilisation. But in the field of culture, most of the contributions of large imperial powers were not always of the highest quality though prolific in quantity. The creative mind of the imperial age had lost some of the natural and inborn intuitive Indian

genius of the earlier epochs and had become more scientific, intellectual, analytic and in some direction highly materialistic and sensuous. Innumerable systems of philosophy proliferated but most of them were rigidly logical and analytical and lost the intuitive insight and the synthetic vision of the thought of the earlier ages. The literary output was prodigious but most of them lost the magnificent spiritual and ethical vision of the earlier epochs and were mostly aesthetic sublimation of the vital and sensuous experiences of life.

The religious life of the age had acquired a greater intellectual and vital vigour, richness and variety but seems to have lost much of the wealth of direct spiritual experience and inspiration of the Vedic and Upanishadic eras. The political mind of the age was beginning to realise the need for political unity and had acquired a greater capacity for organisation in every level of the collective life—economic, social, administrative, military. The result was a greater order, efficiency and prosperity of the collective life. But in this process, the political mind of the age lost sight of some of the deeper political insight and wisdom of the Vedic sages that conceived the ideal of a federated empire on the foundation of psychological, spiritual and cultural unity, with the political unity viewed only as a means towards this deeper and inner unity, or as a spontaneous expression of it. The Gupta emperors made a sincere attempt to realise this Vedic ideal but were not able to sustain it because of the reasons we have described earlier.

In the social life, the great empire-builders were able to bring peace, contentment, security and prosperity to the society but there was a marked decline in the moral fibre and character of the people, especially in the Gupta age. The Indian historians in general tend to write flatteringly on the moral conditions of the Golden Age of Indian civilisation. But when we examine the literature of the age with a discerning eye we can see that the moral tone of the age had slipped down to loose sensuality and conventional morality—regulated by external codes of the shastra—from the high pitched moral idealism proceeding directly from the deeper self-ruling ethical temperament which characterized the earlier epical age. We can see this clearly in the impassioned revolt of Bhartrihari against the sensuality of the age. We can also see this in the highly refined and aesthetically sublimated sensuality of Kalidasa whose works express the spirit of the age with an unparalleled creative power. Sri Aurobindo, writing on the age of Kalidasa, points out what the academic historians missed: “The ideals of the morality were much lower than of old; free drinking was openly recognised and indulged in by both the sexes; purity of life was less valued than in any other period of our civilisation.”³

Most of these defects of the large imperial states of India are due to the inherent limitations of the historical and evolutionary conditions of the age. But an excessive reliance on a large centralised organisation and bureaucracy is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the dilution of the creative vitality and quality of life of the imperial states. For example, some of the smaller kingdoms belonging to more or less the same period as that of the Guptas, like the empires of the South, the Cholas, Chelas, Pandyas, Pallavas and Chalukyas were able to foster a much more original, stimulating and creative communal life than that of the Guptas. For example, when we compare the religious and

spiritual literature created by the Shaivite and Vaishnavite saints of southern India with that of the Gupta period, the former in general is far superior in every respect to the latter. For most of these literary creations of the South were directly inspired from a living spiritual experience and intuition in contrast to the mostly intellectual and vitalistic inspiration of the Guptas. In architecture, southern India created a distinct and original style inspired by a deep and vast spiritual and cosmic vision taking shape in stone in the massive and titanic grandeur of the southern temples. In the social and political life, the southern kings realised the importance of the village as the basic unit of the collective life and revitalised the village life with the institution of panchayat raj. In military science it was a southern empire, the Chola, which first invented the naval fleet in India.

Thus, the strength and weakness of the Gupta empire which we were discussing so far brings us to one of the important and yet unsolved problems of social development. It is the problem of reconciliation of the need of a centralised organisation for creating unity, order and stability, and the need for decentralisation of the social organisation which can bring a rich and creative diversity to the collective life.

(To be continued)

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1. *Social and Political Thought*, SABCL, Vol. 15, p. 437.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
3. *The Harmony of Virtue*, SABCL, Vol. 3, p. 225.

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

My Divine Treasures by Amar Singh. Bhubaneswar, Sri Aurobindo Sanskruti Sansad, 2003, pp. 247, price Rs. 250.00.

READERS of *Oriya Aurovilian* as well as devotees of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in general, are undoubtedly familiar with the name: Sardar Amar Singh. He is an outstanding and multifaceted personality from Orissa who distinguished himself at once in many walks of life. Professionally, he was an administrator who proved his mettle admirably as an officer of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). His service career spanned over several decades primarily in the State of Orissa. Although not an Oriya, he considered himself as one. He spoke the language with a passion and intimacy that few Oriyas are capable of. In his role as a proactive administrator, he refused to conform to the image of the classic bureaucrat who is aloof, detached, condescending and callous.

Instead, Singh steadfastly sought the welfare of the people and never stood on status, position or power. He enjoyed a sterling reputation as an outstanding officer and was dedicated and honest in an exemplary manner.

Such a reputation is hard to sustain in a social milieu which is pathetically feudal, corrupt and mercenary, given to an age-old system of gratification and patronage.

Amar Singh's uniqueness, however, does not lie in his professional success alone. He was a *Karma Yogi* who was magically drawn to the spiritual path. Although a householder and a successful family man who had a wonderful companion in Diljeet Kaur, as well as lovely and successful children, Singh was not confined to his family as an ordinary householder: he shared bonding among a large cross-section of people across caste, creed, religion and nationality.

Singh has also been a sincere and dedicated journalist who has sought to promote Truth of all hues, especially the vision of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Year after year, he used the pages of *Oriya Aurovilian* to spread the message of the Divine Master. He also gave valuable space to countless young men and women writers. He has remained steadfastly loyal to the task the Mother had given him: to promote the cause of Auroville through a bilingual journal, Oriya and English. This he has carried out unflinchingly despite hardship and ordeals!

In addition, Amar Singh has made an exceptional contribution in the field of integral education in accordance with Sri Aurobindo's vision. He has been universally loved and been singularly free from controversies that lesser men are prone to.

And now at the age of 93, Singh offers us a special tribute to the Mother. Divided into eight parts, the book *My Divine Treasures* is structured in a comprehensive manner so as to accommodate the many dimensions of the Mother's ministry upon earth. Part I deals with integral yoga; part II, Auroville; part III focuses on philosophy and spirituality; part IV on education; part V brings in the political dimension: the methodology for running the government; part VI underlines the importance of industry; part VII offers solutions to a few common problems; and finally, part VIII concludes, with "the personal

dimension”, his understanding of the Mother. Thus, both for the beginner as well as the more advanced reader, the book comes as a valuable guide for the inner life.

A spontaneous approach to things full of genuineness, warmth, good will and good humor is what characterizes Amar Singh’s writing throughout. Every page of this book, starting from the dedication to his life companion Diljeet Kaur who passed away at the age of 84 to the friendship Singh has shared with his many associates, is laden with a psychic glow and marvel that is typical of an advanced being. Nor is this spontaneous approach bereft of a carefully structured mind that lends a subtle design upon this personal narrative, a record of a journey within.

The foreword by well-known academic P. Raja, the preface by the author, and a note on the author by Lakshmidhar Mishra provide the necessary context. Progressively we see a fascinating unfolding of Sri Aurobindo’s vision as well as the mystery and miracle behind *Avatarhood*. The approach throughout is simple, down to earth and colloquial. Chapter headings are provocative eye-openers such as “Gods have no apartheid and no social discrimination” and “Is *Kali Yuga* yielding place to *Satya Yuga*?”

In the course of advancing arguments, Amar Singh often brings the writings of others such as Abani Sinha, Navajata and fellow seekers. An eye for the smallest of the details is what we notice throughout even while the author’s gaze is fixed on the great heights. For instance, chapter 40 speaks of the need for foreign collaboration as well as quality infrastructure. Likewise, it is no surprise that youthful as he is, Singh believes firmly that it is the youth that can pave the way for a new millennium.

It is however the last three chapters “Introspective Reminiscence” (Chapter 47) “Culture of Orissa” (Chapter 48) and “The Divine Force” (Chapter 49) that are likely to have a special appeal for the readers. It certainly did for me! In the first, we see many unknown and startlingly new aspects of Amar Singh, his meeting with outstanding and gifted personalities like Prapatti and his graciousness in recalling his association with colleagues in the Sri Aurobindo’s Movement in Orissa. The chapter shows Singh’s great sense of humanity, his firm belief in gratitude and unquestioned devotion to the Mother. Similarly, “Culture of Orissa” shows Singh’s deep attraction towards his village life, and Orissa’s fascinating folk culture.

At the end, the chapter “The Divine Force” is a study of the mystery of the Mother’s ministry. For Singh, nothing in life comes as an accident. Indeed for the devout, even the smallest event comes charged with the divine grace and significance that only the discerning few can fathom.

In sum: *My Divine Treasures* is a rare book about the inner quest of an exceptional soul! It is a spiritual adventure of great significance. At 93, most would find it hard to be coherent, while Amar Singh has produced in this volume a cogent and insightful narrative. Perhaps the book could have done with a little more editing; but it must be said that such deficiency is more than made up by the great sense of spiritual ardour. Like the mountain stream that rushes headlong through a rough terrain, Amar Singh’s sole dream in life seems to be united with the waters of the mighty spiritual ocean!

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY