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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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OUR LIFE HAS OPENED WITH DIVINITY

A HEAVENLY queen consenting to his will,
She clasped his feet by her enshrining hair
Enveloped in a velvet cloak of love,
And answered softly like a murmuring lute:
“All now is changed, yet all is still the same.
Lo, we have looked upon the face of God,
Our life has opened with divinity.
We have borne identity with the Supreme
And known his meaning in our mortal lives.
Our love has grown greater by that mighty touch
And learned its heavenly significance,
Yet nothing is lost of mortal love’s delight.
Heaven’s touch fulfils but cancels not our earth:
Our bodies need each other in the same last;
Still in our breasts repeat heavenly secret rhythm
Our human heart-beats passionately close.
Still am I she who came to thee mid the murmur
Of sunlit leaves upon this forest verge;
I am the Madran, I am Savitri.
All that I was before, I am to thee still,
Close comrade of thy thoughts and hopes and toils,
All happy contraries I would join for thee.
All sweet relations marry in our life;
I am thy kingdom even as thou art mine,
The sovereign and the slave of thy desire,
Thy prone possessor, the sister of thy soul
And mother of thy wants; thou art my world,
The earth I need, the heaven my thoughts desire,
The world I inhabit and the god I adore.
Thy body is my body’s counterpart
Whose every limb my answering limb desires,
Whose heart is key to all my heart-beats,—this
I am and thou to me, O Satyavan.
Our wedded walk through life begins anew,
No gladness lost, no depth of mortal joy;
Let us go through this new world that is the same.
For it is given back, but it is known,
A playing-ground and dwelling-house of God
Who hides himself in bird and beast and man
Sweetly to find himself again by love,

By oneness. His presence leads the rhythms of life
 That seek for mutual joy in spite of pain.
 We have each other found, O Satyavan,
 In the great light of the discovered soul.
 Let us go back, for eve is in the skies.
 Now grief is dead and serene bliss remains
 The heart of all our days for ever more.
 Lo, all these beings in this wonderful world!
 Let us give joy to all, for joy is ours.
 For not for ourselves alone our spirits came
 Out of the veil of the Unmanifest,
 Out of the deep immense Unknowable
 Upon the ignorant breast of dubious earth
 Into the ways of labouring seeking men,
 Two fires that burn towards that parent Sun,
 Two rays that travel to the original Light.
 To lead man's soul towards Truth and God we are born,
 To draw the chequered scheme of mortal life
 Into some semblance of the Immortal's plan,
 To shape it closer to an image of God,
 A little nearer to the Idea divine."
 She closed her arms about his breast and head
 As if to keep him on her bosom worn
 For ever through the journeying of the years.
 So for a while they stood entwined, their kiss
 And passion-tranced embrace a meeting-point
 In their commingling spirits, one for ever,
 Two-souled, two-bodied for the joys of Time.
 Then hand in hand they left that solemn place
 Full now of mute unusual memories,
 To the green distance of their sylvan home
 Returning slowly through the forest's heart:
 Round them the afternoon to evening changed;
 Light slipped down to the brightly sleeping verge,
 And the birds came back winging to their nests,
 And day and night leaned to each other's arms.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, pp. 719-21)

UTTARPARA SPEECH

WHEN I was asked to speak to you at the annual meeting of your Sabha, it was my intention to say a few words about the subject chosen for today, the subject of the Hindu religion. I do not know now whether I shall fulfil that intention; for as I sat here, there came into my mind a word that I have to speak to you, a word that I have to speak to the whole of the Indian Nation. It was spoken first to myself in jail and I have come out of jail to speak it to my people.

It was more than a year ago that I came here last. When I came I was not alone; one of the mightiest prophets of Nationalism sat by my side. It was he who then came out of the seclusion to which God had sent him, so that in the silence and solitude of his cell he might hear the word that He had to say. It was he that you came in your hundreds to welcome. Now he is far away, separated from us by thousands of miles. Others whom I was accustomed to find working beside me are absent. The storm that swept over the country has scattered them far and wide. It is I this time who have spent one year in seclusion, and now that I come out I find all changed. One who always sat by my side and was associated in my work is a prisoner in Burma; another is in the north rotting in detention. I looked round when I came out, I looked round for those to whom I had been accustomed to look for counsel and inspiration. I did not find them. There was more than that. When I went to jail the whole country was alive with the cry of *Bande Mataram*, alive with the hope of a nation, the hope of millions of men who had newly risen out of degradation. When I came out of jail I listened for that cry, but there was instead a silence. A hush had fallen on the country and men seemed bewildered; for instead of God's bright heaven full of the vision of the future that had been before us, there seemed to be overhead a leaden sky from which human thunders and lightnings rained. No man seemed to know which way to move, and from all sides came the question, "What shall we do next? What is there that we can do?" I too did not know which way to move, I too did not know what was next to be done. But one thing I knew, that as it was the Almighty Power of God which had raised that cry, that hope, so it was the same Power which had sent down that silence. He who was in the shouting and the movement was also in the pause and the hush. He has sent it upon us, so that the nation might draw back for a moment and look into itself and know His will. I have not been disheartened by that silence, because I had been made familiar with silence in my prison and because I knew it was in the pause and the hush that I had myself learned this lesson through the long year of my detention. When Bepin Chandra Pal came out of jail, he came with a message, and it was an inspired message. I remember the speech he made here. It was a speech not so much political as religious in its bearing and intention. He spoke of his realisation in jail, of God within us all, of the Lord within the nation, and in his subsequent speeches also he spoke of a greater than ordinary force in the movement and a greater than ordinary purpose before it. Now I also meet you again, I also come out of jail, and again it is you of Uttarpara who are the first to welcome me, not at a political meeting but at a meeting of a society for the protection of our religion. That message which Bepin Chandra Pal received

in Buxar jail, God gave to me in Alipore. That knowledge He gave to me day after day during my twelve months of imprisonment and it is that which He has commanded me to speak to you now that I have come out.

I knew I would come out. The year of detention was meant only for a year of seclusion and of training. How could anyone hold me in jail longer than was necessary for God's purpose? He had given me a word to speak and a work to do, and until that word was spoken I knew that no human power could hush me, until that work was done no human power could stop God's instrument, however weak that instrument might be or however small. Now that I have come out, even in these few minutes, a word has been suggested to me which I had no wish to speak. The thing I had in my mind He has thrown from it and what I speak is under an impulse and a compulsion.

When I was arrested and hurried to the Lal Bazar hajat I was shaken in faith for a while, for I could not look into the heart of His intention. Therefore I faltered for a moment and cried out in my heart to Him, "What is this that has happened to me? I believed that I had a mission to work for the people of my country and until that work was done, I should have Thy protection. Why then am I here and on such a charge?" A day passed and a second day and a third, when a voice came to me from within, "Wait and see." Then I grew calm and waited, I was taken from Lal Bazar to Alipore and was placed for one month in a solitary cell apart from men. There I waited day and night for the voice of God within me, to know what He had to say to me, to learn what I had to do. In this seclusion the earliest realisation, the first lesson came to me. I remembered then that a month or more before my arrest, a call had come to me to put aside all activity, to go into seclusion and to look into myself, so that I might enter into closer communion with Him. I was weak and could not accept the call. My work was very dear to me and in the pride of my heart I thought that unless I was there, it would suffer or even fail and cease; therefore I would not leave it. It seemed to me that He spoke to me gainand said, "The bonds you had not the strength to break, I have broken for you, because it is not my will nor was it ever my intention that that should continue. I have had another thing for you to do and it is for that I have brought you here, to teach you what you could not learn for yourself and to train you for my work." Then He placed the Gita in my hands. His strength entered into me and I was able to do the sadhana of the Gita. I was not only to understand intellectually but to realise what Sri Krishna demanded of Arjuna and what He demands of those who aspire to do His work, to be free from repulsion and desire, to do work for Him without the demand for fruit, to renounce self-will and be-come a passive and faithful instrument in His hands, to have an equal heart for high and low, friend and opponent, success and failure, yet not to do His work negligently. I realised what the Hindu religion meant. We speak often of the Hindu religion, of the Sanatan Dharma, but few of us really know what that religion is. Other religions are preponderatingly religions of faith and profession, but the Sanatan Dharma is life itself; it is a thing that has not so much to be believed as lived. This is the Dharma that for the salvation of humanity was cherished in the seclusion of this peninsula from of old. It is to give this religion that India is rising. She does not rise as other countries do, for

self or when she is strong, to trample on the weak. She is rising to shed the eternal light entrusted to her over the world. India has always existed for humanity and not for herself and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great.

Therefore this was the next thing He pointed out to me,—He made me realise the central truth of the Hindu religion. He turned the hearts of my jailors to me and they spoke to the Englishman in charge of the jail, “He is suffering in his confinement; let him at least walk outside his cell for half an hour in the morning and in the evening.” So it was arranged, and it was while I was walking that His strength again entered into me. I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me his shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me. I looked at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies. Amongst these thieves and dacoits there were many who put me to shame by their sympathy, their kindness, the humanity triumphant over such adverse circumstances. One I saw among them especially, who seemed to me a saint, a peasant of my nation who did not know how to read and write, an alleged dacoit sentenced to ten years’ rigorous imprisonment, one of those whom we look down upon in our Pharisaical pride of class as Chhotalok. Once more He spoke to me and said, “Behold the people among whom I have sent you to do a little of my work. This is the nature of the nation I am raising up and the reason why I raise them.”

When the case opened in the lower court and we were brought before the Magistrate I was followed by the same insight. He said to me, “When you were cast into jail, did not your heart fail and did you not cry out to me, where is Thy protection? Look now at the Magistrate, look now at the Prosecuting Counsel.” I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Vasudeva, it was Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. 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?” He said, “I am in all men and I overrule their actions and their words. My protection is still with you and you shall not fear. This case which is brought against you, leave it in my hand. It is not for you. It was not for the trial that I brought you here but for something else. The case itself is only a means for my work and nothing more.” Afterwards when the trial opened in the Sessions Court, I began to write many instructions for my Counsel as to what was false in the evidence against me and on what points the witnesses might be cross-examined. Then something happened which I had not expected. The arrangements which had been made for my defence were suddenly changed and another Counsel stood there to defend me. He came unexpectedly, —

a friend of mine, but I did not know he was coming. You have all heard the name of the man who put away from him all other thoughts and abandoned all his practice, who sat up half the night day after day for months and broke his health to save me,—Srijut Chittaranjan Das. When I saw him, I was satisfied, but I still thought it necessary to write instructions. Then all that was put away from me and I had the message from within, “This is the man who will save you from the snares put around your feet. Put aside those papers. It is not you who will instruct him. I will instruct him.” From that time I did not of myself speak a word to my Counsel about the case or give a single instruction, and if ever I was asked a question, I always found that my answer did not help the case. I had left it to him and he took it entirely into his hands, with what result you know. I knew all along what He meant for me, for I heard it again and again, always I listened to the voice within, “I am guiding, therefore fear not. Turn to your own work for which I have brought you to jail and when you come out, remember never to fear, never to hesitate. Remember that it is I who am doing this, not you nor any other. Therefore whatever clouds may come, whatever dangers and sufferings, whatever difficulties, whatever impossibilities, there is nothing impossible, nothing difficult. I am in the nation and its uprising and I am Vasudeva, I am Narayana, and what I will, shall be, not what others will. What I choose to bring about, no human power can stay.”

Meanwhile He had brought me out of solitude and placed me among those who had been accused along with me. You have spoken much today of my self-sacrifice and devotion to my country. I have heard that kind of speech ever since I came out of jail, but I hear it with embarrassment, with something of pain. For I know my weakness, I am a prey to my own faults and backslidings. I was not blind to them before and when they all rose up against me in seclusion, I felt them utterly. I knew then that I the man was a mass of weakness, a faulty and imperfect instrument, strong only when a higher strength entered into me. Then I found myself among these young men and in many of them I discovered a mighty courage, a power of self-effacement in comparison with which I was simply nothing. I saw one or two who were not only superior to me in force and character,—very many were that,—but in the promise of that intellectual ability on which I prided myself. He said to me, “This is the young generation, the new and mighty nation that is arising at my command. They are greater than yourself. What have you to fear? If you stood aside or slept, the work would still be done. If you were cast aside tomorrow, here are the young men who will take up your work and do it more mightily than you have ever done. You have only got some strength from me to speak a word to this nation which will help to raise it.” This was the next thing He told me.

Then a thing happened suddenly and in a moment I was hurried away to the seclusion of a solitary cell. What happened to me during that period I am not impelled to say, but only this that day after day, He showed me His wonders and made me realise the utter truth of the Hindu religion. I had had many doubts before. I was brought up in England amongst foreign ideas and an atmosphere entirely foreign. About many things in Hinduism I had once been inclined to believe that they were imaginations, that there was much of dream in it, much that was delusion and Maya. But now day after day I realised in the

mind, I realised in the heart, I realised in the body the truths of the Hindu religion. They became living experiences to me, and things were opened to me which no material science could explain. When I first approached Him, it was not entirely in the spirit of the Bhakta, it was not entirely in the spirit of the Jnani. I came to Him long ago in Baroda some years before the Swadeshi began and I was drawn into the public field.

When I approached God at that time, I hardly had a living faith in Him. The agnostic was in me, the atheist was in me, the sceptic was in me and I was not absolutely sure that there was a God at all. I did not feel His presence. Yet something drew me to the truth of the Vedas, the truth of the Gita, the truth of the Hindu religion. I felt there must be a mighty truth somewhere in this Yoga, a mighty truth in this religion based on the Vedanta. So when I turned to the Yoga and resolved to practise it and find out if my idea was right, I did it in this spirit and with this prayer to Him, "If Thou art, then thou knowest my heart. Thou knowest that I do not ask for Mukti, I do not ask for anything which others ask for. I ask only for strength to uplift this nation, I ask only to be allowed to live and work for this people whom I love and to whom I pray that I may devote my life." I strove long for the realisation of Yoga and at last to some extent I had it, but in what I most desired I was not satisfied. Then in the seclusion of the jail, of the solitary cell I asked for it again. I said, "Give me Thy Adesh. I do not know what work to do or how to do it. Give me a message." In the communion of Yoga two messages came. The first message said, "I have given you a work and it is to help to uplift this nation. Before long the time will come when you will have to go out of jail; for it is not my will that this time either you should be convicted or that you should pass the time, as others have to do, in suffering for their country. I have called you to work, and that is the Adesh for which you have asked. I give you the Adesh to go forth and do my work." The second message came and it said, "Something has been shown to you in this year of seclusion, something about which you had your doubts and it is the truth of the Hindu religion. It is this religion that I am raising up before the world, it is this that I have perfected and developed through the Rishis, saints and Avatars, and now it is going forth to do my work among the nations. I am raising up this nation to send forth my word. This is the Sanatan Dharma, this is the eternal religion which you did not really know before, but which I have now revealed to you. The agnostic and the sceptic in you have been answered, for I have given you proofs within and without you, physical and subjective, which have satisfied you. When you go forth, speak to your nation always this word, that it is for the Sanatan Dharma that they arise, it is for the world and not for themselves that they arise. I am giving them freedom for the service of the world. When therefore it is said that India shall rise, it is the Sanatan Dharma that shall rise. When it is said that India shall be great, it is the Sanatan Dharma that shall be great. When it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is the Sanatan Dharma that shall expand and extend itself over the world. It is for the Dharma and by the Dharma that India exists. To magnify the religion means to magnify the country. I have shown you that I am everywhere and in all men and in all things, that I am in this movement and I am not only working in those who are striving for the country but I am working also in

those who oppose them and stand in their path. I am working in everybody and whatever men may think or do, they can do nothing but help in my purpose. They also are doing my work, they are not my enemies but my instruments. In all your actions you are moving forward without knowing which way you move. You mean to do one thing and you do another. You aim at a result and your efforts subserve one that is different or contrary. It is Shakti that has gone forth and entered into the people. Since long ago I have been preparing this uprising and now the time has come and it is I who will lead it to its fulfilment."

This then is what I have to say to you. The name of your society is "Society for the Protection of Religion". Well, the protection of the religion, the protection and upraising before the world of the Hindu religion, that is the work before us. But what is the Hindu religion? What is this religion which we call Sanatan, eternal? It is the Hindu religion only because the Hindu nation has kept it, because in this Peninsula it grew up in the seclusion of the sea and the Himalayas, because in this sacred and ancient land it was given as a charge to the Aryan race to preserve through the ages. But it is not circumscribed by the confines of a single country, it does not belong peculiarly and for ever to a bounded part of the world. That which we call the Hindu religion is really the eternal religion, because it is the universal religion which embraces all others. If a religion is not universal, it cannot be eternal. A narrow religion, a sectarian religion, an exclusive religion can live only for a limited time and a limited purpose. This is the one religion that can triumph over materialism by including and anticipating the discoveries of science and the speculations of philosophy. It is the one religion which impresses on mankind the closeness of God to us and embraces in its compass all the possible means by which man can approach God. It is the one religion which insists every moment on the truth which all religions acknowledge that He is in all men and all things and that in Him we move and have our being. It is the one religion which enables us not only to understand and believe this truth but to realise it with every part of our being. It is the one religion which shows the world what the world is, that it is the Lila of Vasudeva. It is the one religion which shows us how we can best play our part in that Lila, its subtlest laws and its noblest rules. It is the one religion which does not separate life in any smallest detail from religion, which knows what immortality is and has utterly removed from us the reality of death.

This is the word that has been put into my mouth to speak to you today. What I intended to speak has been put away from me, and beyond what is given to me I have nothing to say. It is only the word that is put into me that I can speak to you. That word is now finished. I spoke once before with this force in me and I said then that this movement is not a political movement and that nationalism is not politics but a religion, a creed, a faith. I say it again today, but I put it in another way. I say no longer that nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith; I say that it is the Sanatan Dharma which for us is nationalism. This Hindu nation was born with the Sanatan Dharma, with it it moves and with it it grows. When the Sanatan Dharma declines, then the nation declines, and if the Sanatan Dharma were capable of perishing, with the Sanatan Dharma it would

perish. The Sanatan Dharma, that is nationalism. This is the message that I have to speak to you.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Karmayogin*, SABCL, Vol. 2, pp. 1-10)

Where is the psychic being located?

It is behind the heart centre, deep in.

*

How to bring the psychic being in front? Can it be done by avoiding wrong movements?

That is the negative way; the positive way is obedience to the Divine, devotion, surrender.

*

Is it true that if the psychic being comes to the front all doubts and difficulties can be swiftly destroyed?

Yes.

*

Is it not possible to bring the psychic being forward without changing the mind and vital?

No. If they are unchanged they prevent the psychic from coming forward.

*

What is the difference between the spiritual and psychic consciousness?

The Spirit is the consciousness above mind, the Atman or Self, which is always in oneness with the Divine—a spiritual consciousness is one which is always in unity or at least in contact with the Divine.

The psychic is a spark come from the Divine which is there in all things and as the individual evolves it grows in him and manifests as the psychic being, the soul, seeking always for the Divine and the Truth and answering to the Divine and the Truth whenever and wherever it meets it.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Elements of Yoga*, pp. 36-38)

A NATIONAL PROBLEM

OF one thing we may be certain, that Hindu-Mahomedan unity cannot be effected by political adjustments or Congress flatteries. It must be sought deeper down and in the heart and in the mind, for where the causes of disunion are, there the remedies must be sought. We shall do well in trying to solve the problem to remember that misunderstanding is the most fruitful cause of our differences, that love compels love and that strength conciliates the strong. We must strive to remove the causes of misunderstanding by a mutual knowledge and sympathy; we must extend the unfaltering love of the patriot to our Musulman brother, remembering that in him too Narayana dwells and to him too our Mother has given a permanent place in her bosom; but we must cease to approach him falsely or flatter out of a selfish weakness and cowardice. We believe this to be the only practical way of dealing with the difficulty. As a political question the Hindu-Mahomedan problem does not interest us at all, as a national problem it is of supreme importance. We shall make it a main part of our work to place Mahomed and Islam in a new light before our readers, to spread juster views of Mahomedan history and civilisation, to appreciate the Musulman's place in our national development and the means of harmonising his communal life with our own, not ignoring the difficulties of brotherhood and mutual understanding. Intellectual sympathy can only draw together, the sympathy of the heart can alone unite. But the one is a good preparation for the other.

[N.B. This was written in 1909]

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Karmayogin*, SABCL, Vol. 2, p. 24)

*

HINDUISM

HINDUISM ... knew its purpose. It gave itself no name, because it set itself no sectarian limits; it claimed no universal adhesion, asserted no sole infallible dogma, set up no single narrow path or gate of salvation; it was less a creed or cult than a continuously enlarging tradition of the Godward endeavour of the human spirit. An immense many-sided many-staged provision for a spiritual self-building and self-finding, it had some right to speak of itself by the only name it knew, the eternal religion, *sanātana dharma*. It is only if we have a just and right appreciation of this sense and spirit of Indian religion that we can come to an understanding of the true sense and spirit of Indian culture.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 179)

SOME LETTERS

(Continued from the issue of October 2003)

In the morning I felt as if I had come out of a nether region and was inwardly below normal.

YOU must have gone down deeper into the subconscious in the sleep where the roots of these things are embedded.

What is the equivalent of fear in the Higher Nature? Is fear a universal force? What is its purpose?

There is no fear in the higher Nature. Fear is a creation of the vital plane, an instinct of the ignorance, a sense of danger with a violent vital reaction that replaces and usually prevents or distorts the intelligence of things. It might almost be considered as an invention of the hostile forces.

There was some drowsiness during the day; it was very difficult to come out of the inertia of the physical consciousness. Most of the thoughts were about the past. I see absolutely no change in the subconscious parts. How will they change and what will they change into?

The subconscious is to be penetrated by the light and made a sort of bedrock of truth, a store of right impressions, right physical responses to the Truth. Strictly speaking, it will not be subconscious at all, but a sort of bank of true values held ready for use.

30 April 1933

My idea is that Mother recognises a person first by aura and then by the physical being. On the 30th evening I must have looked with interest at people—specially women going about with new dresses nowadays—so when I saw her my condition was not right.

Yes, it is true that Mother recognises through the aura. It is true also that your atmosphere was not quite so concentrated as usual and the observing of the women was a factor.

Yesterday night I read the Taittiriya Upanishad with Nathuram Sharma's Gujarati commentary and translation. While reading it I found much of confusion of ideas, but what is more, some doubts came in about our yoga and some hostile or revolting thoughts. I had to give it up and read your letters from my notebook; then only some clarity came. How is it so?

I do not know about this Commentary, but most commentaries on the Upanishads are written out of the reasoning and speculating intellect. They may be of use to people who are trying to find out intellectually the meaning of the Upanishads—but they can be of no help to you as a sadhak who are seeking experience; it is likely rather to confuse the mind by taking it off the true basis and throwing it out from the road of experience and spiritual receptivity into the tangle of intellectual debate.

I sleep occasionally during the day at work. At night I wake up often, so I cannot judge whether the sleep is sufficient. There is a wish to sleep the whole day.

If the sleep is much broken, that may be the result. The body may remain dissatisfied and with a need to recover the deficiency by “sleeping it out”.

Much of what is inwardly given to me is spoilt by my interest in women going by. What kind of strength can dispel this interest since you have forbidden physical violence? I think to some extent it would be useful, and people before have done it.

It was done by some people, but I don't believe in its usefulness. No doubt the physical is an obstinate obstacle, but it must be enlightened, persuaded, pressed even to change, but not oppressed or violently driven. People use violence with the mind, vital, body because they are in a hurry, but my own observation has always been that it leads to more reactions and hindrances and not to a genuinely sound advance.

1 May 1933

In the transformed nature, would the physical energy for work come from the universal or is there a higher energy also?

During the course of the sadhana one can learn to draw upon the universal Life-Force and replenish the energies from it. But usually the best way is to learn to open oneself to the Mother's Force and become conscious of it supporting and moving or pouring into the system and giving the energy needed for the work whether it be mental, vital or physical.

There is naturally a higher Energy above the present universal forces and it is that which will transform the nature and take up the mental, vital, physical energies and change them into its own likeness.

It is said that the debt due to parents who have taken care of one in childhood and boyhood cannot be adequately repaid. Is it among the laws of Karma and does it obstruct sadhana in any way?

It is a law of human society, not a law of Karma. The child did not ask the father to bring him into the world—and if the father has done it for his own pleasure, it is the least he can

do to bring up the child. All these are social relations (and it is not at all a one-sided debt of the child to the father, either), but whatever they are, they cease once one takes to the spiritual life. For the spiritual life does not at all rest on the external physical relations; it is the Divine alone with whom one has then to do.

If it is difficult to repay the debt to one's parents, how much more difficult it is to attempt to repay the Divine Grace? What is the best possible way to do it?

The best possible way is to allow the Divine Grace to work in you, never to oppose it, never to be ungrateful and turn against it—but to follow it always to the goal of Light and Peace and unity and Ananda.

2 May 1933

Is not some of the process that I am following these days akin to the Pratyahara of Rajayoga?

You mean the drawing back from the movements of the outer consciousness? Perhaps—but the Rajayoga movement is for drawing back into silence and samadhi, while this is rather a taking up of the inner Witness consciousness.

Very often the points gained during the last month are forgotten. Is it due to lack of solid experience or concrete feeling? I think it is to a great extent mental.

It is really, I think, the physical consciousness that is responsible. It is forgetful and obscure and repeats always the old habitual movements even when the mind has abandoned them and the vital is quite willing to abandon them. But when the physical receives the old vibration, the lower vital is affected and responds—otherwise it would be merely a vibration and there would be no danger of its being accepted or affecting the conduct.

How is it that Patanjali has given an unusual definition of Yoga? "Yogas-chitta-vrittinirodha" is so dry and mechanical. Was Divine union not the aim in those days? In the sutra "Samadhirishwara pranidhanat" he puts Ishwara as an instrument for attaining Samadhi—as if the Divine were something on the way to Samadhi.

Divine union, yes—but for the ascetic schools it was union with the featureless Brahman, the Unknowable beyond existence or, if with the Ishwara, still it was the Ishwara in a supracosmic consciousness. From that point of view Patanjali's aphorism is sound enough. When he says Yoga he means the process of Yoga, the object which has to be kept in view in the process—for by the cessation of *chittavritti* one gets into *samadhi* and *samadhi* is the only way of unity solely and completely with the Brahman beyond existence.

Have the Asuric hostiles any religious or spiritual ideas? Do they live up to them or

simply throw them in to delude? How do the Asuras chiefly come in the way of the Divine's work at present?

Yes. Some kinds of Asuras are very religious, very fanatical about their religion, very strict about rules of ethical conduct. Others of course are just the opposite. There are others who use spiritual ideas without believing in them to give them a perverted twist and delude the sadhaka. It is what Shakespeare described as the Devil quoting Scripture for his own purpose.

At present what they are most doing is to try to raise up the obscurity and weakness of the most physical mind, vital, material parts to prevent the progress or fulfilment of the sadhana.

3 May 1933

Sometimes a faint doubt comes whether humanity in its present state will be able to respond to the "pressure" in this cycle. Is failure a possibility?

Failure of what? The whole of humanity cannot be changed at once. What has to be done is to bring the Higher Consciousness down into the earth-consciousness and establish it there as a constant realised force just as mind and life have been established and embodied in Matter, so to establish and embody the Supramental Force.

4 May 1933

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO

Thirty years finding his way to Pondicherry: six years as a sadhak, physician to the body's ills, experimenter with poetic composition in Bengali and English exploring the mystical, intuitive and the overmental, and presently twelve years with Sri Aurobindo as privileged attendant, secretary, an amanuensis to Mahakavi Sri Aurobindo reminiscent of Ganapati to Vyasa inditing the Mahabharata: and this magnificent chapter in the joint life of Nirod and Sri Aurobindo ended on 5 December 1950. For Nirod as for others, the loss seemed total at first, with no mitigation at all, and yet Faith and Grace conquered. Sri Aurobindo seemed to whisper 'I am here! I am here!', and the assurance to Nirod is also a universal assurance to all who have faith and wait on Grace.

(K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar in *Nirodbaran: Sadhak and Poet*, 1994)

VISION OF THE LETHE-DRINKER

IN a garden that had fallen out of Time
The pristine lily grew
Beside a stream; and roses in their prime,
Braziers of ruby, had embalmed the air
Through which no wing of darkening sorrow flew,—
But humming-birds, dream-hovering everywhere,
Had fled the tear-wet rainbow bough of Time.

December 8, 1934

ARJAVA

Sri Aurobindo's comment: It seems to me quite good especially the last lines.

To sit in meditation before a closed door, as though it were a heavy door of bronze—and one sits in front of it with the will that it may open—and to pass to the other side; and so the whole concentration, the whole aspiration is gathered into a beam and pushes, pushes, pushes, against this door, and pushes more and more with an increasing energy until all of a sudden it bursts open, and one enters. It makes a very powerful impression. And so one is as though plunged into the light and then one has the full enjoyment of a sudden and radical change of consciousness, with an illumination that captures one entirely, and the feeling that one is becoming another person. And this is a very concrete and very powerful way of entering into contact with one's psychic being.

The Mother

(Questions and Answers, 17 August 1955)

LOVE

What is the relation of human love to Divine love? Is the human an obstacle to the Divine love? Or is not rather the capacity for human love an index to the capacity for Divine love? Have not great spiritual figures, such as Christ, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, been remarkably loving and affectionate by nature?

LOVE is one of the great universal forces; it exists by itself and its movement is free and independent of the objects in which and through which it manifests. It manifests wherever it finds a possibility for manifestation, wherever there is receptivity, wherever there is some opening for it. What you call love and think of as a personal or individual thing is only your capacity to receive and manifest this universal force. But because it is universal, it is not therefore an unconscious force; it is a supremely conscious Power. Consciously it seeks for its manifestation and realisation upon earth; consciously it chooses its instruments, awakens to its vibrations those who are capable of an answer, endeavours to realise in them that which is its eternal aim, and when the instrument is not fit, drops it and turns to look for others. Men think that they have suddenly fallen in love; they see their love come and grow and then it fades—or, it may be, endures a little longer in some who are more specially fitted for its more lasting movement. But their sense in this of a personal experience all their own was an illusion. It was a wave from the everlasting sea of universal love.

Love is universal and eternal; it is always manifesting itself and always identical in its essence. And it is a Divine Force; for the distortions we see in its apparent workings belong to its instruments. Love does not manifest in human beings alone; it is everywhere. Its movement is there in plants, perhaps in the very stones; in the animals it is easy to detect its presence. All the deformations of this great and divine Power come from the obscurity and ignorance and selfishness of the limited instrument. Love, the eternal force, has no clinging, no desire, no hunger for possession, no self-regarding attachment; it is, in its pure movement, the seeking for union of the self with the Divine, a seeking absolute and regardless of all other things. Love divine gives itself and asks for nothing. What human beings have made of it, we do not need to say; they have turned it into an ugly and repulsive thing. And yet even in human beings the first contact of love does bring down something of its purer substance; they become capable for a moment of forgetting themselves, for a moment its divine touch awakens and magnifies all that is fine and beautiful. But afterwards there comes to the surface the human nature, full of its impure demands, asking for something in exchange, bartering what it gives, clamouring for its own inferior satisfactions, distorting and soiling what was divine.

To manifest the Divine love you must be capable of receiving the Divine love. For only those can manifest it who are by their nature open to its native movement. The wider and clearer the opening in them, the more they manifest love divine in its original purity; the more it is mixed with the lower human feelings, the greater is the deformation. One who is not open to love in its essence and in its truth cannot approach the Divine. Even

the seekers through knowledge come to a point beyond which if they want to go farther, they are bound to find themselves entering at the same time into love and to feel the two as one, knowledge the light of the divine union, love the very heart of knowledge. There is a place in the soul's progress where they meet and you cannot distinguish one from the other. The division, the distinction between the two that you make in the beginning are a creation of the mind: once you rise to a higher level, they disappear.

Among those who have come into this world seeking to reveal the Divine here and transform earthly life, there are some who have manifested the Divine love in a greater fullness. In some the purity of the manifestation is so great that they are misunderstood by the whole of humanity and are even accused of being hard and unloving, although the Divine love is there. But it is in them divine and not human in its form as in its substance. For when man speaks of love, he associates it with an emotional and sentimental weakness. But the divine intensity of self-forgetfulness, the capacity of throwing oneself out entirely, making no restriction and no reservation, as a gift, asking nothing in exchange, this is little known to human beings. And when it is there unmixed with weak and sentimental emotions, they find it hard and cold; they cannot recognise in it the very highest and intensest power of love.

The manifestation of the love of the Divine in the world was the great holocaust, the supreme self-giving. The Perfect Consciousness accepted to be merged and absorbed into the unconsciousness of matter, so that consciousness might be awakened in the depths of its obscurity and little by little a Divine Power might rise in it and make the whole of this manifested universe a highest expression of the Divine Consciousness and the Divine love. This was the supreme love, to accept the loss of the perfect condition of supreme divinity, its absolute consciousness, its infinite knowledge, to unite with unconsciousness, to dwell in the world with ignorance and darkness. And yet none perhaps would call it love; for it does not clothe itself in a superficial sentiment, it makes no demand in exchange for what it has done, no show of its sacrifice. The force of love in the world is trying to find consciousnesses that are capable of receiving this divine movement in its purity and expressing it. This race of all beings towards love, this irresistible push and seeking out in the world's heart and in all hearts, is the impulse given by a Divine love behind the human longing and seeking. It touches millions of instruments, trying always, always failing; but this constant touch prepares these instruments and suddenly one day there will awake in them the capacity of self-giving, the capacity of loving.

The movement of love is not limited to human beings and it is perhaps less distorted in other worlds than in the human. Look at the flowers and trees. When the sun sets and all becomes silent, sit down for a moment and put yourself into communion with Nature: you will feel rising from the earth, from below the roots of the trees and mounting upward and coursing through their fibres up to the highest outstretching branches, the aspiration of an intense love and longing,—a longing for something that brings light and gives happiness, for the light that is gone and they wish to have back again. There is a yearning so pure and intense that if you can feel the movement in the trees, your own being too will go up in an ardent prayer for the peace and light and love that are unmani-

fested here. Once you have come in contact with this large, pure and true Divine love, if you have felt it even for a short time and in its smallest form, you will realise what an abject thing human desire has made of it. It has become in human nature something low, brutal, selfish, violent, ugly, or else it is something weak and sentimental, made up of the pettiest feeling, brittle, superficial, exacting. And this baseness and brutality or this self-regarding weakness they call love!

Is our vital being to take part in the Divine love? If it does, what is the right and correct form of participation it should take?

Where is the manifestation of Divine love intended to stop? Is it to be confined to some unreal or immaterial region? Divine love plunges its manifestation upon earth down into the most material matter. It does not indeed find itself in the selfish distortions of the human consciousness; but the vital in itself is as important an element in Divine love as it is in the whole of the manifested universe. There is no possibility of movement and progress without the mediation of the vital; but because this Power of Nature has been so badly distorted, some prefer to believe that it has to be pulled out altogether and thrown away. But it is only through the vital that matter can be touched by the transforming power of the Spirit. If the vital is not there to infuse its dynamism and living force, matter will remain dead; for the higher parts of the being will not come into contact with earth, will not be concretised in life, and they will depart unsatisfied and disappear.

The Divine love of which I speak is a Love that manifests here upon this physical earth, in matter, but it must be pure of its human distortions, if it is to incarnate. The vital is an indispensable agent in this as in all manifestation. But as has happened always, the adverse powers have put their hold on this most precious thing. It is the energy of the vital that enters into dull and insensitive matter and makes it responsive and alive. But the adverse forces have distorted it; they have turned it into a field of violence and selfishness and desire and every kind of ugliness and prevented it from taking part in the divine work. The one thing to be done is to change it, not to suppress its movement or destroy it. For without it no intensity is possible anywhere. The vital is in its very nature that in us which can give itself away. Just because it is that which has always the impulse and the strength to take, it is also that which is capable of giving itself to the utmost; because it knows how to possess, it knows also how to abandon itself without reserve. The true vital movement is the most beautiful and magnificent of movements; but it has been twisted and turned into the most ugly, the most distorted, the most repulsive. Wherever into a human story of love, there has entered even an atom of pure love and it has been allowed to manifest without too much distortion, we find a true and beautiful thing. And if the movement does not last, it is because it is not conscious of its own aim and seeking; it has not the knowledge that it is not the union of one being with another that it is seeking after but the union of all beings with the Divine.

Love is a supreme force which the Eternal Consciousness sent down from itself into an obscure and darkened world that it might bring back that world and its beings to the Divine. The material world in its darkness and ignorance had forgotten the Divine.

Love came into the darkness; it awakened all that lay there asleep; it whispered, opening the ears that were sealed, "There is something that is worth waking to, worth living for, and it is love!" And with the awakening to love there entered into the world the possibility of coming back to the Divine. The creation moves upward through love towards the Divine and in answer there leans downward to meet the creation the Divine Love and Grace. Love cannot exist in its pure beauty, love cannot put on its native power and intense joy of fullness until there is this interchange, this fusion between the earth and the Supreme, this movement of Love from the Divine to the creation and from the creation to the Divine. This world was a world of dead matter, till Divine love descended into it and awakened it to life. Ever since it has gone in search of this divine source of life, but it has taken in its search every kind of wrong turn and mistaken way, it has wandered hither and thither in the dark. The mass of this creation has moved on its road like the blind seeking for the unknown, seeking but ignorant of what it sought. The maximum it has reached is what seems to human beings love in its highest form, its purest and most disinterested kind, like the love of the mother for the child. This human movement of love is secretly seeking for something else than what it has yet found; but it does not know where to find it, it does not even know what it is. The moment man's consciousness awakens to the Divine love, pure, independent of all manifestation in human forms, he knows for what his heart has all the time been truly longing. That is the beginning of the Soul's aspiration, that brings the awakening of the consciousness and its yearning for union with the Divine. All the forms that are of the ignorance, all the deformations it has imposed must from that moment fade and disappear and give place to one single movement of the creation answering to the Divine love by its love for the Divine. Once the creation is conscious, awakened, opened to love for the Divine, the Divine love pours itself without limit back into the creation. The circle of the movement turns back upon itself and the ends meet; there is the joining of the extremes, supreme Spirit and manifesting Matter, and their divine union becomes constant and complete.

Great beings have taken birth in this world who came to bring down here something of the sovereign purity and power of Divine love. The Divine love has thrown itself into a personal form in them that its realisation upon earth may be at once more easy and more perfect. Divine love, when manifested in a personal being, is easier to realise; it is more difficult when it is unmanifested or impersonal in its movement. A human being, awakened by this personal touch, with this personal intensity, to the consciousness of the Divine love, will find his work and change made more easy; the union for which he seeks becomes more natural and close. And the union, the realisation will become for him, too, more full, more perfect; for the wide uniformity of a universal and impersonal Love will be lit up and vivified with the colour and beauty of all possible relations with the Divine.

2 June 1929

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers*, CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 69-75. See also: A compilation by Georges van Vrekhem, *The Mother's Vision*, pp. 184-90)

THE MOTHER'S ASSERTIONS

Discovery of the Psychic—Be the Master of Your Life

... THERE are some solitary travellers [to discover the psychic] and for them a few general indications may be useful.

The starting-point is to seek in yourself that which is independent of the body and the circumstances of life, which is not born of the mental formation that you have been given, the language you speak, the habits and customs of the environment in which you live, the country where you are born or the age to which you belong. You must find, in the depths of your being, that which carries in it a sense of universality, limitless expansion, unbroken continuity. Then you decentralise, extend and widen yourself; you begin to live in all things and in all beings; the barriers separating individuals from each other break down. You think in their thoughts, vibrate in their sensations, feel in their feelings, live in the life of all. What seemed inert suddenly becomes full of life, stones quicken, plants feel and will and suffer, animals speak in a language more or less inarticulate, but clear and expressive; everything is animated by a marvellous consciousness without time or limit. And this is only one aspect of the psychic realisation; there are others, many others. All help you to go beyond the barriers of your egoism, the walls of your external personality, the impotence of your reactions and the incapacity of your will.

But, as I have already said, the path to that realisation is long and difficult, strewn with snares and problems to be solved, which demand an unfailing determination. It is like the explorer's trek through virgin forest in quest of an unknown land, of some great discovery. The psychic being is also a great discovery which requires at least as much fortitude and endurance as the discovery of new continents. A few simple words of advice may be useful to one who has resolved to undertake it.

The first and perhaps the most important point is that the mind is incapable of judging spiritual things.... in order to proceed on the path, it is absolutely indispensable to abstain from all mental opinion and reaction.

...Be only a burning fire for progress, take whatever comes to you as an aid to your progress and immediately make whatever progress is required.

Try to take pleasure in all you do, but never do anything for the sake of pleasure.

Never get excited, nervous or agitated. Remain perfectly calm in the face of all circumstances. And yet be always alert to discover what progress you still have to make and lose no time in making it.

Never take physical happenings at their face value....

Whatever you do never forget the goal which you have set before you. There is nothing great or small once you have set out on this great discovery; all things are equally important and can either hasten or delay its success....

...never forget the purpose and goal of your life. The will for the great discovery should be always there above you, above what you do and what you are, like a huge bird of light dominating all the movements of your being.

Before the untiring persistence of your effort, an inner door will suddenly open and you will emerge into a dazzling splendour that will bring you the certitude of immortality, the concrete experience that you have always lived and always shall live, that external forms alone perish and that these forms are, in relation to what you are in reality, like clothes that are thrown away when worn out. Then you will stand erect, freed from all chains, and instead of advancing laboriously under the weight of circumstances imposed upon you by Nature, which you had to endure and bear if you did not want to be crushed by them, you will be able to walk on, straight and firm, conscious of your destiny, master of your life.¹

Listening to the Inner Law

The true sense of Niraya* is that particular kind of atmosphere which one creates around oneself when one acts in contradiction, not with outer moral rules or social principles, but with the inner law of one's being, the particular truth of each one which ought to govern all the movements of our consciousness and all the acts of our body. The inner law, the truth of the being is the divine Presence in every human being, which should be the master and guide of our life.

When you acquire the habit of listening to this inner law, when you obey it, follow it, try more and more to let it guide your life, you create around you an atmosphere of truth and peace and harmony which naturally reacts upon circumstances and forms, so to say, the atmosphere in which you live. When you are a being of justice, truth, harmony, compassion, understanding, of perfect goodwill, this inner attitude, the more sincere and total it is, the more it reacts upon the external circumstances; not that it necessarily diminishes the difficulties of life, but it give these difficulties a new meaning and that allows you to face them with a new strength and a new wisdom; whereas the man, the human being who follows his impulses, who obey his desires, who has no time for scruples, who comes to live in complete cynicism, not caring for the effect that his life has upon others or for the more or less harmful consequences of his acts, creates for himself an atmosphere of ugliness, selfishness, conflict and bad will which necessarily acts more and more upon his consciousness and gives a bitterness to his life that in the end becomes a perpetual torment.²

Irrefutable Signs of Being in Relation with the Supramental

Two irrefutable signs prove that one is in relation with the supramental:

1. a perfect and constant equality,
2. an absolute certainty in the knowledge.

To be perfect, the equality must be invariable and spontaneous, effortless, towards

* Not to follow one's law of being is to live in hell. That is Niraya. —A. V.

all circumstances, all happenings, all contacts, material or psychological, irrespective of their character and impact.

The absolute and indisputable certainty of an infallible knowledge through identity.³

Supreme Need of Equality for the Supramental

I have observed since 1956, for years, that no supramental vibration can be transmitted except in this perfect equality. If there is the least opposition to this equality—in fact the least movement of ego, any preference of the ego, it does not come through, it is not transmitted....⁴

(Compiled by Arun Vaidya)

References

1. *On Education*, CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 32-35.
2. *On the Dhammapada*, CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 278-80.
3. *Words of the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 15, pp. 110-11.
4. *On Thoughts and Aphorisms*, CWM, Vol. 10, p. 114.

The will to the imperfect separative being, that wrong Tapas which makes the soul in Nature attempt to individualise itself, to individualise its being, consciousness, force of being, delight of existence in a separative sense, to have these things as its own, in its own right, and not in the right of God and of the universal oneness, is that which brings about this wrong turn and creates the ego. To turn from this original desire is therefore essential, to get back to the will without desire whose whole enjoyment of being and whole will in being is that of a free universal and unifying Ananda. These two things are one, liberation from the will that is of the nature of desire and liberation from the ego, and the oneness which is brought about by the happy loss of the will of desire and the ego, is the essence of Mukti.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 681)

THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS

(Continued from the issue of October 2003)

(8)

Mother Divine,

About the proposed flat, I have to say that if *You* want me to have it, I shall have it at all costs, not otherwise.

Although, sometimes, I make mistakes, I know within my heart of hearts that my choice should be *Your* choice.

That is why I pray *You* to put me exactly where *You* want to put me, and not I, in my ignorance, desire to put myself. So the question, now, is not of money but of *Your* Will.

With pranams,

Your child

10-10-67

Abani

*It will be very good to have a
flat in "Tiny House" — and
my blessings are
with you always*



It will be very good to have a flat in "Tiny-House"—and my blessings are with you always [.]

The Mother

(To be continued)

A LETTER FROM DYUMAN

Sri Aurobindo Ashram

Telegram

"AUROBINDO-PONDICHERRY"

PONDICHERRY - 605 002

.....19

21-6-91

Dear Arun,

17th June I received your letter
full of sweet feelings.

And I took it as the birthday
greetings to me for my day 19th June.

as I was indeed happy.

Not by accident we are coming together,
but it is ordained by the Omniscient Will
that we are coming together to be one
for the Divine Manifestation.

Dyuman.

21-6-91

Dear Arun

17th June I received your letter full of sweet feelings.

And I took it as the birthday greetings to me for my day 19th June and I was indeed
happy.

Not by accident we are coming together, but it is ordained by the Omniscient Will
that we are coming together and be one for the Divine Manifestation.

DYUMAN

AMAL KIRAN ON NIRODBARAN

For the occasion of Nirodbaran's centenary (November 17, 2003), some questions were put to Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna). His verbal answers are reproduced herewith.

Nirodbaran joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1933 and served Sri Aurobindo as a personal attendant for twelve years from 1938. He had the privilege of being Sri Aurobindo's scribe when he dictated *Savitri* to him. A prolific writer and accomplished poet in English and Bengali, Nirodbaran dedicated himself to the service of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Amal Kiran—a name given to him by Sri Aurobindo—first joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1927 and is himself a prolific author, poet, literary critic and artist. He has served the Ashram in several capacities. Since 1949 he has been the Editor of *Mother India*, a monthly review of culture.

Question: *In the early days when the Ashram was relatively new, “social norms” and collective life must have been quite different from what they are now. What was it like then?*

Amal Kiran: Life was simpler then, less crowded. People did not meet as much as they do nowadays. Each one was more occupied with his own sadhana. If we did meet, then we met in the Ashram itself, only rarely in each other's rooms. In fact, it was understood that we should not visit each other.

Q: *When Nirod-da arrived, he described himself as a “man of the world”. What do you remember of him in those days?*

A. K.: From those early days all I remember of Nirod is his talk about life in England and the kind of work he had done there. There was no particular reference to anybody. He was naturally interested in our life here and tried to share it. He had to adjust himself to the routine of our life here, as it must have differed a good deal from the one in England. He was troubled by the idea of going away.

Q: *Do you remember your first meeting with Nirod-da? What did you think of him?*

A. K.: We first met in the Dispensary. Nirod used to be the Ashram doctor at that time. So we first met in his capacity as a doctor. He would dispense some gargle to cure my sore throat and he would also give me injections with semi-blunt needles for little pimples in my eyes. He could be indignant with patients for being ill. Hence I called him “The Frowning Physician”. My first impression of Nirod was that of a natural friendliness; it was on the whole a good impression. He seemed to be an honest, dependable, consistent person. I felt I could depend on him. We were at ease with each other.

Q: *How did the two of you become friends? Besides poetry what brought the two of you together?*

A. K.: After our meetings in the Dispensary we made it a habit of meeting daily in Nirod's office on the first floor of Sri Aurobindo's house. We discussed poetry. We discussed mutual friends and—to a lesser degree—medicine. We were both aspiring poets. Sri Aurobindo's attention and attitude to our literary attempts were our main objects of interest. These meetings went on for several years. We became friends in connection with Sri Aurobindo's correspondence to each of us. We had a Master in common!

Q: *From the early correspondence, we gather there were discussions about Yoga, the Supermind, Death, Immortality, Sri Aurobindo's spiritual achievements, etc. How did you deal with these topics?*

A. K.: It was expected that Sri Aurobindo would not "die"—he would have the power to prolong life. We definitely believed that Sri Aurobindo could change his body. To change the body specifically is not quite the same as to prolong one's life. Most of the time we were talking about the Supermind. Somebody once remarked that we talked as though we carried the Supermind in our pockets and knew everything about it. Was there any manifestation of the Supermind in the physical of the sadhaks? The power to tackle illness was increased. But about Sri Aurobindo, I certainly believed that his body was undergoing change. Mother even asked us to try not to look at his body. People's curious gaze at Sri Aurobindo's body must have had an effect on its condition. Nirod used to be in intimate contact with Sri Aurobindo so he had the opportunity to see the weaknesses of his body, like its possible liability to accidents. Sri Aurobindo's keeping aloof from people struck us as part of the process of his bodily change.

When Sri Aurobindo passed away, it was a great shock and puzzle to all of us. We took it as if he had concentrated within his body the whole Death-power at work in the world. It was as if Death itself had died in the death of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo made a self-sacrifice. I have elaborated on this in my article "The Passing of Sri Aurobindo: Its Inner Significance and Consequence" which was first published in 1951.

Q: *Did you share your correspondence with each other? Can you give us an example?*

A. K.: We did not share our correspondence directly, but we used to share our literary correspondence. I came to see how Sri Aurobindo evoked the sleeping poet in Nirod. All of Nirod's letters to Sri Aurobindo ended with "Blessings from Nirod". I think he was the only one in the Ashram to do so.

Q: *In the 1930s there was a special force that inspired and helped creative work like poetry, music, literature, etc. We know that both of you worked and profited a lot by it. What was that period like?*

A. K.: It was a period of great interest to us, especially the mutual sharing of Sri Aurobindo's help and clarifications. We used to read each other's literary correspondence. As a sadhak, Nirod did not like to be drawn out of his concentration by queries from other people about their own sadhana.

Q: *With each friend we share something unique and wonderful. What is the unique thing you share with Nirod-da?*

A. K.: Poetry! We have a Master in common: Sri Aurobindo! Sri Aurobindo's trust and confidence in Nirod has influenced me deeply. Our friendship has helped in our literary aims, our literary natures.

Q: *How has your friendship changed over the years?*

A. K.: The occasions of meeting are less now. But the inner relationship remains the same.

Q: *Of the sadhaks from the early days, only Nirod-da and you remain. Nirod-da had been in physical contact with Sri Aurobindo and you by way of corresponding with Sri Aurobindo. Do the two of you ever reminisce?*

A. K.: We do not talk about old times as we do not realise that we are the only two sadhaks left who were in contact with Sri Aurobindo. We basically talk about Sri Aurobindo's letters—the letters dealing with Yoga and poetry. We discuss certain details of poetry.

Q: *Did Nirod-da tell you how he received inspiration while writing poetry? What form did it take (images, colours, etc.)?*

A. K.: He used to ask Sri Aurobindo to send him inspiration and he would write to Sri Aurobindo whatever happened as a result. The inspiration came in the form of words.

Q: *Is there a difference in the quality of inspiration with respect to the plane from which it descends?*

A. K.: Generally, we did not know ourselves which plane the inspiration came from. It was Sri Aurobindo who would tell us. I remember Sri Aurobindo writing to Nirod that they would cooperate and that he would receive greater and rarer inspirations. Each plane lends its own particular imagery and peculiar turns of phrase. If one is familiar with these from each plane, one can recognise the plane in general. There may be a general indication, but to be precise about the source is difficult. Certain planes send their messages more easily than others.

Q: *Do you have any favourites among his poems or songs?*

A. K.: All were favourites. Of one of his poems, the phrase "A dying warrior's last half-uttered word" has stuck in my mind.

Q: *The correspondence gives us a clear picture of his relationship with Sri Aurobindo. How was his relationship with the Mother?*

A. K.: Nirod had a special relationship with Sri Aurobindo. The Mother saw them like two babies playing with each other on a bed.

Q: *Nirod-da held so many occupations in the Ashram: carpentry, medical services, teaching, writing, serving the Lord, etc. Any special memory of him?*

A. K.: I remember him supervising the carpentry work that took place next to my house. As a doctor, he did not like to be bothered very much with people's complaints about their illnesses.

Q: *Both you and Nirod-da had a unique and special association with Savitri. Did you share your experiences relating to this?*

A. K.: I think so. When we met, we must have talked of our experiences.

Q: *In your opinion, how will Nirod-da inspire future generations?*

A. K.: There will be many people in a state like he was in; they will certainly learn from the advantage he got from his relationship with Sri Aurobindo. There will be some who will have a similar or the same bent of nature and temperament as Nirod's. They surely will learn a good deal from the correspondence between Sri Aurobindo and him.*

* Nirodbaran will be a centenarian this month, on 17 November. Our congratulations to him and always the best wishes to be in the Mother's love and sweetness.

DIVINE FIRE

Now falls the golden orb of light
 Burning in a burnished sky
 Slowly yielding to the night
 The fire that our souls live by.

O Sun of our illumining
 Linger not long from earthly sight
 For love in us aspiring
 Would free the spirit of delight

To dance upon the altar-stone
 In Agni's purifying blaze
 Flaming down from the Alone
 All human imperfections raze,

Eternity find in every cell
 And in thy solar splendour dwell.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

NIRODBARAN'S TWELVE YEARS

(Continued from the issue of October 2003)

PERTINENT to this aspect is the brief but significant reference to the special interviews granted during later years by Sri Aurobindo to some of the prominent political figures of the time, dignitaries like K. M. Munshi, Sir C. R. Reddy, Surendra Mohan Ghose, etc. We must also mention here that Surendra Mohan was very keen that Sri Aurobindo should consent to have an interview with Mahatma Gandhi which he did but, unfortunately, it did not materialise. "Fate stepped in and foiled what could have been a momentous meeting," says Nirodbaran. Perhaps it was not meant to be. Our author also tells us that he is giving these details on purpose, in order to "dispel our ignorant notions that Yogis live in a rarefied atmosphere of the Spirit and are indifferent to what passes on this plane of Matter; we forget that Spirit and Matter are two ends of existence." There were also a number of important letters Sri Aurobindo had dictated during this period.

Apropos of India's partition and the forces that worked behind it we have the account by K. M. Munshi based on what Sri Aurobindo had told him in the course of the interview in 1950. But to get the perspective fully let us first read a part of his message to the nation on 15 August 1947. Sri Aurobindo had foreseen free and united India in the acceptance of Cripps's proposals. It didn't happen and consequently partition became inevitable. "...the old communal division into Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that the Congress and the nation will not accept the settled fact as forever settled or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest." India's integrity and spiritual destiny always remained Sri Aurobindo's concern. In the course of the interview, Munshi was taken aback when Sri Aurobindo surprised him with the unexpected question: "When do you expect India to be united?" He himself then said: "India will be united. I see it clearly. Pakistan has been created by falsehood, fraud and force. It must be brought under India's military ambit." He went out of his way and spoke of the military ambit.

Today we dismiss those words as time-barred, forgetting that he had put his yogic force in them in the context of what he saw as falsehood and fraud. By forgetting them, we are entrenching ourselves more and more into falsehood and fraud. We are strengthening falsehood and fraud more and more. Has the power which Sri Aurobindo put in his words disappeared? Or is it that we are putting more and more obstacles in its working?

In this context we have to only remember the Nehru-Liaquat Pact and the Pakistan government's refusal to sign a joint declaration stating that in no event should there be recourse to war. This was on the political level; we don't know things that were present in the occult world. Therefore when Sri Aurobindo spoke of the military ambit then it means that there was a distinct possibility at that time, but it didn't materialize,—because the lamps were not kept trimmed in the Hour of God, because we were not ready to receive

the gifts of the three Mothers, because we had no conviction in the words of the Avatar.

But we should not take Sri Aurobindo as "Read-Only Text" frozen for all time without the contents of dynamism in time. We should lend ourselves to its dynamism, to its mantric efficacy. In a letter about that time Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple that India's marching to East Bengal and war in Kashmir would have resulted in the end of Pakistan. "The object we had in view would have been within the sight of achievement." It is at times said that in the present conditions it makes more sense to work to achieve a culture of spiritual unity in India rather than the unification of India and Pakistan. But to speak of spirituality where there is falsehood is to be ignorant of things.

Let us recall one of the early conversations of Sri Aurobindo with his disciples as recorded by A. B. Purani in the Evening Talks, 1923. It brings out one specific aspect of the Hindu-Muslim unity. About the Muslims, Sri Aurobindo says that their fanatic faith in their religion is harmful to everybody, even for themselves. It is necessary that they inculcate liberal ideas, of right and liberty. The mildness of the Hindus has always given way in the face of the Muslim aggressive approach. The best solution would be to allow the Hindus to organize themselves and the Hindu-Muslim unity would take care of itself; it would automatically solve the problem. Here is the clue available to us. Though spoken in 1923, its fundamental truth, of liberal ideas for the Muslims and the Hindus organizing themselves, remains valid even today.

In contrast to that Mahatma Gandhi had different views. Take the example of the Ottoman Empire. It was breaking down at the end of the First World War. But in India it was seen as a blow to the prestige of Islam. Therefore, it became a part of political calculation to oppose the move. Thus was born the harmful Khilafat movement. In the context of the freedom struggle Mahatma Gandhi writes about it as follows: "To the Musalmans Swaraj means, as it must, India's ability to deal effectively with the Khilafat question." He further adds: "It is impossible not to sympathise with this attitude... I would gladly ask for postponement of the Swaraj activity if we could advance the interest of the Khilafat." What was in the Ottoman Empire that we should have sold ourselves for it? When the Western world was making tremendous strides in different branches of learning, in science, technology, industry, commerce, here was a decadent regime that had outlived its purpose. Khilafat could not be more precious than Swaraj. In it India's freedom had a lower priority. In it India was denied India's nationhood. This was unfortunate, if not calamitous.

There is a constant refrain in the Quran: "All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorifieth Allah, and he is the Mighty, the Wise." Mahakali-Maheshwari aspects are immediately recognized in this, but the absence of the other two powers brings imbalance in social organization. Which means that in the unregenerate state of society the Mahakali power gets appropriated by the Asuric forces.

Sri Aurobindo saw the necessity of the freedom of India differently. For him India was not an inert piece of matter. He saw in her a mighty Shakti. He called that Shakti India. She was for him Bhavani Bharati. He knew her as the Mother and worshipped her so. How could he rest content if she remained chained? How could he postpone her

freedom even for a day? He entered into politics to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom. When he saw that the freedom of India was an assured fact he moved on to greater issues, issues of existence itself. For that he attempted all and in the process achieved all. He invoked the supreme grace to descend and transform the lot of our mortality. The grace has come down to bestow on us the boons of her plenty and prosperity. We have to only open ourselves to her wonderful gifts of happiness. That is the expectation from us.

And what about the Karma we have generated during the years when we had amongst us the physical presence of the Avatar himself? We ignored him in two ways. These Karmas now become more difficult to remove and shall be more and more so if we perpetuate our stupid, inert, ugly, crude actions.

Let us remember Hamlet in the proper Aurobindonian context:

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
 ...we fools of nature
 So horridly to shake our disposition
 With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
 ... what should we do?

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
 Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

It will be therefore nonsensical to talk of spiritual Pakistan when we know what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother said about it. This becomes more and more clear as we read with attention Nirodbaran's *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*.

In this context it is worth making known Sri Aurobindo's personal interest in the fortnightly *Mother India* that was primarily started to reflect his views on political matters. Those days the fortnightly was coming out from Bombay and its disciple-editor K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) used to send his articles to Sri Aurobindo. Only after he had approved of these were they published. These editorials have now been compiled and brought out in book-form, *India and the World Scene*. Sri Aurobindo privately called this periodical "My Paper". While Amal Kiran's articles were found impeccable, "on a few occasions small but significant changes were telegraphically made."

Nirodbaran's chapter on *Savitri* is invaluable in several respects. We begin to get an idea of the long arduous way the poet's magnum opus proceeded for several years, almost up to the end of his physical presence upon the earth. It was without a doubt a "God's Labour" which perhaps we would not have been able to discern in the absence of *Twelve Years*. Nirodbaran had the "unique good fortune to see Sri Aurobindo working on the epic on its entire revised version" and therefore the details bear the authenticity of a first-hand description. He begins the presentation as follows: "It is my task in this chapter to give a factual account of the long process that had led to *Savitri* in its final form. As the grand epic has captured many hearts all over the world by its supernal beauty I thought

that they would be much interested in the history of its growth, development and final emergence—the birth of the Golden Child.” We should indeed be very appreciative of the manner in which the narrator presents the composition of the epic as it progressed during the 1940s. His “factual account”, howsoever sketchy or non-professional it might appear to us, is of importance in more than a few particulars. To say that Sri Aurobindo would have least bothered to write anything of the sort regarding his *Savitri*’s arrival on the physical plane might not be altogether wrong. Yet there would have remained about it our natural curiosity unfulfilled. The picture drawn by Nirodbaran has now to some extent satisfied this understandable desire of ours. But what is more significant about this picture is its warmth and intimacy, its psychic feeling that takes us closer to its creator. Not that from the mass of manuscripts some idea of it could not have been formed, but that would have been a reconstruction of the former scene, loaded with all mental or scholarly notions about it. It is in that respect that Nirodbaran’s stands apart from all descriptions of the composition of *Savitri*.

Sri Aurobindo had taken the theme of *Savitri* for his poetic presentation perhaps as early as in his Baroda days. It follows closely the description of the *Pativrata Mahatmya* as we have in the Mahabharata. At that time the poem was simply called *Savithri*. This narrative easily falls in the category of other two poems *Urvashi* and *Love and Death* written during that period. However, there seems to be some uncertainty about it. But we are certain that the first available draft was written during 1916-18 belonging to the *Arya* period. The second version is called *Savithri, A Tale and a Vision*. The *Arya*-period version had practically remained unattended for more than fifteen years when he took it up again in the early 1930s and we do not know when exactly *Savitri, A Legend and a Symbol* was found as the present title for the epic. It will be interesting to know how the *Tale* became a *Legend* and the *Vision* a *Symbol*. Sri Aurobindo dictated the last set of passages of *Savitri* just three weeks before his passing away in 1950. Of course, the 1940s was the period when he concentrated on it the most. In its golden spiritual fire, Yogagni, took the birth of the radiant daughter, *kanyā tejasvinī*, that *Savitri* is. Sri Aurobindo had called it as his “main work”, undoubtedly more in its occult-spiritual rather than literary sense. It is in this context that we should dismiss ignorant or arrogant or prejudiced statements that *Savitri* even if it were to be considered as “an impressive attempt” is “an impressive failure”, as does Kathleen Raine. Let us, however, recall the Mother’s exposé about it. She says that Sri Aurobindo has “crammed the whole universe in a single book. It is a marvellous, magnificent work and of an incomparable perfection... It is a revelation, a meditation and a seeking of the Infinite and the Eternal. Each verse of *Savitri* is like a mantra which surpasses man’s entire knowledge... Everything is there: mysticism, occultism, philosophy, history of evolution, history of man, gods of the creation and Nature... *Savitri* is the spiritual path, the Tapasya, Sadhana... It has an extraordinary power, it is the Truth in all its plenitude that he has brought down here on earth.” Its poetry is in the power of the inspired and inevitable word which can be understood only in the depths of a luminous silence.

During the last phase of the *Savitri*-composition several earlier drafts were taken

up and extensively revised, even as new sections or cantos were added mostly by dictation as the work progressed. While we can perfectly understand the nature of this procedure, it should also be borne in mind that it has, at a number of places, led to serious problems of editing. These get compounded when we also take note of the fact that the revisions were made even at the last proofreading stages. It is rather unfortunate that these press-proofs are not now available for critically checking the text. This has led to conflicting view-points at times hurting the sentiments of devotees or else judiciously remaining faithful to the texts while going through them in the course of editing. In the circumstances, the best one can perhaps do is to go by the first complete version that appeared in two volumes in 1950-51. Part One of the epic was published in September 1950, before Sri Aurobindo's passing away in December of that year, and Part II and Part III as the second volume within months of that day, in May 1951. To take care of the early slips that might have occurred in this edition extensive research notes can be provided in a supplementary archival document; these might profitably include several readings as we have in different drafts. Presentation of data should be the main concern in this respect. It is to be well appreciated that carrying out such an exhaustive job can never be an easy archival task; but, then, possibly that is the only kind of an undertaking which would do some justice to the poem as well as to the poet. For an alert or perceptive reader of tomorrow this archival data will prove to be a help of immense value. When followed, it will also have the merit of avoiding the charge of introducing in the edited text one's own likings and dislikings, one's natural subjective notions regarding matters poetic or spiritual. By presenting such "factual" details of research on the *Savitri*-drafts a new chapter of study can open out to enter into its spirit in another way. It is believed that this procedure will be in tune with the spirit in which the *Savitri*-chapter appears in Nirodbaran's *Twelve Years*. I am sure that Nirodbaran will be happy about it.

Why did Sri Aurobindo leave us? Did he accomplish the yogic work he had come to do? Was there an occult necessity for him to arrive at the decision to leave the body? Was he compelled to do that? Our author towards the end of the book has touchingly presented this aspect. While going through his account—God Departs—one is immediately reminded of the last days of Socrates. But who can really gauge the significance and meaning, the full connotation of the great sacrifice he had made for a decisive evolutionary advance of the terrestrial existence? "We stand in the Presence of Him who has sacrificed his physical life in order to help more fully his work of transformation." This is how, by quoting the Mother's utterance of 18 January 1951, Nirodbaran reassures us about Sri Aurobindo always being with us. Indeed, as the Mother herself has said, in the act of leaving the body, he "attempted all and achieved all." But there are layers below puzzling layers and from an occult point of view the following passage conceals more than what it is trying to reveal: "According to Bhṛigu Astrology, Sri Aurobindo after his 78th year would develop a loathing towards his body and then would leave it; otherwise death was in his control... It was also mentioned that the Mother or himself could perform a certain *yajna*, sacrificial ceremony, repeating certain mantras followed by other elaborate instructions. On hearing this Surendra Mohan immediately came here and informed the Mother about it. When

Sri Aurobindo heard of it, he consoled him saying 'Don't worry.' The Mother asked him to send a copy of those instructions but due to some misunderstanding they arrived too late to be of any possible use." It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery which is always an enigma.

"The Supramental is a Truth and its advent in the very nature of things inevitable." This is a yogic assertion of the Divine, implemented in a decisive way on the 5th December.

What we unmistakably see in *Twelve Years* is a deep reverential feeling for the Avatar of the Supermind who came here to accomplish this difficult miracle of transformation and for which he himself performed the Purusha-Yajna hymned gloriously in the Rig Veda.

But the other term of this Yajna is the Holocaust of Prakriti. How can the miracle be accomplished without the participation of the divine Shakti herself in it? He wills; she executes. Nirodbaran brings to mind several personal reminiscences of the Mother but the most important is, what we may call the concern of the Mother for Sri Aurobindo, —as it is as much the other way round too. She had arranged everything for him up to the last detail and saw that nothing was left to chance. In turn, although Sri Aurobindo had stopped writing prose towards the end, concentrating as he was essentially on *Savitri*, the poem of his supreme vision, a supreme revelation as the Mother had pronounced, he wrote at her request a series of articles for the newly started *Bulletin* of the Centre of Education. Establishment of the Intermediate Race, governed by the Mind of Light as a precursor towards the arrival of the Superman proper, is the yogic Siddhi that has become for the earth's soul a part of the evolutionary gain.

Nirodbaran has succeeded remarkably well in bringing out several of these aspects in his book. We are particularly struck by the personal details of the Yogi of the Infinite, the Infinite himself. This has also demolished the old *idée fixe* that "Sri Aurobindo was an anchorite who did not know how to smile or laugh." The note we hear in the whole composition is of mellifluence and joy, even in the parts which sing of sad tidings. "We hear his voice, get his touch, protection, active intervention. The Mother has told me," lets us know Nirodbaran, "more than once that she always saw Sri Aurobindo busy with me." Yes, he is always here if only we know how to approach him. That is the kind of certitude we acquire when we remain in *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*. Nirodbaran has made available to us the Infinite in a sweet and charming manner. Indeed, we can best summarise this in the words of the Mother herself: "Thanks to Nirod, we have a revelation of an altogether unknown side of what Sri Aurobindo was."

(Concluded)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

Congratulations, Nirod-da, to be always with us in the fondness of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. — R. Y. D.

NIROD-DA—HIS CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

HAPPY centennial birthday to you, Nirod-da. Today we adore you for your precious correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, our Lord and Guru. It is a treasure not only to us but also for the rest of the world.

After Sri Aurobindo's retirement, dictated by an inner necessity, he said: "My sadhana is yet far from fulfillment. To bring the highest truth down to the earth I have to dig into deeper depth."¹ His arduous sadhana marks, however, the beginning of a new phase of his activity in the external field. He had assured his disciples that he had not totally or finally retired into his spiritual shell. Within a relatively short time he convinced them of his intentions. The inner or the spiritual is the essence, and the outer derives its value and form from the inner view. About his own retirement most people supposed, that Sri Aurobindo had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the life. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his yoga is not only to realise the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world-activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action, and to base life on the spirit and give it a spiritual meaning. In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened, whenever necessary, but solely in a spiritual way and with silent spiritual action; for it is a part of the experience of those who have advanced in yoga that, besides the ordinary forces and activities of the mind and life and body, in matter there are other forces and powers that can and do act from behind and from above; there is also a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in spiritual consciousness, though all do not care to possess or to use it, and this power is greater than any other and more effective.

Every aspect of human interest is covered in Nirodbaran's Correspondence. It is no exaggeration to say that no question has been left unasked by his disciples nor left unanswered by the Guru. In keeping with his declared outlook that "All Life is Yoga", every aspect of life, from the most commonplace to the most profound is touched upon in these letters; no subject is too insignificant, no question too bizarre.

At one moment the disciple writes under the spell of vital exaltation as if he were only one rung lower than Sri Aurobindo himself and the next moment he writes under the throes of utter depression and despair and is too ready to get into the mood of Arjuna's "*na yotsye*".

Through their correspondence a new type of contact between Sri Aurobindo and Nirodbaran developed from 1933, lasting till November 1938, when Sri Aurobindo met with an accident and injured his right leg as a result of which the correspondence came to an end. Thereafter Nirodbaran became Sri Aurobindo's attendant.

"Nirodbaran sent 3 notebooks at a time: private, medical and literary. So the reader may sometimes find a single day's correspondence jumping from one subject to another.

"The correspondence was left for Sri Aurobindo before 8 p.m. at the head of the staircase in the Meditation Hall.

"Sri Aurobindo used to consult the Mother on questions regarding the sadhana and practical matters. He sat up in an armchair, going through the correspondence of the disciples till the early hours of the morning, in the hall below the Mother's second-floor room (which was built much later). The next day the 'divine post' was handed over to Nolani for distribution to the disciples."²

The Mother has said about *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*: "Thanks to Nirod, we have a revelation of an altogether unknown side of what Sri Aurobindo was." Similarly we can claim about this book that another latent side of the Master's personality has been revealed to us. In fact, when the previous edition of the book was read out to the Mother, she often used to laugh for sheer delight and was impressed by it so much that she made more than one reference to it in the *Agenda*. She said that Sri Aurobindo was all the time laughing and she said to Nirodbaran, "He has given you everything!" Letters on Karma-yoga had a special interest for her and she wanted them by her side to show them to the sadhaks.

"One is happily surprised to find here not Sri Aurobindo of the Himalayan grandeur and aloofness, but a modern Shakespeare of spiritual sublimity and jollity. Discussion, argument leavened with a sweet temper, witty passages of arms, mental duels, banter, persiflage, rollicking laughter, repartees, swear-words, then all on a sudden a switching off to solemn and serious topics, all written at lightning speed, and if any answer was not completed for shortage of time (apprehending that the Mother would be late for the morning pranam) a request for the note-book back again next day—these are the contents of his opulent offering."³

Nirodbaran reports: "Every morning when the 'Divine Post' came down and I knocked at Nolani's window for the 'window delivery', my heart would leap in joy in anticipation of the manna poured from above. And I was rarely sent away empty-handed. The nectar flowed through a number of years. That made me write to him a bit of burlesque:

We are not worshippers of you,
But your immortal letter;
We do not worship the dumb blue
But His resplendent Star.

"Sri Aurobindo wrote back about lines 2 and 4: 'Good Lord! I hope you don't imagine that is a rhyme.'⁴

In Sri Aurobindo's letters it is easier to appreciate the personal touch, with the humour and humanity, as well as the universal application. The letters like the one Sri Aurobindo wrote to Dilip on the "logic of his doubts" being impeccably phrased in rhythms akin to those of subdued but nervous conversational speech, play upon one's tongue with disarming ease and friendliness and force. But it is in exchanges like the following that Guru-Sishya relationship is brought out, mingling the bantering and the sublime with delighted freedom:

The modern age has produced a modern Guru who could deal with each sadhak according to his nature. When I asked from what perennial fount flowed so much laughter, his cryptic answer was the Upanishadic *raso vai sah* (Verily He is Delight). In the whole of spiritual history I know of no Guru-Shishya relationship in which the Guru of venerable age and vast learning has given such unlimited liberty to the disciple, so that I could challenge his Karmayoga doctrine, refuse to accept his own example as having any validity for common people like us, carry on a long-drawn-out argument on Homeopathy vs Allopathy, etc, etc. in all the exchanges what was remarkable was his calm and cool temper, yogic *samatā*, inexhaustible patience and above all his sunny humour pervading the entire correspondence. At times he asked to be excused for the bantering tone he could not resist when his own Karmayoga based on experience was tilted at. Very freely he used swear-words for the sake of fun or perhaps to shock the puritan temper. I was occasionally on the perilous brink of irreverence. When people complained of it, he replied, “I return the compliment—I mean, reply without restraint, decorum or the right grave rhythm. That is why I indulge so freely in brackets.”

As regards subject matter he gave me a wide field to range over. Supermind, literature, art, religion, spirituality, Avatarhood, love, women, marriage, medical matters, sex-gland, any topical questions such as goat-sacrifice in Kalighat, Bengal political atrocities, sectarian fanaticism, hungerstrike, India’s freedom etc. etc. were my rich pabulum....

Now, the question arises: what was the purpose of it all? At one stage, Sri Aurobindo declared that he wanted to intellectualise and logicise my “wooden head”. But that would be a very short-sighted human view of the Divine’s multi-dimensional work. I am reminded, however, of a narrative poem by Tagore about Guru Govind Singh. The Sikh Guru adopted a Pathan boy whose father he had killed in a flare of temper. He brought him up well-versed up in all Shastras and proficient in the art of warfare. Every morning and evening the old valorous Guru used to play with the boy as with his own son. His disciples, much alarmed, warned him not to indulge in this dangerous game, since he was a tiger-cub. However kindly and diligently trained, he would not change his nature! “When he grows up, do remember that his paws will be piercingly sharp,” they added. The Guru replied, “If I fail to make the cub grow into a tiger, then what have I taught him?”⁵

About Sri Aurobindo’s wit and humour:

To most of his disciples Sri Aurobindo was the Avatar of Supramental Wisdom. To me he manifested himself at first as the Avatar of Supramental Humour. Perhaps he saw that he could catch this ‘medical gent’, as he once dubbed me, only in this way. A masterpiece of spiritual philosophy like the *The Life Divine* would be entirely lost upon me. In fact, both Dr. Manilal and I complained of its ‘unintelligibility’. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo that since I could not get anyone with whom to study it, I would have to fall back upon myself. He replied: ‘You might try. Read an

unintelligible para from the *L.D.*, then sit in vacant meditation and see what comes from the intuitive Gods. They will probably play jokes with you, but what does it matter? One learns by one's errors and marches to success through one's failures.'

In this manner my rugged Yogic journey proceeded through the varied plains, heights and abysses of Yoga, fields of Medicine, Poetry, etc. And he followed me throughout, sustaining me with his sunny humour, his gentle raillery, sometimes in a long letter, sometimes in a sentence, a phrase, a word, even a punctuation mark. He invited me to duels, giving me all chances of victory but ending with my 'genial massacre'. On the other hand, if provoked, he almost always took up the challenge and met it either by an elaborate campaign or, if time was short, by a single decisive stroke.

I have used the expression "Avatar of Supramental Humour". If we took into account all the fun in his drama, *The Viziers of Bassora*, in his Bengali booklet *Kara Kahini* on his jail-life, and particularly in his voluminous correspondence with Dilip, Amal and me, I think we would be tempted to say that he surpassed even Shakespeare, at least that he reminded us strongly of the great English poet. It is said of Shakespeare that poetry in him always flowed. About Sri Aurobindo's writings, beginning with his *Bande Mataram* period, the same truth holds. And about his correspondence it is well known that in the early years of the Ashram every night he used to spend on it eight to ten hours, answering at a vertiginous speed the letters of over a hundred and fifty inmates. Now, if all this were written from the mind, it would be an impossible feat. Read all his correspondence, remembering the conditions under which it was penned and the conclusion will be irresistible that no human faculty was in operation here.

Now I shall give concrete instances, the proof of the pudding. Let me start with a specimen from Dilip, who at that time was a great fan of Bertrand Russell. Dilip writes: 'I must quote here in full the first letter he wrote, shedding the solace of his humour on my badly hurt head. This happened in 1933.'

'You struck your head against the upper sill of the door our engineer Chandulal fixed in your room?' Sri Aurobindo wrote. 'A pity, no doubt, but remember that Chandulal's dealings with the door *qua* door were scientifically impeccable: the only thing he forgot was, that people of various sizes should pass through it. If you regard the door from the Russellian *objective* point of view as an external thing in which you must take pleasure for its own sake, then this will be brought home to you, and you will see that it was quite all right. It is only when you bring in irrelevant subjective considerations like people's demands on a door and the pain of a stunned head, that objections can be made. However, in spite of philosophy, the Mother will speak to Chandulal in the morning and get him to do what has (practically not philosophically) to be done. May I suggest, however, if it is any consolation to you, that our Liliputian engineer perhaps measured things by his own head, forgetting that there were in the Ashram higher heads and broader shoulders?'⁶

Here are a few short letters from the *Correspondence* :

MYSELF: *You wrote the other day that you had lived dangerously. All we know is that you did not have enough money in England, also in Pondicherry in the beginning. In Baroda you had a handsome pay and in Calcutta you were quite well off.*

SRI AUROBINDO: I was so astonished by this succinct, complete and impeccably accurate biography of myself that I let myself go in answer! But I afterwards thought that it was no use living more dangerously than I am obliged to do. So I rubbed all out. My only answer now is !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I thank you for the safe, rich, comfortable and unadventurous career you have given me. I note also that the only danger man can run in this world is that of the lack of money. Karl Marx himself could not have made a more economic world of it! But I wonder whether that was what Nietzsche meant by “living dangerously”.

*

MYSELF: *You refuse to be a Guru and decline to be a Father, though ladies especially think of you and call you by the latter name. If they know that you refuse and decline, I shall have to run from one lady to another with smelling salts.*

SRI AUROBINDO: Father is too domestic and Semitic—Abba Father! I feel as if I had suddenly become a twin brother of the Lord Jehovah. Besides, there are suggestions of a paternal smile and a hand uplifted to smite; which don't suit me. Let the ladies “father” me if smelling salts are the only alternative, but let it not be generalised.

*

MYSELF: *What does your newspaper say about Abyssinia? Another “black country” swallowed-up by the “whites”, “prayers to God of no avail”!*

SRI AUROBINDO: Why all this sentimental fury? This and worse has been happening ever since mankind replaced and improved on the ape and the tiger. So long as men are what they are, these things will happen. What do you expect God to do about it? The Abyssinians have conquered others, Italy conquers the Abyssinians, other people had conquered the Italians and they will probably be sat upon again hereafter. It is the law, sir, and the great wheel and everything else. Keep your head cool in the heat. If you want to change things you have to change humanity first and, I can assure you, you will find it a job—yes, even to change 150 people in an Ashram and get them to surmount their instincts.

*

MYSELF: *Last night I tried to compose a poem. It was a failure. I fell asleep over its first two lines.*

SRI AUROBINDO: You call it a failure when you have discovered a new soporific?

*

MYSELF: *I hear from a reliable authority that the Supramental Descent is very near. Is it time, Sir?*

SRI AUROBINDO: I am very glad to hear it on reliable authority. It is a *great* relief.

*

MYSELF: ... *am plunged into a sea of dryness and terribly thirsty for something. Along with it waves of old desires. Any handy remedy?*

SRI AUROBINDO: “Eucharistic injection from above, purgative rejection below, liquid diet, psychic fruit juice, milk of the spirit.”

*

MYSELF: *For this Yoga one must have the heart of a lion, the mind of Sri Aurobindo, the vital of Napoleon.*

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord! Then I am off the list of candidates—for I have neither the heart of a lion nor the vital of Napoleon.⁷

*

NIRODBARAN: *No joy, no energy, no cheerfulness. Don't like to read or write—as if a dead man were walking about. Do you understand the position? Any personal experience?*

SRI AUROBINDO: I quite understand; often had it myself devastatingly. That's why I always advise people who have it to cheer up and buck up.

NIRODBARAN: *I asked Kanai for my diagnosis—he says some sort of trouble in the “prān” [vital] positively; desire of ego. Just as a Kaviraj puts his finger on the pulse and diagnoses at once, so with this. What's required is purification.*

SRI AUROBINDO: Diagnosis right—only should add an adjective disappointed pran. and ego. No active vital row; vital and ego lying back flat and gloomy.

NIRODBARAN: *So, since I have to pass the time, how to do it? To bear the cross gloomily, hoping for a resurrection?*

SRI AUROBINDO: To cheer up, buck up and the rest if you can, saying “Rome was not built in a day”—if you can't, gloom it through till the sun rises, and the little birds chirp, and all is well.

Looks however as if you were going through a training in vairagya. Don't much care for vairagya myself, always avoided the beastly thing, but had to go through it partly, till I hit on *samata* as a better trick. But *samata* is difficult, *vairagya* is easy, only damnably gloomy and uncomfortable.⁸

*

NIRODBARAN: *My hard labour and effort deprive me of the joy of creation and discourage me with a dread of the work. You say this is because I am an “efforter” and a “hower”. All very well, Sir, but have you shown me the Grand Trunk Road of non-effort—not to speak of leading the way?*

SRI AUROBINDO: There are two ways of arriving at the Grand Trunk Road. One is to climb and struggle and effortise, (like the pilgrim who traverses India prostrating and measuring the way with his body,—that’s the way of effort). One day you suddenly find yourself on the G.T.R. when you least expect it. The other is to quiet the mind to such a point that a greater Mind of mind can speak through it. (I am not here talking of the supramental.) You will do neither. Your mind refuses to be quiet—your vital kicks at the necessity of effort. One too active, the other too lazy. How can I show you the G.T.R. when you refuse either way of reaching it? ⁹

The innumerable letters that deal with yoga—either the underlying principles of the yoga or intimate personal problems like those relating to food, desire, sex, illness etc have their practical value to sadhaks for whom they are intended. An exercise in differentiation like the following must certainly prove helpful to a practising humour.

In such a letter Sri Aurobindo would enter more fully into the spirit of the disciple’s ruling sensitivity and make almost a duet of the question and answer in the best tradition of comic theatre:

NIRODBARAN: *There are some Yogis, I hear, who are in bliss during meditation, but when they come down they are swallowed up by the lower nature, and to escape from this they at once leap up to their static sublimity. Unfortunately I can’t rush up again till August [15th—the next Darshan]. Will you kindly come down and help the poor amateur yogi out of the inexplicable meshes?*

SRI AUROBINDO: Come down? into Erebus? No, thank you—I might become like the said Yogis....

NIRODBARAN: *At present I am only sleeping and sleeping, no aspiration, no will, nothing—shunyam, void. Have I set the devil on my track by my boasting?*

Please save me from this Dilipian despair.

SRI AUROBINDO: ...But why hug despair without a cause—Dilipian or other [Dilip, another disciple, well known for his changing moods]? Come to your senses and develop a Nirodian jollity instead....Laugh and be fat—then dance to keep the fat down—that is a sounder programme.¹⁰

This was on February 1935; then, some months later:

NIRODBARAN: *I am thrown out of joint at two miracles, Sir... though Madame Doubt still peeps from behind. Anyhow, no chance for me! ...Kapāl [Fate]...Sir! what to do?*

SRI AUROBINDO: Why out of joint? It ought to strengthen your joints for the journey of Yoga.

Not at all *Kapāl*, sir. Mind, sir, Mind. Madam Doubt, sir, Madam Doubt! Miss Material Intellectualism, sir! Aunt Despondency, sir, Uncle Self-distrust, sir! Cousin Self-Depreciation, sir! The whole confounded family, sir!¹¹

*

SRI AUROBINDO: Good Lord, what can one write in 1 or 1½ hours?! If I could only get that time for immortal productions every day! Why in another three years *Savitri* and *Ilion* and I don't know how much more would be all rewritten, finished, resplendently complete....

Well, but what I mean is to stop this profitless debate... and do what you have to do. When you are moved to concentrate, concentrate—when you are moved to cosmicise chaos, cosmicise away. And don't waste time in remorse for having done either. Remorse is a damned useless affair, very depressing, defertilising etc. Even if you murder somebody or, what is worse, write lines which amount to a murder of the Muse, remorse is out of place. In the first case, the useful thing to do is to bury the corpse and in the second to seek the capacious arms of the W.P.B. for your misdeed or try to cover it up by doing better.¹²

The disciple wanted Sri Aurobindo to make it clear to him what exactly the Brahman Consciousness is. Here is Sri Aurobindo's humorous reply:

Eternal Jehovah! You don't even know what Brahman is! You will next be asking me what Yoga is or what life is or what body is or what mind is or what sadhana is! No, sir, I am not proposing to teach an infant class the A.B.C. of the elementary conceptions which are the basis of Yoga. There is Amal who doesn't know what consciousness is, even!

Brahman, sir, is the name given by Indian philosophy since the beginning of Time to the one Reality, eternal and infinite which is the Self, the Divine, the All, the more than All, which would remain even if you and everybody and everything else in existence or imagining itself to be in existence vanished into blazes—even if this whole universe disappeared, Brahman would be safely there and nothing whatever lost. In fact, sir, you are Brahman and you are only pretending to be Nirod; when Nishikanta is translating Amal's poetry into Bengali, it is really Brahman translating Brahman's Brahman into Brahman. When Amal asks me what consciousness is, it is really Brahman asking Brahman what Brahman is! There, sir, I hope you are satisfied now.¹³

The disciple asks about the general progress of the disciples in the Ashram. Here is Sri Aurobindo's factual but humorous comment:

...they [the disciples] are not floating in the supramental—some are floating in the higher mind, others rushing up into it and flopping down into the subconscious alternately, are swinging from heaven into hell and back into heaven, again back into hell ad infinitum, some are sticking fast contentedly or discontentedly in the mud, some are sitting in the mud and dreaming dreams and seeing visions, some have their legs in the mud and their head in the heavens etc., etc., an infinity of combinations, while many are simply nowhere. But console yourself—these things, it seems, are inevitable in the process of great transformations.¹⁴

Speaking about the supramental descent Sri Aurobindo clears a doubt raised by the disciple:

...I never said or thought that the supramental descent would automatically make everybody immortal. The supramental descent can only make the best conditions for anybody who can open to it then or thereafter attaining to the supramental consciousness and its consequences. But it would not dispense with the necessity of sadhana. If it did, the logical consequence would be that the whole earth, men, dogs, and worms, would suddenly wake up to find themselves supramental. There would be no need of an Asram or of Yoga.¹⁵

About the state of the sadhaks in the Ashram Nirodbaran remarks:

One or two points are there in the Correspondence at which some readers may raise their eyebrows. “Why has Nirod revealed the inner story of the Ashram?” they may ask. My intention is clear. For one thing, I wanted to show what kind of stuff we were that Mother and Sri Aurobindo had to fashion into a new race. People in general have a rosy view of the Ashram. Since it is a Yogashram, they believe *a priori* that it must be chock-full of big yogis, but their preconceptions do not take long to break into pieces. Most of us, in truth, were common people, and knew very little of yoga. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo took us as they found us. It is precisely one of the cardinal principles of their yoga to take up fresh and simple natures “uncouth, shapeless”, if you like, and try to mould them in the image of their souls. When I exclaimed, “What disciples we are of what a Master! I wish you had chosen or called better stuff”, Sri Aurobindo answered, “As to the disciples I agree! Yes, but would the better stuff, supposing it to exist, be typical of humanity? To deal with a few exceptional types would hardly solve the problem.”¹⁶

We must also remember that Sri Aurobindo’s yoga accepts life and must attend to all matters big or small as parts of it with a view to transform it. He remarked to me that life was in full swing in the Ashram. We know also that the Ashram has been considered as a small “Supramental laboratory” or an epitome of the world where all human problems are concentrated: if and when their solutions would be found, the world problems too would get solved. Each one of us represents a type. On the one hand, our inner and outer difficulties, struggles, resistances in the

peripeties of sadhana, the ups and downs, successes and failures, complexities of nature (each one an impossibility, according to the Mother), all these coming to the surface as a result of the pressure of yoga. On the other hand the Mother and Sri Aurobindo treating each case with amazing love and patience in order to give each one the full chance of finding his soul. Such is the spiritual saga I have tried to unfold with innumerable illustrations. I myself was a certain type so that my conversion would facilitate the conversion of many others like me. I believe that is what Sri Aurobindo meant when he said, "You see, your difficulties are not yours alone. When they are conquered, others also will benefit by it. That is the meaning of one man doing yoga for all."¹⁷

(To be concluded)

NILIMA DAS

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12. *Ibid.*, pp. 398-99.
13. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 991.
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17. *Ibid.*, pp. XII-XIII.

NIRODBARAN'S SURREALIST POEMS

(Continued from the issue of November 2003)

War

In the blood-stained vast field of war
In the clash of arms burns the thunder's flame.
Aswoon, injured, dead—in their unvoiced pain
Earth's dark altar-seat convulses thickly
On Bhagirathi's breast.
Countless decaying corpses in side embrace
Float by. Loser and victor in one voice
Carry Futility's message to the Creator's feet.
Passionless moves God's chariot wheel
Nowhere any concern! On mountain-heights
Echoes listen in that Triumph-song
To the rumour of Cataclysm.
The seeds hidden in the treasure-chest
Within the petals of primaeval Creation—
Their Victory-Fires will burn at twilight.

(To be continued)

DEBASHISH BANERJI

We came into contact with each other some time in 1934, after which our acquaintance grew into an intimacy nurtured by the Guru's quiet encouragement and inner solicitude. This contact gave me the opportunity to see Amal in various situations, and what I came to admire in him most was his freedom from vanity, largeness of spirit and an inborn equanimity.

(Nirodbaran in Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic, 1994)

AMAL KIRAN—MY WONDERFUL TEACHER

THE MOTHER arranged my reading with Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna) in 1962.

Sri Aurobindo had first introduced *Savitri* to Amal in private drafts and written to him most of the letters that are now published along with the Epic.

For the first time Amal and I met in 1961 upstairs in the passage which connects the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's rooms. I casually asked him about a chess board because the Mother and I were doing something on the theme. He drew it and made me understand it.

When we started our reading of *Savitri*, some interested people warned Amal against me and asked him to discontinue. Amal cut them short by saying: "The Mother has arranged our reading. Besides, I have seen and felt Huta's soul. I cannot back out."

Amal made me understand *Savitri* intellectually and aesthetically.

It was 7th August 1965 when I finished reading the whole of *Savitri* with him. I could not check my tears of joy. Amal too was moved. We shook hands over the long harmonious collaboration and absorbing discussions.

That day in the afternoon I went to the Mother to inform her about it. She smiled and heaved a sigh of happiness and said:

"Ah, one great work is done."

*

As soon as Amal left my apartment, I wrote down what he had explained to me in detail. I have cherished several notebooks which are of great value to me.

Here are Amal's own words in *Mother India*, May 1979 p. 276:

... An appreciative treatment of *Savitri* in terms of its quality—an elucidation of its thought-content, its imagery-inspiration, its word-craft and its rhythm-impact: this the Mother did not consider as beyond another interpreter than herself. I can conclude thus because she fully approved Huta's proposal to her that I should go through the whole of the Epic with Huta during the period when the Mother and she were doing the illustrations of the poem, the Mother making outline sketches or suggesting the general description of the required picture and Huta following her instructions, invoking Sri Aurobindo's spiritual help, keeping the Mother's presence constantly linked to both her heart and hand producing the final finished painting.

It was a long-drawn-out pleasure—my study-sessions with the young artist who proved to be a most eager and receptive pupil, indeed so receptive that on a few occasions, with my expository enthusiasm serving as spur, she would come out with ideas that taught a thing or two to the teacher.

I never thought he would write such a thing about me. I always marvelled at his modesty, selflessness and good will.

He also wrote without my knowledge in his book *Life—Poetry—Yoga*:

... Huta—was indeed a far cry. Huta whom the Mother assiduously taught and inspired to paint Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri* belongs to the late fifties, sixties and after, but she happens to be perhaps the single friend in relation to whom the generally forgotten proto-artist of the Ashram has lingered in stray action on private occasion.

Here is Amal's letter to me dated 4-12-74:

Dear Huta,

May I make a request to you? You are free to say 'No' without feeling any embarrassment. I remember that in your diary there is a statement by the Mother that before she came here she went through all possible occult experiences. She never told them to Sri Aurobindo but later she found them all expressed in *Savitri*. I should like very much to publish this statement in the February *Mother India*. Will you permit me and, if you do, will you please send me as soon as possible the exact words as reported by you? I shall be thankful and, of course, I will mention that they are from you.

Yours affectionately
Amal

Later Amal gave the account of this matter in *Mother India*'s issue of November 1982 and not in that of February 1975.

*

When the paintings of the whole of *Savitri* were over they were exhibited in February 1967 along with the Mother's sketches.

The Mother asked me not to attend the exposition. So I wrote my declaration as follows:

All can be done if the God-touch is there.

This is what Sri Aurobindo has written in *Savitri*. I feel that the painting of the pictures exhibited here is explained only by this line. For the task which the Mother had given me was so immense, so beyond the capacity of the little instrument she had summoned, that only her Grace working in Sri Aurobindo's Light could have seen me through.

I am deeply grateful to the Mother for her constant personal guidance—outward as well as inward. And what shall I say of the Presence of Sri Aurobindo helping all along?

I thank the Mother also for making possible a study of the Epic with Amal Kiran.

The Mother wrote to me on 26.1.67:

My very dear little child Huta

Your declaration is very good indeed and it will look quite nice where you want to put it.

With all my love for you and blessings for the exhibition.

The Mother's lovely message for the exhibition ran:

The importance of *Savitri* is immense [.]

Its subject is universal. Its revelation is prophetic. The time spent in its atmosphere is not wasted. It will be a happy compensation for the feverish haste men put now in all they do.

*

Amal gave me all the beautiful books he had written, with his good wishes and affection.

His wife Sehra who loved me and treated me like her own daughter was once attacked severely in her sleep by the invisible beings of the vital world. This incident was not a mere dream but a concrete experience. In relation to it, I was amazed to read in Amal's book *Our Light and Delight* p. 206:

...I may end by striking a spiritually optimistic note. When I had an occasion to relate the incident to Huta, she suddenly lighted upon an implication I had not guessed. I had seen only the frightful possibility of hostile blows having more and more gross-physical consequences. I had not let my mind appraise all-round the critical point at which the workings behind the scene might have arrived. But she exclaimed: "What has happened shows that the Divine Force also can now have a direct effect upon the body. If the dark powers have this new possibility, the inner Light and the higher Consciousness can just as well emerge into the body with concrete changes in it if we are truly receptive!"

The Mother, while teaching me occultism during our *Savitri* work disclosed to me the mysteries of the higher as well as the nether worlds.

And in yet another book of his, *The Mother: Past-Present-Future* pp. 161-2, Amal stated my experiences and Nolani-da's comments on them. Here is one of them:

A DREAM OF REALITY

In a dream on 15 August 1974, early in the morning, I saw the Mother lying on a bed. Her body was immobile. I questioned myself: "If the Mother's body was put in a casket, how is it that it is here? Then I saw her hands moving and her eyes open.

Suddenly, while I was wondering, I found her standing near me and I had the same feeling as when she used to embrace me in the old days. I was still in amazement. She then became invisible but I distinctly heard her parting word:

“I am coming.”

A comment by Nolini:

“She showed to you her living presence still continues.”

Amal had presented to me his book *The Secret Splendour—Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran)*.

Each poem is like a fragrant flower. I was exceedingly charmed by the poem

Sri Aurobindo

All heaven's secrecy lit to one face
Crowning with calm the body's blinded cry—
A soul of upright splendour like the noon.

But only shadowless love can breathe this pure
Sun-blossom fragrant with eternity—
Eagles of rapture lifting flickerless
A golden trance wide-winged on golden air.

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

“It comes from the higher mind except for the third and seventh lines which have illumination and are very fine.”

Amal is a genius. His remarkable books are a great revelation to the whole of humanity.

*

Invariably he has been sending me birthday greetings. Here are two of them:

To very dear Huta

On a birthday there is usually the Shelleyan moment:

“We look before and after
And pine for what is not.”

For us, the birthday should bring no regret, no doubt. The “what is not” of the past is the fading of our small self in the largeness of the Divine Presence. The future's vagueness is the unlimited room the same Presence shows us for merging in the depth beyond depth that is the Mother's Love and in the height over height that is the Truth of Sri Aurobindo.

With a warm heart's wishes,

1-9-1985

Amal

Then he wrote:

From 'The Clear Ray' to 'The Offered One.'
 Dearest Huta
 A happy birthday
 embodying that vision of Sri Aurobindo—
 "Light, endless Light! darkness has room no more"—
 and ever voicing for earth the invocation:
 "O Wisdom-splendour, Mother of the universe,
 Creatrix, the Eternal's artist Bride."
 In unison with your old friend
 1-9-1993

Amal

Amal never lost the chance to write to me humorous notes. Here are two masterpieces!

"Dear Huta,
 It does not matter even if you forget. But once you remember that you have not forgotten, your memory is not yet sufficiently supramentalised like Nirod's. Wish you more progress!"

I had misplaced the October instalment of *The Story of a Soul*. Then eventually I found and sent it to Amal. He wrote:

Dear Huta,
 I am glad that the "Old Lady" has been saved from the re-typing the Oct. instalment. Some tonic for the memory is needed—to save it from getting Nirodianly Supramentalised at such a young age!

I relished his sense of humour. I like his company, because he has treasures of knowledge, he has a wonderful understanding, consideration, and a broad mind. The adjectives to describe him are not enough.

I have been always feeling that his consciousness is flourishing in Sri Aurobindo's Light, and his psychic is constantly nestled in the Mother's loving arms. That is the reason why I always see Amal as "The Clear Ray."

May the Supreme Lord and the Supreme Mother fulfil all his highest aspirations.

IN THEIR LOVE

HUTA

THE COMPOSITION OF SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of October 2003)

Savitri and the Record of Yoga

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WE have seen that there are striking similarities between the powerful vision described near the end of Book Two, Canto Fourteen of *Savitri* (“The World-Soul”) and a brief entry in the *Record of Yoga* on 1 February 1927. But it has not been possible to conclude without qualification that this passage in Sri Aurobindo’s epic, first drafted around 1938, is a poetic rendering of a particular, datable experience recorded over ten years earlier. *Savitri* does not, in fact, lend itself very often to such a precise chronological reading. Yet much of it is undoubtedly an accurate transcription of the spiritual experiences of the poet, sometimes remembered or relived many years later. Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter in 1946:

The mystical poet can only describe what he has felt, seen in himself or others or in the world just as he has felt or seen it or experienced through exact vision, close contact or identity and leave it to the general reader to understand or not understand or misunderstand according to his capacity.¹

He especially insisted that “all that is spiritual or psychological in *Savitri* is of that character”.² No doubt, the autobiographical aspect of the poem has to be seen in the context of its elements of legend and symbol and the demands of its massive narrative structure and literary architecture. But such a work could not have been written without direct access to the domains of reality of which it speaks. From this point of view, the *Record of Yoga* can help us to gain a fuller understanding of the experiential background of Sri Aurobindo’s epic.

In *Savitri*, it is in the canto before Aswapati reaches the Overmind that he sees the “Two-in-One” and her who “brought them forth from the Unknowable”.³ In Sri Aurobindo’s diary, on the other hand, the Darshana of Parameswara-Parameswari and Aditi was recorded early in 1927 when he was already concerned with the Overmind itself, though he was not yet calling it by that name. Had he kept a diary from 1921 to 1926, including the period when he was concentrating on the intuitive transformation, perhaps we would have found an entry corresponding more exactly with *Savitri*. Be that as it may, the essential significance of the vision should not be affected by whether it is seen on the intuitive or on the overmental plane. The latter medium would simply impart a greater universality to the “seeing absolute”⁴ of which Intuition, too, is said to be capable in the degree of its less superhuman amplitude and intensity.

The significance of this vision lies in the healing of the rift between Purusha and

Prakriti created by the separative faculty of mind and exaggerated on the lower spiritual planes for the sake of the liberation of the soul. The feminine principle of existence, represented by Prakriti, had been relegated by that exaggeration to a seemingly eternal status of inferiority and imperfection. Now she is vindicated not only as being an equal partner in the “Two-in-One” of Parameswara-Parameswari, but as reigning even beyond them in the form of what Sri Aurobindo, when he revised *The Synthesis of Yoga*, called “the supreme Shakti of the Supreme”:

In the gnosis the dualism of Purusha and Prakriti, Soul and Nature, two separate powers complementary to each other, the great truth of the Sankhyas founded on the practical truth of our present natural existence, disappears in their biune entity, the dynamic mystery of the occult Supreme. The Truth-being is the Hara-Gauri* of the Indian iconological symbol; it is the double Power masculine-feminine born from and supported by the supreme Shakti of the Supreme.⁵

The “gnosis” in which this “biune entity” is realised is ultimately what Sri Aurobindo termed the Supermind or Truth-consciousness. But when he revised *The Synthesis of Yoga* in the 1930s, he qualified “the gnosis” earlier in the same paragraph by adding “even the mentalised gnosis”. As revised, these are the sentences that precede those quoted above:

On the other planes to which the mental being has easier access, man finds God in himself and himself in God; he becomes divine in essence rather than in person or nature. In the gnosis, even the mentalised gnosis, the Divine Eternal possesses, changes and stamps the human symbol, envelops and partly finds himself in the person and nature. The mental being at most receives or reflects that which is true, divine and eternal; the gnostic soul reaches a true identity, possesses the spirit and power of the truth-Nature.⁶

Though Sri Aurobindo did not define precisely what he meant by the expression “mentalised gnosis”, evidently it refers to at least the higher planes of spiritual mind below the Supermind. It is likely that not only Overmind, but Intuition—which we have seen to be “the first plane in which there is a real opening to the full possibility of realisation”⁷—was meant to be included as a plane on which the soul becomes capable of the beginning of a “true identity” with “the spirit and power of the truth-Nature”. Likewise, Intuition should perhaps be included in our understanding of what Sri Aurobindo meant by “a certain spiritual and supramental level” in a related statement in the revised *Synthesis of Yoga*, cited earlier in this series:

At a certain spiritual and supramental level the Duality becomes still more perfectly

* The biune body of the Lord and his Spouse, Ishwara and Shakti, the right half male, the left half female. [Sri Aurobindo's footnote]

Two-in-one, the Master Soul with the Conscious Force within it, and its potentiality disowns all barriers and breaks through every limit.⁸

In the final text of *Savitri*, this “Two-in-one” appears in the following sentence near the end of Book Two, Canto Fourteen; here, the original single line in which Aswapati “stood before the timeless Two in One”⁹ has been replaced by several lines:

There he beheld in their mighty union’s poise
The figure of the deathless Two-in-One,
A single being in two bodies clasped,
A diarchy of two united souls,
Seated absorbed in deep creative joy;
Their trance of bliss sustained the mobile world.¹⁰

Then comes the first appearance of the Goddess who is referred to in *The Mother* as the “one original transcendent Shakti” who “stands above all the worlds” and through whom “the Supreme is manifested... in the worlds as the one and dual consciousness of Ishwara-Shakti”.¹¹ Here in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo writes of her:

Behind them in a morning dusk One stood
Who brought them forth from the Unknowable....
At the beginning of each far-spread plane
Pervading with her power the cosmic suns
She reigns, inspirer of its multiple works
And thinker of the symbol of its scene.
Above them all she stands supporting all....

In *The Mother*, he had expressed the same thing in different words:

Each of the worlds is nothing but one play of the Mahashakti of that system of worlds or universe, who is there as the cosmic Soul and Personality of the transcendent Mother. Each is something that she has seen in her vision, gathered into her heart of beauty and power and created in her Ananda.¹²

Up to this point in the passage in *Savitri*, there has been a revelation of knowledge to the intuitive perception; but this has been of the nature of a representation and interpretation of supreme truths, as if the higher or the illumined mind had been uplifted to the plane of a more direct, supernal and all-unifying vision. Aswapati now begins to reach what Sri Aurobindo had written of in *The Synthesis of Yoga* as a “true identity” with “the spirit and power of the truth-Nature”. His sense of individual existence is not lost, however. Knowledge and the luminous force it brings merge into adoration (*bhakti*), expressed in ecstatic prayer:¹³

His spirit was made a vessel of her force;
Mute in the fathomless passion of his will
He outstretched to her his folded hands of prayer.

In response, an indescribable gesture seems to cast aside the worlds still intervening between him and the Highest:

Then in a sovereign answer to his heart
A gesture came as of worlds thrown away,
And from her raiment's lustrous mystery raised
One arm half-parted the eternal veil.
A light appeared still and imperishable.
Attracted to the large and luminous depths
Of the ravishing enigma of her eyes,
He saw the mystic outline of a face.¹⁴

Aswapati is now face to face with the Goddess on the highest level of the unmixed intuitive consciousness where, as Sri Aurobindo observed in *The Life Divine*,

its rays are not separated but connected or massed together in a play of waves of what might almost be called in the Sanskrit poetic figure a sea or mass of "stable lightnings"¹⁵

Accordingly, the Mother's cosmic being is experienced on this plane as an ocean of "honey and lightning", on whose waves the soul is carried helplessly like an intoxicated swimmer:

Overwhelmed by her implacable light and bliss,
An atom of her illimitable self
Mastered by the honey and lightning of her power,
Tossed towards the shores of her ocean-ecstasy,
Drunk with a deep golden spiritual wine,
He cast from the rent stillness of his soul
A cry of adoration and desire
And the surrender of his boundless mind
And the self-giving of his silent heart.
He fell down at her feet unconscious, prone.¹⁶

The full and imperative force of this revelation proves to be more than what Aswapati can assimilate as yet. Apparently he still lacks the needed *dhāraṇa-sāmarthya* or sustaining capacity, whose importance Sri Aurobindo emphasised in his explanation of the *sapta catuṣṭaya*:

The body is the pratistha [support] in this material universe; for the working out of the divine lila on earth it is necessary that it should have especially the dharana-samarthyam or power of sustaining the full stream of force, of ananda, of widening knowledge & being which descends into mind and prana and the vital and bodily functions with the progress of the siddhi.¹⁷

In showing Aswapati's inability to sustain for long the intensity of this experience, Sri Aurobindo may have intended to illustrate the inherent limits of the integrality that can be achieved in the transformation by Intuition. He wrote with regard to the action of this power:

It can thus change the whole consciousness into the stuff of intuition; for it brings its own greater radiant movement into the will, into the feelings and emotions, the life-impulses, the action of sense and sensation, the very workings of the body-consciousness; it recasts them in the light and power of truth and illumines their knowledge and their ignorance. A certain integration can thus take place, but whether it is a total integration must depend on the extent to which the new light is able to take up the subconscious and penetrate the fundamental Inconscience. Here the intuitive light and power may be hampered in its task because it is the edge of a delegated and modified Supermind, but does not bring in the whole mass or body of the identity-knowledge. The basis of Inconscience in our nature is too vast, deep and solid to be altogether penetrated, turned into light, transformed by an inferior power of the Truth-nature.¹⁸

In *Savitri*, the ray of Intuition that falls in Book Two, Canto Thirteen exposes, "at the bottom of the sleepless stir", the dark presence of the Inconscient,

For ever sustaining the irrational cry,
For ever excluding the supernal Word....¹⁹

But it is not until the first section of Book Three, Canto Three—where a transformation by the overmind gnosis, preparatory to the experience of the supramental world, seems to be represented²⁰—that Aswapati is depicted as effectively coming to grips with this most fundamental and intractable of all difficulties,

The stubborn mute rejection in life's depths,
The ignorant No in the origin of things.²¹

Stunning as the vision at the end of Book Two, Canto Fourteen is, the eternal veil is there only "half-parted" and the Goddess's eyes remain a "ravishing enigma".²² It is only in the second canto of "The Book of the Divine Mother" that Sri Aurobindo will be able to say decisively:

The Enigma ceased that rules our nature's night....²³

What Aswapati has seen with the intuitive vision he must complete in its effective power and assimilate to his normal consciousness by going on from the intuitive plane to the more comprehensive Overmind. In the *Record of Yoga*, where on 1 February 1927 Sri Aurobindo mentioned the Darshana of Aditi and Parameswara-Parameswari in the context of the overmental sadhana he was then engaged in, it was not in deep *samādhi* that he had this experience, but in his everyday waking state. He was by no means knocked flat by it. In the next paragraph of the same entry, he went on to write about the daily hours of walking which he usually referred to as "primary utthapana":

Primary utthapana oppressed during the last days once more progresses. Stiffness and muscular pains are still possible, though they can be ejected by the knowledge-will movement. They are most prominent when the exertion ceases, but do not endure. The latent memory however persists and brings them back at customary times or junctures.²⁴

It is perhaps not very easy to penetrate through the technical language and scientific objectivity of Sri Aurobindo's Yogic diary to grasp the extraordinary significance of much of what is recorded there. His *Record of Yoga* has to be read in conjunction with his other writings, beginning with Part Four of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, "The Yoga of Self-Perfection", whose practical application is seen in detail in the diary. For various reasons, a comparison with Sri Aurobindo's other major record of his Yoga, *Savitri*, is far more difficult; yet we have seen that it can be rewarding. Cryptic diary entries, like the one about the Darshana of "Aditi holding P^a-Pⁱ in all living things" which has been discussed in this series, become more meaningful when we read them in relation to the descriptions of the same or similar experiences in *Savitri*, where their living reality is conveyed in vivid and moving poetic language. At the same time, as I have tried to show, our understanding of *Savitri* is enriched by seeing in the diary the day-to-day working out of the details that had to be omitted when Sri Aurobindo set about telling the story of much of his inner life in the framework of "A Legend and a Symbol".

(To be continued)

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Notes and References

1. *Savitri* (1993), p. 739.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 295.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 660.

5. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 501-2. This passage was first published in the *Arya* in November 1917 in the following form: "In the gnosis the dualism of Purusha and Prakriti as two separate powers complementary to

each other,—the great truth of the Sankhya philosophy which is also the practical truth of our present natural being,—disappears in their biune entity. The Truth-being realises the Hara-Gauri of the Indian symbolistic iconology.” The footnote explaining “Hara-Gauri” was the same in the *Arya* as in the final text. The important changes Sri Aurobindo made when he revised this passage around 1932 were the insertion of the phrase “the dynamic mystery of the occult Supreme” after “biune entity” and, especially, the addition of a statement introducing an idea that goes beyond the *Arya* text to reflect his experience of the 1920s, first made public in *The Mother*: “it is the double Power masculine-feminine born from and supported by the supreme Shakti of the Supreme”.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 501.

7. *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 264.

8. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 123.

9. See the previous instalment.

10. *Savitri*, p. 295.

11. *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, pp. 20-21.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

13. The *Record of Yoga* shows that prayer entered into Sri Aurobindo’s personal sadhana at an advanced stage. On 14 April 1914 he wrote: “Last night prayer, to which the nature has been long much opposed & then indifferent, was twice used to the Rudra-Vishnu as the helper & healer & yet the cause of the affliction.” (*Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 10, p. 443) A few years later, on 22 May 1918, there is another reference: “There was also the beginning of the specific religious ideality and the ideal sense of prayer and adoration as an element of love and oneness with the Divine.” (*Ibid.*, Vol. 11, pp. 1085-86)

14. *Savitri*, pp. 295-96.

15. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 948. Sri Aurobindo speaks explicitly of “lightning seas” in the last canto of Book Two of *Savitri*, in the line “He rode the lightning seas of cosmic Mind”, which comes two lines after a line about “the rays of an intuitive Sun” (*Savitri*, p. 299). But the context seems to suggest that this refers not to the intuitive plane itself, but to the “overmind intuition” or “intuitive overmind” mentioned in Sri Aurobindo’s letters (*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 261-62).

16. *Savitri*, p. 296.

17. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 10, p. 11.

18. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, pp. 949-50.

19. *Savitri*, p. 287.

20. See the discussion of Book Three, Cantos Two and Three of *Savitri* in the present series in *Mother India*, January-February 2001.

21. *Savitri*, p. 317.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 295-96.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 313. This line was actually written several years before the first draft of the passage in Book Two, Canto Fourteen, though it describes a more advanced stage in the sadhana.

24. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 11, p. 1264. *Uthāpanā* was defined in the system of the *sapta catuṣṭaya* as “the state of not being subject to the pressure of physical forces” (*ibid.*, p. 1477). In its “secondary” and “tertiary” degrees, this referred especially to freedom from the force of gravity; “levitation” is a possible translation of the word *utthāpanā* in this sense. The Mother spoke of “lightness” as an attribute of the “supramental body which has to be brought into being here” and said: “When the physical body is thoroughly divinised, it will feel as if it were always walking on air, there will be no heaviness or *tamas* or unconsciousness in it.” (CWM, Vol. 3, p. 175) “Primary utthapana”, whose essence was “abolition of fatigue and its symptoms” (*Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 11, p. 1272), was a preliminary stage for arriving at this change. Sri Aurobindo considered it to be dependent on three siddhis of the *vijñāna*—*mahimā*, *laghimā* and *añimā*—becoming operative in the body. (“Stiffness and muscular pains”, mentioned in the entry quoted here, would indicate a defect of *añimā* or “subtlety”.) In this connection, he often recorded the number of hours he spent walking during the day—on at least one occasion as many as sixteen (*ibid.*, Vol. 10, p. 155).

APPEARANCES

THE mystery of the puzzle surrounded us
in our darkness

Could we ever discover the magic, transmute
the gloss of our elusive world

into earthly delight in the eternal
dance of a mysterious universe?

True, a drear existence seemed the lot
of many on the earth

though ancient Vedic seers had affirmed the world
in original luminous vision

We struggled, dreamed
in the stark reality

The human strife
The misery of the streets

And there was delight!

For they dwelled side by side in the teeming
cities of our world

In the pilgrimage of the journey
we plodded on in penurious wounds

questing toward Fire and the lift
to a better state

And on oracular paths
the conundrum was unriddled, the mystery

illumined in the flame
Life blossomed, transfigured,

redeemed in light
We saw this world

just as the ancient seers
as the beatitude

of Brahman, eternal
radiance of the Divine.

JOSEPH KENT

RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE FIRST SESSION OF THE INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL CONGRESS HELD IN 1950

(Continued from the issue of October 2003)

FROM my vocation as an artist in verse, I have come to my own idea about the joy of the real. For to give us the taste of reality through freedom of mind is the nature of all arts. When in relation to them we talk of aesthetics we must know that it is not about beauty in its ordinary meaning, but in that deeper meaning which a poet has expressed in his utterance: "Truth is beauty, beauty truth." An artist may paint a picture of a decrepit person not pleasant to look at, and yet we call it perfect when we become intensely conscious of its reality. The mind of the jealous woman in Browning's poem, watching the preparation of poison and in imagination gloating over its possible effect upon her rival, is not beautiful; but when it stands vividly real before our consciousness, through the unity of consistency in its idea and form, we have our enjoyment. The character of Karna, the great warrior of the Mahabharata, gives us a deeper delight through its occasional outbursts of meanness, than it would if it were a model picture of unadulterated magnanimity. The very contradictions which hurt the completeness of a moral ideal have helped us to feel the reality of the character, and this gives us joy, not because it is pleasant in itself, but because it is definite in its creation.

It is not wholly true that art has its value for us because in it we realize all that we fail to attain in our life; but the fact is that the function of art is to bring us, with its creations, into immediate touch with reality. These need not resemble actual facts of our experience, and yet they do delight our heart because they are made true to us. In the world of art, our consciousness being freed from the tangle of self-interest, we gain an unobstructed vision of unity, the incarnation of the real which is a joy for ever.

As in the world of art, so in God's world, our soul waits for its freedom from the ego to reach that disinterested joy which is the source and goal of creation. It cries for its *mukti* into the unity of truth from the mirage of appearances endlessly pursued by the thirsty self. This idea of *mukti*, based upon metaphysics, has affected our life in India, touched the springs of our emotions and supplications for it soar heavenward on the wings of poesy. We constantly hear men of scanty learning and simple faith singing in their prayer to Tara, the Goddess Redeemer:

For what sin should I be compelled to remain in this dungeon of the world of appearances?

They are afraid of being alienated from the world of truth, afraid of their perpetual drifting amidst the froth and foam of things, of being tossed about by the tidal waves of pleasure and pain and never reaching the ultimate meaning of life. Of these men, one may be a carter driving his cart to market, another a fisherman plying his net. They may

not be prompt with an intelligent answer, if questioned about the deeper import of the song they sing, but they have no doubt in their mind, that the abiding cause of all misery is not so much in the lack of life's furniture as in the obscurity of life's significance. It is a common topic with such to decry an undue emphasis upon *me* and *mine*, which falsifies the perspective of truth. For, have they not often seen men, who are not above their own level in social position or intellectual acquirement, going out to seek Truth, leaving everything that they have behind them?

They know that the object of these adventurers is not betterment in worldly wealth and power,—it is *mukti*, freedom. They possibly know some poor fellow villager of their own craft, who remains in the world carrying on his daily vocation, and yet has the reputation of being emancipated in the heart of the Eternal. I myself have come across a fisherman singing with an inward absorption of mind, while fishing all day in the Ganges, who was pointed out to me by my boatmen, with awe, as a man of liberated spirit. He is out of reach of the conventional prices which are set upon men by society, and which classify them like toys arranged in the shop-windows according to the market standard of value.

When the figure of this fisherman comes to my mind, I cannot but think that their number is not small who with their lives sing the epic of the unfettered soul, but will never be known in history. These unsophisticated Indian peasants know that an Emperor is a decorated slave remaining chained to his Empire, that a millionaire is kept pilloried by his fate in the golden cage of his wealth, while this fisherman is free in the realm of light. When, groping in the dark, we stumble against objects, we cling to them believing them to be our only hope. When light comes we slacken our hold, finding them to be mere parts of the all to which we are related. The simple man of the village knows what freedom is—freedom from the isolation of self, from the isolation of things which imparts a fierce intensity to our sense of possession. He knows that this freedom is not in the mere negation of bondage, in the bareness of belongings, but in some positive realisation which gives pure joy to our being, and he sings:

To him who sinks into the deep, nothing remains unattained.

He sings:

Let my two minds meet and combine
And lead me to the City Wonderful.

When the one mind of ours which wanders in search of things in the outer region of the varied, and the other which seeks the inward vision of unity, are no longer in conflict, they help us to realise the *ājab*, the *anirvacanīya*, the ineffable. The poet saint Kabir has also the same message when he sings:

By saying that Supreme Reality only dwells in the inner realm of spirit we shame

the outer world of matter and also when we say that he is only in the outside we do not speak the truth.

According to these singers, truth is in unity and therefore freedom is in its realization. The texts of our daily worship and meditation are for training our mind to overcome the barrier of separateness from the rest of existence and to realize *advaitam*, the Supreme Unity which is *anantam*, infinitude. It is philosophical wisdom having its universal radiation in the popular mind in India that inspires our prayer, our daily spiritual practices. It has its constant urging for us to go beyond the world of appearances in which facts as facts are alien to us, like the mere sounds of a foreign music; it speaks to us of an emancipation in the inner truth of all things in which the endless *Many* reveals the *One*, as the multitude of notes, when we understand them, reveal to us the inner unity which is music.

But because this freedom is in truth itself and not in an appearance of it, no hurried path of success, forcibly cut out by the greed of result, can be a true path. And an obscure village poet, unknown to the world of recognized respectability, untrammelled by the standardised learning of the Education Department, sings:

O cruel man of urgent need, must you scorch with fire the mind which still is a bud? You want to make the bud bloom into a flower and scatter its perfume without waiting! Do you not see that my lord, the Supreme Teacher, takes ages to perfect the flower and never is in a fury of haste? But because of your terrible greed you only rely on force, and what hope is there for you, O man of urgent need? Prithee, says Madan the poet, hurt not the mind of my Teacher. Lose thyself in the simple current, after hearing his voice, O man of urgent need.

This poet knows that there is no external means of taking freedom by the throat. It is the inward process of losing ourselves that leads us to it. Bondage in all its forms has its stronghold in the inner self and not in the outside world; it is in the dimming of our consciousness, in the narrowing of our perspective, in the wrong valuation of things.

The proof of this we find in the modern civilization whose motive force has become a ceaseless urgency of need. Its freedom is only the apparent freedom of inertia which does not know how and where to stop. There are some primitive people who have put an artificial value on human scalps and they develop an arithmetical fury which does not allow them to stop in the gathering of their trophies. They are driven by some cruel fate into an endless exaggeration which makes them ceaselessly run on an interminable path of addition. Such a freedom in their wild course of collection is the worst form of bondage. The cruel urgency of need is all the more aggravated in their case because of the lack of truth in its object. Similarly it should be realized that a mere addition to the rate of speed, to the paraphernalia of fat living and display of furniture, to the frightfulness of destructive armaments, only leads to an insensate orgy of a caricature of bigness. The links of bondage go on multiplying themselves, threatening to shackle the whole world with the chain

forged by such unmeaning and unending urgency of need.

The idea of *mukti* in Christian theology is liberation from a punishment which we carry with our birth. In India it is from the dark enclosure of ignorance which causes the illusion of a self that seems final. But the enlightenment which frees us from this ignorance must not merely be negative. Freedom is not in an emptiness of its contents, it is in the harmony of communication through which we find no obstruction in realizing our own being in the surrounding world. It is of this harmony, and not of a bare and barren isolation, that the Upanishad speaks, when it says that the truth no longer remains hidden in him who finds himself in the All.

Freedom in the material world has also the same meaning expressed in its own language. When nature's phenomena appeared to us as manifestations of an obscure and irrational caprice, we lived in an alien world never dreaming of our *svarāj* within its territory. With the discovery of the harmony of its working with that of our reason, we realize our unity with it and, therefore, freedom. It is *avidyā*, ignorance, which causes our disunion with our surroundings. It is *vidyā*, the knowledge of the Brahman manifested in the material universe that makes us realize *advaitam*, the spirit of unity in the world of matter.

Those who have been brought up in a misunderstanding of this world's process, not knowing that it is his by his right of intelligence, are trained as cowards by a hopeless faith in the ordinance of a destiny darkly dealing its blows, offering no room for appeal. They submit without struggle when human rights are denied them, being accustomed to imagine themselves born as outlaws in a world constantly thrusting upon them incomprehensible surprises of accidents.

Also in the social or political field, the lack of freedom is based upon the spirit of alienation, on the imperfect realization of *advaitam*. There our bondage is in the tortured link of union. One may imagine that an individual who succeeds in dissociating himself from his fellows attains real freedom, inasmuch as all ties of relationship imply obligation to others. But we know that, though it may sound paradoxical, it is true that in the human world only a perfect arrangement of interdependence gives rise to freedom. The most individualistic of human beings, who own no responsibility, are the savages who fail to attain their fullness of manifestation. They live immersed in obscurity, like an ill-lighted fire that cannot liberate itself from its envelope of smoke. Only those may attain their freedom from the segregation of an eclipsed life, who have the power to cultivate mutual understanding and co-operation. The history of the growth of freedom is the history of the perfection of human relationship.

The strongest barrier against freedom in all departments of life is the selfishness of individuals or groups. Civilization, whose object is to afford humanity its greatest possible opportunity of complete manifestation, perishes when some selfish passion, in place of a moral ideal, is allowed to exploit its resources unopposed, for its own purposes. For the greed of acquisition and the living principle of creation are antagonistic to each other. Life has brought with it the first triumph of freedom in the world of the inert, because it is an inner expression and not merely an external fact, because it must always exceed the

limits of its substance, never allowing its materials to clog its spirit, and yet ever keeping to the limits of its truth. Its accumulation must not suppress its harmony of growth, the harmony that unites the *in* and the *out*, the end and the means, the *what is* and the *what is to come*.

Life does not store up but assimilates; its spirit and its substance, its work and itself, are intimately united. When the non-living elements of our surroundings are stupendously disproportionate, when they are mechanical system and hoarded possessions, then the mutual discord between our life and our world ends in the defeat of the former. The gulf thus created by the receding stream of soul we try to replenish with a continuous shower of wealth which may have the power to fill but not the power to unite. Therefore the gap is dangerously concealed under the glittering quicksands of things which by their own accumulating weight cause a sudden subsidence, while we are in the depth of our sleep.

But the real tragedy does not lie in the destruction of our material security, it is in the obscuration of man himself in the human world. In his creative activities man makes his surroundings instinct with his own life and love. But in his utilitarian ambition he deforms and defiles it with the callous handling of his voracity. This world of man's manufacture with its discordant shrieks and mechanical movements, reacts upon his own nature, incessantly suggesting to him a scheme of universe which is an abstract system. In such a world there can be no question of *mukti*, because it is a solidly solitary fact, because the cage is all that we have, and no sky beyond it. In all appearance the world to us is a closed world, like a seed within its hard cover. But in the core of the seed there is the cry of Life for *mukti* even when the proof of its possibility is darkly silent. When some huge temptation tramples into stillness this living aspiration after *mukti*, then does civilization die like a seed that has lost its urging for germination.

It is not altogether true that the ideal of *mukti* in India is based upon a philosophy of passivity. The Ishopanishad has strongly asserted that man must wish to live a hundred years and go on doing his work; for, according to it, the complete truth is in the harmony of the infinite and the finite, the passive ideal of perfection and the active process of its revealment; according to it, he who pursues the knowledge of the infinite as an absolute truth sinks even into a deeper darkness than he who pursues the cult of the finite as complete in itself. He who thinks that a mere aggregation of changing notes has the ultimate value of unchanging music, is no doubt foolish; but his foolishness is exceeded by that of one who thinks that true music is devoid of all notes. But where is the reconciliation? Through what means does the music which is transcendental turn the facts of the detached notes into a vehicle of its expression? It is through the rhythm, the very limit of its composition. We reach the infinite through crossing the path that is definite. It is this that is meant in the following verse of the Isha:

He who knows the truth of the infinite and that of the finite both united together, crosses death by the help of *avidyā*, and by the help of *vidyā* reaches immortality.

The regulated life is the rhythm of the finite through whose very restrictions we

pass to the immortal life. This *amṛtam*, the immortal life, is not a mere prolongation of physical existence, it is in the realization of the perfect, it is in the well-proportioned beautiful definition of life which every moment surpasses its own limits and expresses the Eternal. In the very first verse of the Isha, the injunction is given to us: *mā grdhaḥ; Thou shalt not covet*. But why should we not? Because greed, having no limit, smothers the rhythm of life—the rhythm which is expressive of the limitless.

The modern civilization is largely composed of *ātmahano janāḥ* who are spiritual suicides. It has lost its will for limiting its desires, for restraining its perpetual self-exaggeration. Because it has lost its philosophy of life, it loses its art of living. Like poetasters it mistakes skill for power and realism for reality. In the Middle Ages when Europe believed in the kingdom of heaven, she struggled to modulate her life's forces to effect their harmonious relation to this ideal, which always sent its call to her activities in the midst of the boisterous conflict of her passions. There was in this endeavour an ever present scheme of creation, something which was positive, which had the authority to say: *Thou shalt not covet, thou must find thy true limits*. To-day there is only a furious rage for raising numberless brick-kilns in place of buildings. The great scheme of the master-builder has been smothered under the heaps of brick-dust. It proves the severance of *avidyā* from her union with *vidyā* giving rise to an unrhythmic power, ignoring all creative plan, igniting a flame that has heat but no light.

Creation is in rhythm,—the rhythm which is the border on which *vidyāmca avidyāmca*, the infinite and the finite, meet. We do not know how, from the indeterminate, the lotus flower finds its being. So long as it is merged in the vague it is nothing to us, and yet it must have been everywhere. Somehow from the vast it has been captured in a perfect rhythmical limit, forming an eddy in our consciousness, arousing within us a recognition of delight at the touch of the infinite which finitude gives. It is the limiting process which is the work of a creator, who finds his freedom through his restraints, the truth of the boundless through the reality of the bounds. The insatiable idolatry of material, that runs along an ever-lengthening line of extravagance, is inexpressive; it belongs to those regions which are *andhena tamasāṇṛtāḥ*, enveloped in darkness, which ever carry the load of their inarticulate bulk. The true prayer of man is for the Real, not for the big, for the Light which is not in incendiarism but in illumination, for Immortality which is not in duration of time, but in the eternity of the perfect.

Only because we have closed our path to the inner world of *mukti*, has the outer world become terrible in its exactions. It is a slavery to continue to live in a sphere where things are, yet where their meaning is obstructed. It has become possible for men to say that existence is evil, only because in our blindness we have missed something in which our existence has its truth. If a bird tries to soar in the sky with only one of its wings, it is offended with the wind for buffeting it down to the dust. All broken truths are evil. They hurt because they suggest something which they do not offer. Death does not hurt us, but disease does, because disease constantly reminds us of health and yet withholds it from us. And life in a half world is evil, because it feigns finality when it is obviously incomplete, giving us the cup, but not the draught of life. All tragedies consist in truth remaining a

fragment, its cycle not being completed.

Let me close with a *Baul* song, over a century old, in which the poet sings of the eternal bond of union between the infinite and the finite soul, from which there can be no *mukti*, because it is an interrelation which makes truth complete, because love is ultimate, because absolute independence is the blackness of utter sterility. The idea in it is the same as we have in the Upanishad, that truth is neither in pure *vidyā* nor in *avidyā*, but in their union:

It goes on blossoming for ages, the soul-lotus in which I am bound, as well as thou, without escape. There is no end to the opening of its petals, and the honey in it has such sweetness that thou like an enchanted bee canst never desert it, and therefore thou art bound, and I am, and *mukti* is nowhere.

(Concluded)

YOU

You are the starlight
 That makes my heart bright
 Within the dark night of ancient longing
 In every pathway that I roam.
 Within the twilight,
 You give my eyes sight.
 You are the love-light that keeps on shining,
 You are the call that draws me home.
 Although the stars pass away
 Before the dawning of the day,
 Past the bounds of our travail,
 You are a light that will not fail;
 Beyond this valley of tears,
 Beyond the passing of our years,
 Past the loves that time will part,
 You are the love that holds my heart.

ROGER CALVERLEY

THE WONDER-CHILD OF THE MOTHER

CONTEMPLATING New Creation's enigma, Lord Vishwakarma
Looked around for springing a lovely surprise;
A beaming smile on the Divine Mother's face
Commanded Him to launch the yogic panorama.

The Lord Supreme showered His loving Benedictions
And Mother-Earth selected the auspicious moment;
On seventeenth November 1903 was his great advent
As a wonder-child, for fighting human tribulations.

The bright young witty doctor blossomed as a poet,
Shedding light on mysteries of personality-growth,
In quest of the golden Supramental Truth;
He narrated the Supreme Master's humours best.

"Nirod-da" entered the brocaded pages of history,
With a hundred springs spent joyfully;
His uncanny ability, drawing out the Master jovially
From His mysterious moods, has no peer, in glory.

The inevitable choice of Lord Sri Aurobindo,
Selecting Nirodbaran, to act as the scribe
For all His magnificent dictations on *Savitri*,
Was a great boon, for attaining epical crescendo.

The Centenarian's affection and endearing nature,
Encourages aspirants to brave all hazards;
His soft words touch deeply tender human emotions,
As he walks, the Millennium smiles with grandeur.

SURESH DEY

THE SILENT PLACE: THE WAY BACK TO WHAT WE ARE

It is apparent this morning, as I write these words, that I have written them down as much for myself, as for the reader. Spending periods of time in silence naturally leads to an unleashing of creative inspiration.

There are so many ways all these ideas have been said before. What is clear to see is that this same Presence, that inspires this work, is the same potential that each possesses now. It is only necessary to discover It within and establish It within awareness through a regular practice of meditation or silent contemplation.

Establishing this inner experience happens with each visit to the Silent Place. It is not a place we will find with our eyes or ears. One could call it a space, but it is more substantial and real than the void of outer space. It could be called a being, yet it is Beingness, the root of all.

What is important, is not what we call this experience of going within, but that we make this inner journey often. Every visit to this place within, makes it more real. One begins to depend on it, because it feeds the inner feeling of fulfillment. It becomes the source of joy and contentment. The parts of outer life that are not fulfilling, slowly fade in importance. Whether they stay or go, does not matter.

If these words are of any benefit, they may serve as stepping stones to a new sense of reality. There are no human limitations in this overflowing sense of abundant Joy and Divine inspiration.

Whatever we find in this inner journey, remember that it is found within our own conscious awareness. Words can only point the way. In this Presence, the night dissolves in the light of day, dispelling every human belief and myth. Now is the only time we have to awaken to this inner Joy and a whole, new consciousness.

ALLAN STOCKER

THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of October 2003)

2. Why the Bhagavata?

By the time the Puranas came to be set down, the hierarchy of gods had almost crystallised in the Indian psyche. Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti held prime positions. Here again, Vishnu looms large and roughly speaking is the prime deity in the earliest of them, the Vishnu Purana; and holds the reins in the last of them all, the Bhagavata. In both of them Krishna is the enthralling god and we seem to plunge forward to hold on him. How so? Why are we so fascinated by Krishna, the last of the avatars till now?

One of the reasons seems to be the projection of Krishna's childhood. Vamana as a lovely boy we had seen, but we had not seen him in action among people. It was Vishnu Purana that brought us the destruction of Putana and Sakatasura, the dancing on the Kaliya snake, the killing of demoniac beings like Denuka, Pralamba (who was actually killed by Balarama), the playing of childhood games like Harinaa Kreedanam, the lifting of the Govardhana Hill. Most important of all was the Rasakridaa; and the author does not minimize the irreverence of tradition indulged in by Krishna. Maitreya asks whether this union of Krishna with the married cowherdesses was right. Parasara's answer comes in simple terms: "The Lord pervades the five elements, earth, water, fire, space and air. In the same manner the Lord pervades those cowherdesses and the cowherds and the millions of sentient beings. Hence the Rasakridaa was not wrong."¹

But there are other reasons that also seem relevant. Being the last of the incarnations so far, Krishna remains closest to our consciousness. Was it not only yesterday we laughed no end when he was caught stealing butter, then wandered with him all over Brindavan, watched him take a personal interest in building the stately capital of Dwaraka, admired the manner in which he held the reigns while directing Arjuna's chariot in the Kuruskshetra field? Ah, have our tears dried since we learnt of his passing at Prabhasa after being hit by Jara's arrow? Memories... memories... memories...

So the Indian psyche has recorded and re-recorded Krishna's life in a million ways, in dramas and songs, in sculpture and painting, but for all this immense Krishna literature the Vishnu Purana remains the fount. It was this Purana that helped spread the Krishna cult far and wide and inspired Perialwar to sing of Krishna's childhood, boyhood and youth in mellifluous Tamil poesy. Hence the great Sri Vaishnava acharya Alavandar referred to it as the gem among Puranas, the *Puraana Ratna*. Another great acharya, Vedanta Desika, has caught this metaphor and says the Purana is a faultless gem indeed:

*Atraasam, maanadham, ratnam, sthiram, bhogyam, prakaasakam
mahaargham mangalam maanyam suraksham sugraham nrunaam*"

("Faultless, priceless, permanent, meant for enjoyment, brilliant, auspicious, worthy of praise, a jewel to be guarded, easy for handling by aspirants.")

While the Vishnu Purana thus became the parent-treasury of Vishnu's manifestations in general and Krishna's life in particular, the Bhagavata which came a little later after the Alwars, continues to be the most popular. And even as the former helped disseminate Krishna consciousness in the sub-continent, the Bhagavata has been doing the same now at a global level. For the Purana is not considered just a traditional compendium but a personification of the Lord Himself. This is brought out clearly in the Padma Purana, in the cantos on "The Bhagavata Mahatmya". Incidentally, it reveals the mutual good will among editors, writers, poets and scholars in those days whose single-minded aim was to save India's hoary tradition mid all the problems posed by the large-scale invasion by Islamic hordes since the Hindu kingdom of Dahir in Sindh fell to an Arab invasion led by Muhammad Quasim in 711 A.D. Within two hundred years India would be devastated by the repeated attacks of Mahmud of Ghazni. If the Vedic tradition along with its Upanishadic Vedanta and Itihasic riches were safeguarded for posterity, it was due to those sages and scholars who remained in rural countryside or dire forests and recorded all the yesterdays in the Puranas.

The Padma Purana which is one of the six major Puranas that uphold the supremacy of Vishnu has a dialogue between Narada and the personification of devotion as the Lady Bhakti. What was happening around at that time was not unlike the extremism of these days when civilised life gets challenged at all levels. The greater tragedy of such times is that there can be no open condemnation. The Puranas thus enveloped their distress in the stories they told to the common man. The Padma Purana story of Narada and Bhakti is one such reference.

Once Narada went on a pilgrimage to the holy places on the earth as it is "the best of all spheres" (*sarvottama*). He went to Pushkara and Prayag, Kasi, Nasik, Kurukshetra, Srirangam and Rameswaram. But he was unhappy with what he saw. There was a general deterioration in the moral fabric. Truth, tapasya, physical and mental purity, charity and other good qualities were all in the decline, while people had become quite materialistic. Running after pelf to fill their bellies, they had no shame in uttering falsehood (*udaram-bharino jeeva varaakah kootabhaashinah*). To add to all this, any number of ashrams, temples and pilgrim spots had been destroyed without compunction by these wicked people and had come under the control of foreigners, the Yavanas.

It is of course a reference to the way large parts of North India were ravaged by the Islamic hordes who targeted the religious institutions of the Hindus with incredible savagery. The natural consequence was a weakening of the rituals of Hinduism. Where large scale killings have taken place, whole families converted and huge libraries destroyed, it is but natural that rituals suffer a great deal. When one is fleeing or begging for life, where is the time to engage oneself in austerities and other observances of Sanatana Dharma? The Padma Purana says: "Hermitages, places of pilgrimage and rivers are controlled by foreigners and temples here have been destroyed in large numbers by those wicked people. There is no Yogi, nor one who has attained perfection, no enlightened soul and no man performing righteous deeds. All spiritual discipline stands consumed by the wild fire of Kaliyuga."²

At last Narad came to Brindavan where Krishna had sported long, long ago, at the close of Dwapara Yuga. A strange sight met him. He found a distraught young woman with two old men fallen unconscious at her feet. On Narada asking her, she tells him that she is Bhakti (Devotion) and the two old men are her sons, Jnana (spiritual knowledge) and Vairagya (desirelessness). She says she was born in South India and had since then travelled wide: "I was born in the Dravida country and attained maturity in Karnataka. I was respected here and there in Maharashtra and attained a ripe age in Gujarat. Mutilated by heretics due to the arrival of the fearful age of Kali, and continuing in that state for a long time, I grew weak and developed sluggishness along with my two sons. Reaching Vrindavana, however, I stand refreshed as it were and endowed with extreme comeliness."³

The reference to Dravida country relates the origin of the Bhakti Movement which began with the Alwar (devotees immersed in god-experience) movement in Tamil Nadu. Sri Aurobindo recognised the Bhagavata to be "the culmination of the movement which had the most important effects on the future, the evolution of the emotional and ecstatic religion of Bhakti."⁴ In Srivaishnava hagiology about the beginnings of the Bhakti Movement, the legend of Tirukoilur near Pondicherry speaks of three pilgrims taking shelter in a tiny room of a house on a stormy night. In the pitch darkness, the three realised that there was a fourth person within the room who was pressing upon them. Who was that? From where could they get a lamp to see who had come in? Poykai Alwar burst out in a song that he sought to light as lamp with all the knowledge he had gained:

With the world as the cup, the sea as ghee,
The sun as the lighted wick,
I have strung a garland of words in praise
Of the Lord who holds the flaming discus
To gain release from the ocean of misery.⁵

But mere knowledge was not enough, surely. The heart must melt with an unflinching aspiration to gain the experiential delight of the Lord, and this can be done when our knowledge of the Divine is infused with love for the Divine. Hence the second Alwar, Bhutham, sang:

With love as the cup, aspiration as ghee,
A ceaseless joy-filled thought as the lighted wick,
I have lit the flame of knowledge to Narayana,
By means of the revelatory Tamil language.

When such an upward aspiration is generated, the unflinching Grace of the Divine is assured. The night flees as the self-illuminated Divine appears before the three devotees leading the third one, Pey, to exclaim in ecstasy:

I have seen the Mother, the golden image!
 I have visioned the sun-like splendour too.
 The battle-ready and fire-red discus golden,
 And the whorled conch. All these did I see
 In the person of my Ocean-hued Lord.

So the Bhakti Movement was born in Tirukoilur which has the Vamana-Trivikrama Avatar as the presiding deity of its ancient temple. From then onwards, the Movement has weathered many a crisis but has always emerged triumphant in its youthful divinity. For, this love divine is a priceless agent for transforming our human condition into something finer, nobler: "The divine love of God is such that one enters into the very being of God, losing oneself in the rapture of God's inner nature. A new perception of the Reality happens, which is altogether different from what one perceives from the point of view of the world or the individual. The divinely possessed one perceives the world and all with the over-welling love that God has for his creation. It is no longer with human love that one loves God; but with God-love that one perceives the world and all. This is *parama-bhakti*, not merely transcendent, but superior verily to that also."⁶

The Lady Bhakti speaks to Narada of how her reign has spread and how she has fared in our socio-religious history. For despite the pure springs of the early days, and luscious streams later, she had also been mutilated by the foreigners and even by her own people, which is probably a reference to the manner in which bridal mysticism has sometimes degenerated into licensed erotica. Again, it is perhaps possible to restore Bhakti to her youthful nature but wherefrom can one bring health-giving inspirations for Jnana and Vairagya? Fancy a young mother having such ageing children! Mankind is growing increasingly materialistic!

Narad tells her that she should not trouble herself with self-pity. Her past has been inspired by the Lord Himself. It was He who had commanded her to go to the earth with her sons Jnana and Vairagya and take Mukti as a maid-servant. Of course, Mukti has had to return to the Heaven as too many false doctrines tended to devalue her nature. Narada, the author of Bhakti Sutras, now makes a vow to find a remedy for Bhakti's ills:

"There is no age like Kali, O lady with a charming countenance! In this Yuga I shall establish you in every house and in every individual. If I fail to propagate you in the world throwing into the background all other cults and placing above all grand celebrations (connected with Devotion), I am no longer a servant of Sri Hari."⁷

Not tapasya, nor Vedic knowledge, nor spiritual enlightenment nor righteous action can gain for man the life divine; only devotion can transform this earth into an eternal Brindavan, and the cowherdesses are standing witnesses to this fact (*pramaanam tatra gopikaah*). The Lady Bhakti is delighted but is unhappy that her sons are still in a stupor. Narada wakes them up by chanting the Vedas, the Upanishads and scriptures like the Gita. They come back to consciousness but only for a brief while. Soon they fall down again. Narad has no idea on how to cure this malady that afflicts Jnana and Vairagya. A disembodied voice tells him that he has to perform a righteous act. What could it be? He

now sees close by Sanaka and his three brothers. The Kumaras listen to his problem and tell him that the righteous act referred to by the disembodied voice was the recitation of Srimad Bhagavata for it contains all the needed inspirations to keep Bhakti, Jnana and Vairagya youthful and strong, *jnaanavairaagya samyuktah bhakti premarasaavahaa*.

Narada is non-plussed. How can that be? How can all the received tradition of our Vedas, Vedanta, ritualistic compendiums like the Agamas be set at a discount by a poem that speaks only of Vishnu's exploits? Of course, the verses and even phrases of the Bhagavata do contain the essence of the Vedas; but Vedanta? And the rest? The sons of Brahma assure him that this is even so for the Purana contains everything. Nor does this Jnana-Yajna need the appurtenances of elaborate ritualism. Recitation with faith completes the yajna. The sages also direct him to perform this jnana-yajna at a place called Ananda near Haridwar, the abode of great sages. When Bhakti goes there with Jnana and Vairagya, the old men will be restored to their youth. Once the news was abroad, great rishis and even the Vedas, Upanishads, the holy streams, gandharvas and the rest came to partake of the Knowledge-Dispassion Sacrifice, even as Sanaka and his three brothers expound in detail the glory of the Bhagavata which has twelve Skandhas (Books) cast in the form of a dialogue between King Parikshit and Sri Suka. Indeed, the book is Suka Shastra, and the protagonist is Krishna. What is impossible for one who has heard with absorption the story of Krishna?

Sanaka now wonders aloud how the Bhagavata has come to be such a spiritually powerful text. The reply comes in no uncertain terms. When Krishna decided to withdraw from the physical, he discoursed with Uddhava and then took leave. Uddhava is disconsolate. With Kaliyuga round the corner, to whom can people turn to for help? Where can be found a protector like Krishna? Was it not to help the distraught that the Supreme has embodied himself in a form and come down as Krishna, saved the good and destroyed the evil? The Padma Purana tells us that Krishna went into deep meditation over these words. A treasure-house of compassion, he could not leave mankind; nor could he remain here forever. The Purana says:

"The Lord infused all his glory and energy into the Bhagavata and disappeared in the ocean of Srimad Bhagavata. This constitutes, therefore, a visible verbal manifestation of Sri Hari. It drives away all one's sins by being waited upon, heard, read or seen."⁸

Hence the Bhagavata is the living Presence of Krishna. Reciting it in its entirety in a week is considered to be a superior discipline, a non-pareil tapasya. Even as Sanaka and his three brothers spoke thus, Bhakti appeared with her sons, all of them looking lustrous and young, and repeating the Lord's names. Emerging from the ocean of the Bhagavata Bhakti tells the assembled persons how the Purana had revived her and now she wished to know where she could make up her residence for future times. Where else but in the minds of Krishna's devotees, the sages reply. And so it comes to be.

One may be poor, destitute, in the grip of disease or enslaved; yet, he who is a devotee of Krishna is eclectically free, he is blessed in all the three worlds, for Krishna has been bound to his heart with the string of devotion (*pravasisati hridhi teshaam bhaktisutropanaddhah*). The example of the evil Dhundhukari gaining liberation by

listening to the exposition of the Bhagavata by Gokarna, underlines the need not only to read and hear the scripture but reflect upon it. This is because knowledge (*jnaanam*) without clear intake, hearing (*srutham*) without attention, receiving counsel (*mantra*) with a doubting mind and recitation (*japa*) with a tumultuous psyche are in vain. But if we draw to the scripture with devotion and faith and a pure mind, the scripture becomes the most effective medicine for overcoming the disease of birth in this flawed earth, *kalau bhaagavati vaartha bhavarogavinasini*. So concludes the portion on the greatness of the Bhagavata in Padma Purana.

We may not have an exact date when the words above were written detailing the greatness of the Bhagavata, but it is very obvious that of all the Puranas, it has been the most popular, for it seems to contain everything. Krishna pervades the work, and Book Ten is wholly devoted to the Krishna manifestation. The Padma Purana reference to Krishna descending into the ocean of this scripture and merging in it is indeed quite appropriate. The author has taken his cue from the Vishnu Purana and recast the approach and expanded the clues in a very effective manner. He must have derived a lot of inspirations from the manner in which the Alvars of Tamil Nadu handled the glorious theme of incarnations and the soulful story of Krishna.

Thus, the Krishna of the cowherd clan has bewitched generations with his flute-call ever since Perialwar sang about it. Why, not long ago we had Sarojini Naidu giving effective recordation to the feelings of the aspirant community in a language wholly alien to the Sanskrit-Tamil ethos through ‘The Flute-Player of Brindaban’:

Why didst thou play thy matchless flute
 'Neath the Kadamba tree?
 And wound my idly dreaming heart
 With poignant melody,
 So where thou goest I must go,
 My flute-player with thee!

Swami Vivekananda found the Bhagavata approach to devotion ideal for Indian masses and considered the cowherdresses as the highest symbols of pure, unselfish devotion. Only realised souls like him could get into the heart of the matter regarding this symbolism of the Brindavan leela which is used in the scripture:

“Ah, that most marvellous passage in his life, the most difficult to understand, and which none ought to attempt to understand until he has become perfectly chaste and pure, that most marvellous expansion of love, allegorised and expressed in that beautiful play at Vrindavan, which none can understand but he who has become mad with love, drunk deep of the cup of love! Who can understand the throes of the love of the Gopis—the very ideal of love, love that wants nothing, love that even does not care for heaven, love that does not care for anything in this world or the world to come?”⁹

For a brief while, apparently, life divine had been realised on this earth when the Lady Bhakti had been a perfectly youthful damsel. Then her limbs had been dismem-

bered by heretics (*ghorakaleryogaat paakhandaihi khandithaangaka*). For the last several millennia we have been trying to regain that life divine and in these days of encircling gloom, the Bhagavata is a Purana for the twentieth century as well. Sri Aurobindo's *Ahana* concludes with a hope that if we are ready to pour forth our devotion, good days will come again:

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.¹⁰

(*To be continued*)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

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THE COSMIC DANCE

FLAMES, O Flames that invade the sky,
Who are you, O Dancer in oblivion of the world?
Your steps and your gestures undo your locks,
The earth and the planets all tremble under your feet.

Flames, O Flames that invade the earth,
Flames like a deluge rush inside hearts,
Teasing the waves of a nocturnal ocean
Thunders peal in a lightning rhythm.

Flames, O Flames inside abysmal caverns
Where buds of sun-flower keep on blooming,
Skeletons of the past, caressed by fire
Start souls invoking a new creation.

Flames, O Flames inside the heart of Man:
Who are you, heavenly Bard, voicing Tomorrow?

PRITHWINDRA MUKHERJEE

AMAL KIRAN ENTERING INTO THE HUNDREDTH YEAR

Amal

Full name *अमल किरण*

Amal - kiran

(The clear ray)

3 September 1930 . Sri Aurobindo

INTIMATE PORTRAITS

Hellas 2003—Loukia

LOUKIA said it in a manner that is typically hers, her sincerity and dimple-etched smile prominent: “There is only one rule: feel free, comfortable and at home. We’ll do the same!” Then, dimples deepening: “But, Makis has the right of way to the bathroom in the morning. That’s all!”

And so I moved in. Staying with her was the conclusion and culmination of my visit to Greece. Hellas 2003 would have been very different without Loukia!

I had first visited my family in Peloponese, before coming to Athens, the city I grew up in and love. For a couple of weeks I stayed at a hotel with the Parthenon a gaze up from the balcony, and the new pedestrian way around the Sacred Hill starting just a few metres away. A little further off my old high school was being renovated. I know this area of old Athens well and I have explored and kept on re-discovering it ever since my school days.

A pocket of timelessness, a retreat where even the air feels different, the narrow winding streets are an ever-open invitation to a meditative walk, a brisk climb up. It is this climbing up I enjoy most and what I miss when away: to walk and reach up there, right to the top of Acropolis, the Sacred Rock. Athena blessed the city from there and I sense Her still lingering.

But I couldn’t afford the hotel for long. Besides, who wants to live separated from the everyday life the rest of the people live? My cousin was still building; there was no way I would squeeze into her place. Unless something drastic happened, I would have to return to India sooner than expected.

Well something *did* happen, and it was as drastic as only the unexpected can be. Loukia took me in. It was her old studio, freshly painted and refurbished, a perfect little abode at the end of the veranda that encircles the flat. A step out and I had the panorama of Athens at my feet. She had actually prepared it all even as I was in India; she just didn’t write to tell me about it!

The two of us go a long way back.

Once upon a time, she and I had been together in high school (for six years the same classrooms, neighbourhoods, dreams, pranks and teachers). Quite naturally, we used that world of “back then” as the springboard to jump and catch up with our “here and now”. Our teenage-friendship had roots that ran deep and strong; what we had once instinctively liked about each other was now given a chance to develop on firmer grounds.

The fact that in the years in between we did different things and attempted very dissimilar lives (Loukia married and a mother, me settled all the way away in India) bothered us little, if at all. We found our differences enticing, and cultivating them became a regular pastime. We questioned and we listened and then questioned each other again.

There was plenty to catch up with and even more to do. I let Loukia have the lead

role. She had to; I have been away for too long and my very occasional visits to mama Hellas (that's Greece for me!) had not helped much either. Each time there, I was more concerned with observation than actually taking part. So I remained the visitor and bystander. A witness, I spoke the language and mingled freely with everyone everywhere, but had no real inkling of what actually made my fellow Greeks tick and relate to each other.

Loukia made it possible for me to become re-acquainted with and restore what had been but was pushed away: the closeness with my homeland. Sharing her life connected me again to the how and why of the Greek people. Gently yet decisively, she brought down many of the lofty constructions I had erected (so mentally stimulating yet so far from reality). She took away my abstractions and disclosed what has come to be; she updated Greece for me and for this I am grateful to her.

Loukia lives right in the centre of the modern city. Yet, her neighbourhood (just a few criss-crossing streets) still retains an appealing character. This used to be the western gateway into Athens. Even though as heavily built and rebuilt as the rest of the metropolis, it has somehow kept a few of the (late 19th and early 20th centuries) neo-classic homes.

These remains give out a feeling of persistence and continuity; they made me think of time-essence and I saw them as a charming and perfect fit that insists on leaving its mark. A few of them are renovated or converted to more contemporary needs; the old inn (the Turkish caravanserai) is now a tavern and the troughs from where the horses drank are still in the courtyard under the bougainvillea.

I liked to see these houses contrast with the modern multi-storeyed buildings next to them. And shops were there too, the suppliers of daily needs: baker and tavern, the little dress-alteration joint and the pavement kiosk; the nucleus around which people live, meet and relate as they shop or walk by. It has been Loukia's neighbourhood for the past twenty years.

My introduction to it was rather organic; she and I had only to walk down the street! Casual greetings and encounters, a chat with this one, shopping here and there or looking for the occasional bargain eased me into their lives.

However, at first I was disturbed by the lack of intellectual content. What was actually said was of so little consequence, it put me into an automatic mode of polite boredom. "Why should anybody even *bother* with any of it?" I wondered as I missed the obvious; it took me some time to get it: it all had to do with contact—contact was what they sought and cared for, contact that mattered.

These intellectually void exchanges were emotionally full of meaning. Recognition and reaching out was the purpose, and the time they had for each other. Those few moments they took off to smile, confide or gossip, was a break from the routine. The big city renders them faceless and, when no longer anonymous, they used trivia as a means to be persons.

Just what Greeks have always done, and I happily let Loukia steer me through this modern-day Agora*!

* Ancient Greek marketplace.

Soon, I too recognised and was recognised and gave the appropriate nod or smile; I even chatted with some. There was Thodoros, the painter-philosopher, regularly drunk. "Drink helps me think," he said once, sipping slowly. He had been painting the veranda walls and shyly asked for a beer when invited to join us for tea. A good man, this Thodoros: he drinks and thinks habitually, but he also finds work on and off and it is this that keeps him out of trouble when others don't. The confectioner's son breaks into his father's shop; he is a heroin addict. The father's terse sadness prompted Loukia tell me the short solemn story, one of many in the big city.

However, there were also Michalakis (working nights and studying days) and Ekaterina, a refugee from the Euxine, the Black Sea; she'll never go back, there has been too much suffering and trouble in the old country. Tailor by profession, she has been stitching her life anew for the last ten years; she now has her own business, her daughter is a dentist and her son starts university soon.

Little worlds of mostly good people (some street-smart, others barely managing), whom I interacted with and came to know; they were part of what helped me weave myself back into the fabric of Hellas-today and I gathered the plain threads of their lives carefully. But the pattern would have been incomplete without some extra colour and texture and humanity's strength and hope provided them.

I was fortunate to meet those special few who were at once persistent and defiant and kept on building what will be. It was like kindred finding kindred and it happened anywhere. The rapport was instant; I will certainly remember a couple of taxi-drivers, a shopkeeper, a lady with whom I shared a park-bench—our brief contact was direct and almost soulful.

And so it was with the others that were or became dear friends. We recognised each other at first glance and knew ourselves as collaborators. We felt that our coming together held significance and we exchanged experiences eagerly. As if they were offerings, we put our feelings and thoughts side by side—what was still alive and aspiring in Greece and my own findings in India. It all combined to something new that felt old and known inside. One way or another, we were all aspirants or seekers; we did not always agree or understand each other's details, yet there was a deeper association and we expanded on it.

Even speaking with them felt good. The Greek language is such a rich and powerful tool! We turned the words around and played with them and placed them so that they could tell and describe best what is usually hard to define. (I had missed it for so long, I thought I'll never have enough of it—this skilful handling and bartering of ideas in the language that gave them names and brought them forth!)

I was back indeed and this homecoming was more than just the act of belonging.

Athens has changed. Much of the world is in turmoil and Greece too reflects this. Hellas is the nearest country to absorb the shocks from the Balkans, she is also the check-in point for the world's desperate. She stretches exactly where east meets west; millions cross her borders and the capital is their natural first stop.

Foreign-looking faces throng the streets and strange tongues are heard everywhere.

Hard to get used to them, it is even harder to look at them; deep scars are there, and too obvious. These people have been through it all, and it shows. War, plunder, poverty, famine leave hard-set traces; one can see them acutely in recent arrivals, softer in those longer settled.

Albanians, Rumanians, Bulgarians, Russians, even Chinese, Pakistanis and Filipinos—they are all here to build new lives, much to the Greeks' concern and challenge. Crime has come with them and cultural differences. Greece is no longer homogenous; values and ways are changing and it is difficult to see where the differences will lead. Some Greeks are stoical about it; most see the changes as a threat; very few are being philosophical, it is too real. One way or another, they all agree it is a process.

Loukia admits the influx as a *fait accompli*. "We've got the soup, might as well learn how to cook it! It can be good soup; it can be bad; it depends. And we are all responsible." She extends the same attitude to this situation as she brings to her life.

She told me about it; her life hadn't been easy. But it sounded as if she had gone through it with that dimpled and sincere smile she had on the day she asked me to be her guest. There is serious strength in her and I had several occasions to see it surface and meet life head on. I respected and admired her for it, and wondered about it also. Likewise but for different reasons, Loukia was intrigued with me. Strength wasn't my strong point (not the strength she knew of, anyhow), yet there was something in me as well that surfaced, which she found interesting enough to explore.

So there were questions (about India and about Kati, and about Loukia) and from the answers we gave and the way we felt, one thing became clear: we were both seekers. More questions!

"And this spiritual quest of yours?" she asked early one morning. "Will it take you so far and so high that I won't be able to reach you?" There was concern; she only knew of the usual monastic and away-from-the-world practices. She thought mine must be similar.

She recalled how she had to restrain herself from going to India, how she had always wanted to but was afraid she would get "stuck" there. "Like you!" she said, "I would have stayed on had I come. But there were priorities to look after." And then, with eyes focused somewhere ahead (past me and through the veranda beyond): "Now it is different...."

Could it be that she is instinctively attempting the four life-stages of the Indian spiritual tradition? There was an unmistakable urgency in that "now it is different" of hers, as if she knew that her householder's state must soon come to an end.

She fascinated me. She told me she was aware of her heart centre, which she called upon when in need or doubt. She had almost none of the usual narrow confines of ordinary lives and she always dared to build her own according to aims and values that she felt inspiring. She is one who uses the strength of her aspiration and in this she is different from most. And she has no regrets for this. "There isn't much time to waste, is there?" she would say, dimpling!

I never saw her stressed. She doesn't believe in the conventional concept of "pass-

ing the time” nor in following trends. One could call her a misfit, should one judge her by the norm. But nothing would be furthest away from her truth. Loukia is and has been successful and thorough in whatever she takes up. A good mother and an established iconographer, she is also active and helpful wherever and whenever needed.

She has the vital force that moves and does and very little of what life brings in escapes her care and attention. Yet, it wasn’t her handling capacities that impressed me; there are many people in the world who can manage and organise well. What is special about Loukia is the way she does it: her reasons and attitude, her firm sincerity and the unusually high degree of self-giving with which she balances her actions. In her own way, she seemed to follow the path of works.

We spoke about these paths and ways of ours. It was like assembling each other’s larger picture. A puzzle-like map took shape and it became the shared reality into which we filled bits and pieces of intimate understanding. During our separate life-journeys we had each arrived at similar stations and crossroads and we talked about them and were thrilled discovering each other’s *raison d’être*.

We really had fun! Nothing was insignificant or boring. Shopping or washing up, long walks through our old haunts and evenings spent leisurely stretched out on the veranda, meeting each other’s friends or going to galleries and parks—it all combined to give more space for us to meet. Nothing particularly exceptional, just simple things done simply: camaraderie and a natural understanding of each other. We never had any arguments, nor were there dull moments; it was interchange that moved us on and the love we felt growing for each other.

We had stumbled upon a rare chance and we did not miss it, we focused on it with intent and fine-tuned this almost-perfect duet—our Friendship!

KATI WIDMER

TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of October 2003)

Tagore's Perception of Divine Life

LIKE Sri Aurobindo, Tagore is aware that man has within him a clue to the Life Divine. Man can remove the problems of disharmony, which are caused by his egoistic impulses and his selfish desires. Our narrow self conceals our true identity. The discovery of our true being thrills us and the whole world becomes our own. The very essence of soul is unity. In love, the disharmony disappears. For Tagore, love is the highest bliss for man, which makes him realize that he is wider than himself. Love relates him to the universe.

Both the authors know that ego and love do not go together. While Tagore rubs in a little too much with the word sin, Sri Aurobindo excludes the idea from his theory and practice of Yoga. Let us listen to Tagore :

For in sin man takes part with the finite against the infinite that is in him. It is the defeat of his soul by his self. It is a perilously losing game, in which man stakes his all to gain a part. Sin is the blurring of truth which clouds the purity of our consciousness.¹

The Upanishadic idea of sin is not unknown to Sri Aurobindo. But, somehow he is not too fond of the word 'sin'. He says it in his own idiom:

An occasional sinking of the consciousness happens to everybody. The causes are various, some touch from outside, something not yet changed or not sufficiently changed in the vital, especially the lower vital, some inertia or obscurity rising up from the physical parts of nature.²

The science of the new yoga excludes the word 'sin' from its vocabulary. In this matter at least, Tagore is more tied to the old texts than Sri Aurobindo. The discovery of the planes of the being in very clear terms is Sri Aurobindo's original contribution to Yogic culture. He prefers the word 'Error'. And even Error is a possibility for the Prophet of the Life Divine:

In our world error is continually the handmaid and pathfinder of Truth; for error is really a half-truth that stumbles because of its limitations; often it is Truth that wears a disguise in order to arrive unobserved near to its goal.³

The progressive enlightenment can only be hastened if man consents to change his nature. The transformation of human nature is not an overnight affair. Sri Aurobindo maps the hitherto unknown planes of human consciousness and shows in detail the ways to transform

them with the direct help of that mediating force whom he and Sri Ramakrishna call the Mother. Tagore does not show any interest in the Mother-cult, although here and there in his poems the suppressed feeling for the World-Mother creeps in. In Tagore's book entitled *Sadhana*, we find a general survey of the cosmic consciousness and oneness. The details about those realizations are missing in his prose. Of course, in his songs and lyrics, there are moments of revelation. In Sri Aurobindo's prose and poetry, the experiential ideas are more prolific and the doctrine is always supported by the Yogic vision. Moreover, Sri Aurobindo does not stick to a past doctrine; he wishes to reshape the doctrine in the light of the present and the future. However, it is really interesting to see how inspiringly Tagore remembers his tradition in an acquired language:

Through all the diversities of the world the one in us is threading its course towards the one in all; this is its nature and this is its joy. But by that devious path it could never reach its goal if it had not a light of its own by which it could catch in a flash of the sight of what it was seeking. The vision of the Supreme One in our soul is a direct and immediate intuition, not based on any ratiocination or demonstration at all. Our eyes naturally see an object as a whole, not by breaking it up into parts, but by bringing all the parts together into a unity with ourselves.⁴

Tagore means 'revelation' here. He does not use the word, which means direct sight, Sri Aurobindo would have called it "a flame-throw from identity".⁵ Tagore, within his limitations, has a perception of the idea of the Divine's manifestation in common things:

The touch of an infinite mystery passes over the trivial and the familiar, making it break out into ineffable music. The trees and the stars and the blue hills appear to us as symbols acting with a meaning which can never be uttered in words.⁶

Like Sri Aurobindo, Tagore believes in the ultimate value of man: to find the One which is in him. The ultimate value of man is that great becoming, when life itself becomes a beautiful piece of art. The discovery of the One in us removes all contradictions of life. Disharmonies disappear. Work, knowledge and love are harmonized:

...pleasure and pain become one in beauty, enjoyment and renunciation equal in goodness; the breach between the finite and the infinite fills with love and overflows; every moment carries its message of the eternal: the formless appears to us in the form of the flower, of the fruit; the boundless takes us up in his arms as a father and walks by our side as a friend. It is only the soul, the one in man which by its very nature can overcome all limits, and finds its affinity with the Supreme One.⁷

This is what Sri Aurobindo calls "the realisation of the All in the individual by the transformation of the limited ego into a conscious centre of the divine unity and freedom..."⁸

Tagore does not speak about the difference between the mind and the Supermind. Sri Aurobindo clarifies the distinction and tells us how the mind is incapable of achieving or initiating this unity or oneness.

The principle of unity is above in the Supermind: for there alone is the conscious unity of all diversities; ...there alone Consciousness and Force arrive at their divine equation.⁹

However, Tagore echoes Sri Aurobindo's idea of man's awareness of his parts and there is a deliberate effort in him to arrive at a harmony of his mind, life and body. Sri Aurobindo sees it as "a harmony of his [man's] knowledge and will and emotion, a harmony of all his members."¹⁰ Also, both are aware of man's intense conflict with the external world and his wish to search for the principles of harmony. Tagore has an inkling of the divine life on earth; Sri Aurobindo builds the bridge marrying the soil to the sky.

(To be continued)

GOUTAM GHOSAL

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5. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p. 301.
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8. *SABCL*, Vol. 18, p. 59.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
10. *Ibid.*

LOVE FOR THEE

IN what does love for thee consist?
An ardour that would ever persist;
A hallowed manner's mystic grace,
A passion in devotion's face?

Shall we then bow before thy feet,
Surrender all in prayer sweet,
And serve thy work with fervent zeal,
Thy Word obey, thy Truth reveal?

Would love for thee excite and thrill
Unleash the heated heart's fierce will,
And flame in rapture rising fast,
That melts ecstatic in Thy vast?

Shall love with wisdom's light be wed,
On oneness' breast, delight be fed?
Then all would be a shrine of thee,
All life our love's felicity.

LARRY SEIDLITZ

THE MOTHER

By Sri Aurobindo, with the Mother's Comments, pages 213, Rs. 60.00.
ISBN 81-7058-671-2

This book contains *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's spoken comments on passages from that book, made during her evening classes at the Ashram Playground. The first set of comments was made in 1951 and the second in 1954. The publisher's note says, "These comments do not form a systematic commentary on Sri Aurobindo's work, but are rather explanations of certain passages, phrases and words. The Mother usually began the class by reading out a passage from the book, then commented on it or invited questions from those gathered around her."

Available at SABDA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram
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VEDIC PERCEPTION OF THE WORD

In Search of a New Language

THE most fundamental question in the field of Linguistics from immemorial times was the correspondence of meaning with sound (*artha* and *vāk*). There were several great attempts to discover their true relation, to observe and study it gradually and scrupulously on all levels. The oldest attempt, known to us, belongs to the Vedic period (more than 2500 BC). It should be noted that the Vedic Sanskrit language was functioning differently from what is known to us today. In the Vedic times, the main approach to the Word was mantric. Vak, speech, was seen as a carrier and even a creator of meaning. This view was maintained by ancient rishis on the basis of clear and transparent system of etymons and the rich and flexible grammar of Vedic language, the meaning of which was cognized by comprehensive hearing.

When we say, for instance, ‘pen’, we do not know why this particular sound designated this particular meaning. We simply remember it as a symbol indicating it. There is no special law or deeper sense of sound and meaning going together. Their association is rather conventional, in the words of modern Linguistics. But in Sanskrit if we say *lekhani*, a pen, we immediately recognise its meaning from the root, to *likh / rikh*, to scratch, to scribe, and moreover it suggests to us a more general significance of the whole family of roots and their derivations. So, there is a fundamental difference between the language which is etymologically transparent relying on its system of roots, creating a contextual significance from it, being always focused and oriented towards the roots and the language which operates by conventional meaning, memorising the words, their meanings and contextual use, rather than creating them.

In Vedic language a simple root-sound “... had a general character or quality (*guṇa*), which was capable of a great number of applications and therefore of a great number of possible significances. And this *guṇa* and its results it shared with many kindred sounds. At first, therefore, word-clans, word-families started life on the communal system with a common stock of possible and realised significances and a common right to all of them; their individuality lay rather in shades of expression of the same ideas than in any exclusive right to the expression of a single idea.... The principle of partition was at first fluid, then increased in rigidity, until word-families and finally single words were able to start life on their own account.... For in the first state of language the word is as living or even a more living force than its idea; sound determines sense. In its last state the positions have been reversed; the idea becomes all-important, the sound secondary.” (Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, p. 49)

So, the words in Sanskrit were far from simply symbolising the objects and their relations, as they seem to mainly appear in modern languages, but the derivatives of their own system of the seed-ideas, revealing quality, power and state of consciousness in their own system of Meaning. At the very source they were not meant to imitate or project the outer reality, as they are supposed to function in modern languages, but to

reveal the inner reality of the Word, and thus to create a new outer reality.

Up to now there was no valid concept of a comprehensive etymological significance. It was seen mainly as historical evidence of the past and nothing more. The system of etymons was lost in time, and there was no direct correlation between sound and meaning in a systematic way. For instance if we compare the meaning of different synonyms in English: big, huge, immense, great, large, etc., we will find that on the one hand they represent the same concept and on the other hand they have a certain difference in sound-form. So the two phrases “big ocean” and “huge ocean” are not the same. Being similar in concept they differ in sound-quality and therefore in feeling, representing various expressions of consciousness. We can feel these variations but are not able to define them, because we have no knowledge of and access to the system of etymons anymore.

To make our point clear we can take another example. If we compare different words in Sanskrit, which have similar sound-form, we will find certain similarity in meaning also. So if we open the Sanskrit Dictionary we will find that the words, as we read them one by one, change their meanings gradually as they change their sound-form, always adding some new significance and having still something in common.

<i>i,</i>	to go, move;
<i>ikh,</i>	to go, move;
<i>inkh,</i>	to go, move;
<i>ing,</i>	to go, to go to or towards, to move, agitate, shake;
<i>icch / ish,</i>	to desire, to endeavour to obtain;
<i>it,</i>	to go, to go to or towards, to make haste;
<i>inaksh,</i>	to endeavour to reach, strive to obtain;
<i>indh,</i>	kindling, lighting, flaming;
<i>inv,</i>	to advance upon, press upon, drive;
<i>ir,</i>	to go;
<i>ish,</i>	to course, to move, throw, to stream out, to promote; etc.

It is very rare that the meaning would change in a completely unpredictable way because Sanskrit had not yet deviated from its original system of etymons. To a certain extent it is also true for Latin and Greek, though much less, because their systems are incomplete. For modern languages it is absolutely different. Here the meaning is changing from word to word without any systematic phonetic reason. But even here we can find similarity to examples in Sanskrit. If we take, for instance, the whole range of words in English starting with “st”—, like: state, stay, stand, station, static, status, stable, stage, and even such words like: stubborn, stupor, stupid, stumble, stop, stock, staff, stuff, stiff, stem, stick, struck, etc., we can see without any difficulty that they have some common semantic field behind them, of which they are the applications in a specific context.

Here we have to mention that there is a whole range of words, which imitate the sounds of objective reality, so called ‘knock-knock language’. We will not deal with them for the time being, but only with etymologically cognisable words. For this purpose

we will start with Sanskrit which is a language which preserved its own original etymological system. We have basically three different types of meaning:

- a) etymological (original semantic), the core meaning;
- b) grammatical, syntactic semantic;
- c) contextual (the applied one into a specific context), the word-text as we use it.

The syntactic semantic or grammatical meaning is mainly created by the mind, forming language as such. Therefore in ancient Indian linguistic tradition Indra is the first grammarian. Indra as the Lord of Illumined Mind, according to Sri Aurobindo, invented Grammar to master the Eternal Word. His teacher of Sanskrit was Brihaspati, the Lord of the Divine Word. The flow of Brihaspati's speech was endless and eternal, so there was no way for Indra to master it. Therefore he had to stop the flow of the eternal speech and to fashion Grammar, so that with its help the etymological original semantic of Brihaspati, which is beyond time and space, could be grasped and applied to the manifested world in time and space. The Vedic Myth of Creation also tells us about the Word-Grammar-Meaning, which are identified and explained in the Upanishads:

- a) *Dyaus*, Heaven—Original Word, System of Etymons, Meaning;
- b) *Antariksha*, Space in between Heaven and Earth—Grammar, Syntax, Structure, Language;
- c) *Prithivi*, Earth—Applied, manifested Speech.

At the beginning, Heaven and Earth were one, as Original-Intention-Word and Manifested Word, or we may say Meaning and Sound, *artha* and *vak*. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." (*Gospel from John 1.1*) But after splitting into two by grammatical structures, the meaning of the text could not be grasped without a mediator—Grammar. It was no more understood through the sound only but through the structure of the text, the Language.

In our research, we follow Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the origin of human language. In his essay "Origins of Aryan Speech" in the book *The Secret of the Veda*, Archival notes, we collect invaluable material for our studies. Sri Aurobindo gives us keys to the original classification of etymons and a variety of grammatical forms. He gives us original abstract meanings of simple vowels and consonants and moreover—a comprehensive understanding of the processes involved in the creation of human language. This knowledge was revealed to him not simply through linguistic studies. He entered the hidden source of the Word with the help of his yogic realisation.

As Sri Aurobindo writes in his article "Philological Method of the Veda", "The Vedic Sanskrit... abounds in a variety of forms and inflexions; it is fluid and vague, yet richly subtle in its use of cases and tenses. And on its psychological side it has not yet crystallised, is not entirely hardened into the rigid forms of intellectual precision. The word for the Vedic Rishi is still a living thing, a thing of power, creative, formative. It is

not yet a conventional symbol for an idea, but itself the parent and former of ideas. It carries within it the memory of its roots, is still conscient of its own history.” (*The Secret of the Veda*, p. 51)

He gives us the keys to the etymological system of Sanskrit language. The four first simple vowels *a*, *i*, *u*, *r* of the Sanskrit “indicate primarily the idea of being, existence... *A* in its short form indicates being in its simplicity without any farther idea of modification or quality, mere or initial being, creative of space; *i* an intense state of existence, being narrowed, forceful and insistent, tending to a goal, seeking to occupy space; *u* a wide, extended but not diffused state of existence, being medial and firmly occupant of space, *r* a vibrant state of existence, pulsing in space, being active about a point, within a limit.” (*Sri Aurobindo, Archives and Research*, December 1978, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 155-156) A conscious attempt to articulate a particular meaning revealed the system of sound-ideas. The later specification of the idea was provided by the mind, which shaped out the word and its farther derivations. It is the mind which assigns to the words a particular significance, but it is not the mind which assigns to them their general meaning.

Now we have to trace this general semantic in the roots and words of Sanskrit, and to compare the general meaning of all those similar in grammatical structure, words and roots with the general meaning of vowels. Here we will not differentiate the short and long vowels, considering the long vowels to be of the same basic quality. Later in our studies we will make the difference between them.

<i>bha</i> ,	to appear, to look like, to shine;
<i>bhi</i> ,	to fear, to be tense;
<i>bhu</i> ,	to become, to occupy a new space;
<i>bhri</i> ,	to bear;
<i>ma</i> ,	to measure, to create;
<i>ma/mi</i> ,	to measure, to diminish;
<i>mu</i> ,	to measure, to bind, to mingle;
<i>mri</i> ,	to die.

From these few examples we can clearly see that the semantic of selected roots is changing according to the general semantic of the vowel sounds. Thus, for instance: *bha* is to appear; *bhi* is to be tense; *bhu* is to become; *bhri* is to bear. Let us now compare them with the semantic characteristics of the vowels which Sri Aurobindo has given. So if the first root *bha* means an appearance, then the appearance in power is the root *bhi*, meaning tension, whereas the root *bhu* means appearance in the space, which is a kind of occupation of space, and therefore has the meaning of becoming; and finally the root *bhri* means to sustain itself in spite of everything, to bear. The other set of roots: *ma*, to measure, to create, where *mi* is to measure but already to diminish by this measurement; whereas *mu* is to measure and to bind by this measurement; and *mri* is even to depart from by the act of measurement, that is to die.

In these few examples we are trying to go beyond the significance of the mind to

the basic vibrations and their meanings in a systematic way; the difficulty is obvious here, for any time one can mix the grammatical, structural meaning and its influence with etymological. After comparing the whole system of roots and grammatical structures with their systematic change in meaning we will find an absolutely marvellous picture of meaning-sound correlation in Sanskrit, which makes it a true language in a sense of what sounds that is. It is not only a symbolic but factual, true embodiment of meaning. Sanskrit can be a true guide to a new science of language. We believe that a systematic approach to etymology, where Sanskrit is essential for its discovery, may lead us to a new understanding of the origins of all Indo-European languages, or even shed some light on the origins of all languages. It may also prepare a firm and scientific ground for understanding what the language of the new humanity could be. The true language of a new human race, where the sound and meaning are one, where one says exactly what one truly is.

IATSENKO VLADIMIR

THE TRAVELLING MOMENT

LOOKING at the travelling Moment through a rainbow-prism
 of humanity's ebbs and nature's tides,
 of discoursing silences and colourful clamours,
 of lighted nights and thickening shadows,
 The seer plunges
 into its soul of peace and poetry—its eternity.

Higher and higher, and deeper and deeper, he goes
 until is reached the Moment's inscrutable divinity.

Then swooping down on the expectant Moment,
 his chit-tapas he pours out
 on humanity's ebbs and nature's tides,
 on discoursing silences and colourful clamours,
 on lighted nights and thickening shadows.

And lo! the ageless Earth is born,
 A Figure of Godliness, a Being of Bliss.

SUNJOY V. BHATT

AMONG THE NOT SO GREAT—XIX

DADOO (Charu Chandra Dutt)

*Strong Sun of God, immortal love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing when we cannot prove.*

In Memoriam, TENNYSON

DADOO he was to us, his students. He was known to others and the world at large as C. C. Dutt, I.C.S. or at least as Charu Dutt. The full name is Charu Chandra Dutt. He was probably quite well known in some older circles, i.e., in the early part of the last century. But of late not much is heard of him. So, it occurred to me—Why not rake up the still-warm interesting part, blow a little to let flare up the “fire” of Dadoo? For, he was a man out of the ordinary (as testified by our Guru Himself). I know he was a “Great” but again I thought—Why not another exception, with an apology and bring him under “Not So Greats”—just for us to be amongst them. It feels good to rub shoulders with the likes of Dadoo.

(Dadoo himself had written an article about himself. Long ago, in answer to many queries. Much of what I have written comes from that article and what I have put between quotes are actually his or Sri Aurobindo’s words as reported by him. Except for the paragraph in italics which is a direct quote from a letter by the Master to one of the sadhaks.)

Dadoo was one of the most endearing teachers we ever had. C. C. Dutt (Charu Chandra Dutt) sounds too lengthy and grandiose for a man like him—so Dadoo he will be in most of our minds and in all that follows, from 1940 to 1952.

Dadoo even as a teacher in our school was a legendary figure. Later when I learned more about him, the legend only grew. There are, we may say, two legends—one as C. C. Dutt, Charu Dutt of the old cadre of ICS of the Raj, and the other as Dadoo of the Ashram after he settled here in 1940.

I will take up the latter legend first.

He taught history to us youngsters in our old school. His teaching methods were most unconventional but flamboyant and captivating. He already looked like an old man in 1945. He conformed to a picture-book idea of a grandfather with a large pinch of aristocracy added on. Dadoo was not a very large man—may be a bit heavy due to old age. When young he must have been quite smart, energetic, bright and handsome (purely my guesswork and extrapolation backwards). He was always neatly attired in short trousers (above ankles), bush shirt and a waist-coat, steel-rimmed spectacles brightened his merry eyes. A smile ever played on his lips and charmed all who chanced to meet him. A felt hat and walking stick were his constant friends (in need). He looked a pucca retired “Saheb”.

Dadoo would come to school walking slowly with short steps helped along by the

stick. Once in the classroom, he would deposit the hat and stick on the table—within easy reach—and ease himself on to his chair, wipe his forehead and cheeks, look up and give us all a great smile with eyes, lips and more. Familiarity and happiness emanated from him. We were comfortable and ready. He would then launch off into his history lesson. We listened while he recounted history—after all history is a story. Sometimes he would tell a story (*The Three Musketeers*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, were favourites). It was not just recounting—but accompanied by vivid enactments (solo) with the help of hat and stick. They would be held aloft or in front or on the head or under the arm as the occasion demanded.

The hat would become a crown, halo, helmet, shield or just a hat. The stick could be a gun, lance, sword, crutch, almost anything (of course a stick). Remarkable too was his ebullience, childlike and contagious and refreshing. He became one with the story and took us along.

I heard too that he took off a “false and flying” start in his job of class-taking! Why?—is anybody’s guess and imagination. The fact was he started taking history and /or geography lessons right under the “Service” tree in the Ashram Courtyard! He probably got a little impatient. Sisir-da, our old headmaster, even reported to the Mother that he (Dadoo) was giving these classes without textbooks. She said: “That may be alright, these are just some practical classes etc., etc...” (I don’t know what else She had to say.) Anyway he was soon giving classes in the classroom in 1945.

More than giving classes, writing and translating, not much else was expected, and probably he could not and did not do anything else.

That was Dadoo from 1944 to 1952 in our School. But there is more to the story—how did he come here? Why? Dadoo retired from service in 1925. He was a mere 48-year-old! (He was born in 1877.) He arrived here as a result of a few warm and warmer exchange of letters that culminated in his seeking and getting Sri Aurobindo’s permission to visit the Ashram. Along with the permission came a query from Sri Aurobindo: “Does he still smoke that old pipe of his? If so, how can he live in the Ashram?” Dadoo, not to be outdone, wrote back: “Tell Sri Aurobindo that my pipe is my servant, I am its master.” So started Dadoo’s pilgrimage to the Ashram: So far, so good. But there was still a problem—it was the Mother! He was not too sure about “the French lady”. He had heard about Her, both from Her devotees and detractors. He had known other remarkable European women like Annie Besant, Sister Nivedita—but there was no question of prostrating at their feet!—others did so at the Mother’s feet—so what now?—all such thoughts were shooting and recocheting in his mind when he was approaching Her on the eve of the Darshan Day, escorted by an Ashram friend. He decided that he would just do an ordinary ‘namaskar’, go back to his room, and write a letter to Her saying that as he could not follow the Ashram discipline, he was leaving Pondicherry. He approached, beheld those feet and a cry within him arose: “Fool, fool, you thought those were human feet.” He rushed forward to seize them. “A powerful current passed through my frame and the problem of the Mother’s personality was solved for ever,” (as confessed by Dadoo later).

The next day, Darshan day, Nirod-da met him and asked: “What happened sir? Why did the Master say, ‘So Charu did bow down to the Mother!’ ” Dadoo had only this to say—that the Master had saved him. Then came “face-off” day (i.e., Darshan Day). Dadoo crossed the threshold of the Darshan Hall with “trembling feet and fluttering heart, with closed eyes.” When he faced the throne, he opened his eyes and beheld “a sky-blue face, beautiful and benign with a peacock feather on the head.” He could not bear to look at it again and left with averted face. His one thought was not to break down. When Purani-ji asked Sri Aurobindo “How did you see your old friend?” Sri Aurobindo replied: “Charu would not let me look at him.” This was the February Darshan.

Dadoo, before he came to Pondicherry, garlanded his family deity “Govindaji” with a garland of “Bokul” flowers (on Dol Purnima and Ras Purnima nights). He followed this ritual rather mechanically. It was done on his sister’s request, who had taken a vow on his behalf (because he was cured of a severe knee pain when she prayed to Govindaji). This time, i.e. in March after his first visit to Pondicherry, he was met at the Calcutta station by his nephew who took him straight to their Govindaji for the garlanding. Dadoo approached the deity as usual. But... lo and behold, there was nothing usual about it. Dadoo saw the deity’s eyes open and a gentle smile broke on the face—just as he had seen a few days back at Pondicherry. He picked up two handfuls of “Abir” (a red powder) and smeared Govindaji’s face. There is a beautiful sequel to this “Abir-smearing”. Later when Dadoo came to the Ashram, he brought a packet of Abir. He and his wife Leelavati desired, on a festive day, to smear some of it on Sri Aurobindo’s feet. But how? It was simple enough, because Leelavati went straight to the Mother and asked Her if She would do this for them, and the Mother agreed! Next day to their immense delight they got back the powder.

Dadoo even got his rosary or Rudrāksha mālā to be placed at Sri Aurobindo’s feet. Again it was the Mother who indulged her child. These were later events during the course of Dadoo’s stay here. But when he came back for the August Darshan (his second—after the first Darshan in February), he came with Leelavati and they gazed at Sri Aurobindo to their hearts’ content. And Sri Aurobindo too, as he remarked to Purani-ji, “This time I had a good look at Charu, and I recognised Leelavati quite easily.” This was 1940. Dadoo realised that Sri Aurobindo had never forsaken him—a feeling that had gnawed at his heart for 30 long years. Dadoo did pour out all these feelings at the feet of the Mother. She asked him tenderly: “Do you understand now, why Sri Aurobindo came away here in 1910?” He answered, “Yes, I do Mother. As soon as I understood it, I ran up to you!”

Sometime in 1906 Dadoo had told Sri Aurobindo: “You give so many good things to others. I have a request for myself. Let me have a copy of the Gita—one you have handled.” Dadoo used to read the Gita, but hardly ever discussed anything philosophical or spiritual with Sri Aurobindo. Once or twice when Dadoo did raise such topics, Sri Aurobindo would say: “Not yet.” (They discussed political matters, poetry, history, etc.) But when this request was made, Sri Aurobindo brought a well-thumbed copy of the Gita and gave it to Dadoo. One gave it, the other took it—nothing much more was said. After

40 years, in 1946, Dadoo on an impulse, for no good reason, took the book (old and brittle) up to the Mother and said: “Ma mère (Mother mine), Sri Aurobindo gave this book to me 40 years ago. I would like you to keep it.” A few days later after the Darshan, Nirod-da came to Dadoo with something, wrapped up, placed it in Dadoo’s hands—it was the Gita. He said: “I am repeating Sri Aurobindo’s words—‘I gave you the Gita in 1906 and asked you to keep it. I give it to you again today and ask you to keep it.’” Thus he got the book twice, a doubly priceless book—once from a friend and the second time from his “Lord and Master”.

Dadoo—let us presently just call him C.C. Dutt or plain Charu Dutt—heard a great deal about Aurobindo Ghose, even in 1890, when he [Charu Dutt] was in school in Calcutta. What astonished him and most others about this Ghose, was the complete Indianisation of one whose father was thoroughly Europeanised and whose education was in England (deliberately kept away from ‘native’ influence) and one who was not just educated, but reached its top echelons.

Later Dutt himself left for England. He too climbed very high on the same ‘echelon’ as Aurobindo Ghose (not as high). He passed his ICS (unlike Aurobindo Ghose who chose to fail). But even when in England (1896-1899) Charu had already a foot in the revolutionary movement. He and a group of young men had pledged themselves to work for the freedom of their country and had, for this end, contacted some Irish revolutionaries. He continued such revolutionary activities even after joining the ICS. He was also implicated in the Alipore Bomb Case, but no charges were brought against him (I would not know why).

Charu Dutt was acquainted with Sri Aurobindo before 1910 and collaborated with Him. Sri Aurobindo often visited and even stayed with his family, in Thana and in Calcutta. Once, they were amusing themselves shooting at a target with a saloon rifle. When Sri Aurobindo entered, they persuaded him to try his hand. He agreed after a little bit of persuasion and technical explanation. It seems he got the target, the head of a matchstick at twelve feet, again and again.

There is also a story of a card game in which Sri Aurobindo after receiving a few instructions, partnered Mrs. Dutt and time and again beat the other pair of Charu Dutt and his brother-in-law Subodh Mallick. Sri Aurobindo seemed to know what cards the others held. It was a one-sided or more precisely no game at all.

These and more stories were told, which are repeated here just to impress upon us the most remarkable and fortunate nearness and camaraderie that Charu Dutt enjoyed with Sri Aurobindo.

Sometime Sri Aurobindo had passed remarks, semi-humorous, cloaked in ambiguity, during talks with Nirod-da and others, about Charu Dutt being “imaginative” and “inventive”.

Charu Dutt speaks of a faculty he had even before coming to Pondicherry. This was a power to look inside his body and see his internal organs (heart, lungs, liver, etc.), the blood coursing through his veins. This usually happened when he sat relaxed, absent

minded, at dusk or after dark. One day he said to Sri Aurobindo: "Why don't you give me some nice object to concentrate upon?" Sri Aurobindo said nothing, though on previous occasions he would say, "Not yet". (Sri Aurobindo knew of Charu Dutt's faculty to look inside himself, but had never encouraged it.) He (Sri Aurobindo) left for Baroda. After that, one day he had the experience of this old faculty—but—seated inside him, he saw "a luminous, entrancing figure of a Yogi sitting in padmasan." He found it now easy to concentrate on this figure. By and by this figure got confused with that of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo never admitted to having given such an image! He said, "Oh! That image of yours! I know nothing about it."

In 1925 Charu Dutt retired from service and went to Calcutta. Sri Aurobindo had left the political field and Calcutta. This sudden departure did not go down well with many—it was so with Charu Dutt also. He, whom Charu Dutt had recognised as "Chief", had let them down. In a great huff he broke all contact with Sri Aurobindo. He burned many letters he had from Sri Aurobindo. Somehow the Gita given by Sri Aurobindo escaped the mini-holocaust.

Charu Dutt then dabbled in many a "trade"—wrote history, biographies, on science and tried his hand at art. But nothing really satisfied him. He was going through some rough weather too. Leelavati his wife kept telling him "go to Ghose Saheb, he will give you peace." He would not pay heed—he could not bring himself to it. It hurt him, but he suffered himself to carry the chip on his shoulder! Then came a break.

Once someone, a sadhak from the Ashram, had written to Charu Dutt that "many here want to meet you." He replied: "I will not go to your Ashram to satisfy my curiosity. When I go, it will be to offer myself." Then it happened that Charu Dutt had written a review of Jawaharlal Nehru's autobiography. This review was published in a magazine (Vishwa Bharati). It was shown to Sri Aurobindo. A sadhak asked, "Did you, Guru, have contact with this gentleman of yore? Political?" The reply from the Guru was the one which, when communicated to Charu Dutt, broke him down completely. A wound, kept open for 30 long years, suddenly started to heal. The Guru's reply was:

*Charu Dutt? Yes saw very little of him, but from far away
for a few, little bits very intimate, one of the kind of men whom I
used most to appreciate and felt as if they had been my friends and
comrades and fellow warriors in the battle of life and could be so far off
me. But coming from my personal contact with men of this type there were
two drawbacks in my life. Because I had met so many of them, I
suffered.*

Charu Dutt? Yes, saw very little of him, for physically our ways lay far apart, but that little was very intimate, one of the band of men I used most to appreciate and felt as if they had been my friends, comrades and fellow warriors in the battle of the

*ages and would be so for ages more. But curiously enough, my physical contact with men of his type, there were two or three others, was always brief. Because I had something else to do this time, I suppose.*¹

On seeing it “I was overwhelmed by a sense of shame and sorrow. I sat stupefied for a while”—as Charu Dutt himself wrote. Leelavati was naturally overjoyed. She said, “I have told you so often before. Go to Him for a while. He will give you peace.” Charu Dutt immediately wrote to the sadhak. The sequel, as we have seen, was Charu Dutt’s pilgrimage to the Ashram—indeed one long destined and long prepared, for Charu Dutt again joined the ranks of his old “Chief” to resume the “battle of the ages”.

Dadoo the old “fellow warrior” left this visible battlefield in 1952. How he fought here! Colourful and flamboyant like one of his Musketeers and tenacious as a terrier. We saw him as he lay in state, a faint smile as of old yet played on his lips. May be he hears his Chief’s fresh order and call to arms on new frontiers.

We know so little about such matters of the past and the future and frontiers and fellow-warriors. Yet, with this little knowledge, maybe we can hope and pray to meet again on the ‘right’ side whenever and wherever the battle-lines are drawn.

PRABHAKAR (BATTI)

1. Facsimile of the letter in Sri Aurobindo’s hand was published in a book by Mrs. Leelavati Dutt, titled: *Purono Kathar Upasanghar*.

HISTORY, AMNESIA AND PUBLIC MEMORY: THE CHITTAGONG ARMOURY RAID 1930-34

I SHALL divide this essay into three parts: in the first, I shall attempt to reconstruct the main outline of the Chittagong Armoury Raid and the uprising against the British at Chittagong (former East Bengal, now Bangladesh) between 1930-34. In the second, I shall explore the reasons that might help explain the erasure of this significant episode from public memory in India as well as the former East Pakistan and present Bangladesh. And finally, I shall suggest as to how this amnesia could be overcome and the recovery of the Chittagong narrative contribute to the shaping of a new South Asia, more composite, possibly in the manner of a South Asian federation or confederation. I shall rely, in the main, on available historical evidence including Manini Chatterjee's well documented volume *Do and Die: The Chittagong Uprising 1930-34*, Penguin Books, India, 1999. I shall supplement this account by my recent visit to Bangladesh, to the sites associated with the Armoury Raid and my conversation with one of the two surviving members of the Raid, Binode Bihari Choudhury aged 93 (the other being Subodh Roy of *Surjya Sen Bhavan*, Calcutta).

I

The Chittagong story forms an intimate part of the larger history of revolutionary or militant nationalism in Bengal. Led by an intrepid ideologue and combatant, Surjya Sen, popularly known as Masterda (so named since he was a school teacher), the movement scored an extraordinary victory against the vastly superior British military and civilian presence in and around Chittagong in East Bengal. On 18 April 1930, a group of armed revolutionaries raided the British Armoury and other military installations at Chittagong. They proclaimed an independent national government under the Indian Republican Army and waged a prolonged guerilla war in the ensuing three years in the countryside. Striking and graphic accounts at Dhalghat, the attack at Pahartali European Club and the underground resistance have been documented largely in Bengali by some of the survivors. Sadly, mainstream historians in India and Bangladesh neglect this story.

In reconstructing this narrative, it will be useful to ask the following questions:

What were the ideological antecedents of Surjya Sen, the chief architect of the Chittagong movement? Who were the role models of the revolutionaries? What was their socio-economic base and underpinning? In what significant ways was this movement different from the earlier ones? And finally, what is its lasting contribution to nationalistic thought and the history of the freedom struggle in India and Bangladesh?

It is impossible to think of the Chittagong movement without the intellectual, political and martial leadership of Surjya Sen. He was born in the Noapara village of the Chittagong

district in 1894. After his schooling, he completed his intermediate course in Chittagong College and graduated in 1917 from Krishnanath College at Berhampore in the Murshidabad district. During his college days, he came under the influence of the nationalistic movement and vowed to dedicate his life for national liberation. According to other accounts, Surjya Sen, Ambika Chakraborty and others were initiated into the movement by Hemendra Mukhoti, an absconder in the Barisal Conspiracy Case.

The Chittagong group's early inspiration was from the Bengal revolutionaries who came into prominence especially during the *Partition of Bengal Movement* during 1905. The chief architect of this phase was undoubtedly Sri Aurobindo, then known as Aurobindo Ghose. His grandfather from the mother's side was Rajnarayan Bose who formed in 1876 a secret society called *Sanjibani Sabha* of which several members of the Tagore family had membership. In a series of articles in *Induprakash*, a weekly from Bombay edited by K.G. Deshpande, Sri Aurobindo severely criticized the Congress policies as moribund of vision. He sent a Bengali soldier of the Baroda army named Jatin Banerjee to Bengal with the objective of establishing a secret group for undertaking revolutionary propaganda and recruitment. Jatin was later joined by P. Mitter and Barindra Ghosh, Sri Aurobindo's younger brother. Another figure who was influential was a Maratha named Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar. Domiciled in Bengal, he wrote a book called *Deshar Katha* that underlined the British commercial and industrial exploitation of India. He often addressed Jatindra's group of Upper Circular Road on history and economics.

On 30 April 1908 at Muzaffarpur two revolutionaries, Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki threw bombs at Kingsford. Sri Aurobindo was arrested on 2 May, 1908 and sent to Alipore jail. The report sent from Andrew Fraser, the then Lt Governor of Bengal to Lord Minto in England declared that although Sri Aurobindo came to Calcutta in 1906 as a Professor at the National College, "he has ever since been the principal advisor of the revolutionary party. It is of utmost importance to arrest his potential for mischief, for he is the prime mover and can easily set tools, one to replace another." Sri Aurobindo, ably defended by C.R. Das, was acquitted on 6 May 1909 while most of the other accused were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

Of the revolutionary organizations in Bengal, there were principally two, *Anushilan* and *Jugantar*. Under the influence of Barrister P. Mitter, a strong branch of Anushilan was formed in Dhaka.

Thus, while working under the banner of Gandhi's *Non-Cooperation Movement* Surjya Sen and his group were deeply influenced by the earlier revolutionaries of Bengal. They had undergone physical and armed training. In October 1926 Surjya Sen was arrested and, two years later, he and other members were released.

The more immediate inspiration to the Chittagong group came from the famous Easter Uprising in Dublin in 1916. Eamon de Valera's exhortation spurred Surjya Sen to effective action. In a speech delivered in New York in 1920, entitled "India and Ireland", Valera declared:

We of Ireland and you of India must each of us endeavor both as separate people

and combination to rid ourselves of the vampire that is fattening on our blood, and we must never allow ourselves to forget what weapon it was by which Washington rid his country of the same vampire.

The second aspect that distinguishes the Chittagong group from its predecessors and earlier models of revolutionary activities, including the Anushilan group, was their widening socio-religious base. No doubt, the Chittagong group, like the earlier revolutionaries like Khudiram, Bagha Jatin, and Barin Ghose, came from the Hindu middleclass *Bhadralok* background. But Surjya Sen did not have the advantage of a primarily Hindu ambience for a revolutionary action. The entrenched socio-economic divide between the relatively different and educated Hindu minority some of whom came from the landed zamindar background, and the largely sullen Muslim peasantry, vulnerable to the communal mindset of East Bengal, was the greatest challenge the Chittagong group faced. As events proved, they turned the challenge into an opportunity. Revolutionary extremism at Chittagong was not a one-time affair, the spectacular shooting down of a hated political or administrative symbol of the British Raj, say by a Khudiram or a Bhagat Singh. The earlier attempt by a Bagha Jatin to prepare an army under the shadow of World War I with a shipload of German weaponry had met with a premature and aborted end in the fields of Kaptipada at Balasore in Orissa.

Due to various reasons including persistent internecine rivalry, betrayal and mutual suspicion among the rebels, such a plan did not fructify until the time of Subash Chandra Bose during World War II. We must also remember that Sri Aurobindo's argument in favour of the war-effort was induced by solid strategic seasoning. Apart from the permanent need to resist and defeat the fascist forces of Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo, India, he reasoned, would have a standing army of nationalistic minded soldiers that could be relied upon to fight a war of national liberation, should the occasion arise and should the British decide to go back on their promise.

What Subhash Chandra Bose did with the favourable support of the Japanese, by forming the Indian National Army (INA) in Singapore and what the mutineers in the Royal Indian Navy did in the wake of a vastly weakened British military in the naval dockyard of Bombay in 1946, Surjya Sen accomplished, despite being vastly outnumbered and outgunned by the British. He and his men carried out with the help of mostly looted weapons, a prolonged guerilla war against a formidable army in the face of the full might of the British military in the undivided India. He did it by guts and idealism, no doubt joined primarily by strategy, careful planning and by overcoming the class and communal divide in east Bengal. Apart from this, he also enlisted the active support and combat participation of women like Preetilata and Kalpana Datta, who would be remembered as the most outstanding examples of female participation in revolutionary action.

II

After meticulous planning on 18 April 1930, the Chittagong group raided the AFI

armoury, the police station, and the telegraph office simultaneously. Telegraph and communication lines were totally severed. Ananta Singh, Kalipada Chakraborty, Birabhadra, Dwija Dastidar, Surjya Sen, Ganesh Ghose, Ambika Chakraborty, Nirmal Sen, Binode Choudhury, Makhan Ghosal, Loknath Bal and others took part in the raids. They scored a huge success. Unfortunately they could not take possession of the magazines, which were stored separately. Undeterred, they proclaimed a provisional revolutionary government, unfurled the national flag and Surjya Sen made the following declaration in English as part of a longer proclamation: "The great task of revolution in India has fallen on the Indian Republican Army. We in Chittagong have the honour to achieve the patriotic task of revolution for fulfilling the aspiration and urge of our nation."

Having made the proclamation, the group retreated, surviving on biscuits and watermelons. Later, they fought a pitched battle in the surrounding hills of Jalalabad against a contingent of the Eastern Frontier Rifles under the command of Lt. Col. Dallas Smith. They lost several men but inflicted heavy casualties on the soldiers pursuing them. Some of the rebels like Ananta Singh escaped to Calcutta. Others, the largest group remained underground and fought a guerilla war for nearly three years. Several encounters took place, including one at Dhalghat in June 1932. Later, Preetilata and her group attacked the European Club at Pahartali. Wounded, she took potassium cyanide and embraced martyrdom heroically in 1932.

Throughout 1932-33 Masterda and his men were on the run in the countryside. Unfortunately, he was betrayed on 7 February 1933 and was captured by a platoon of Gorkha Sepoys. Later Tarakeshwar Dastidar and Kalpana Dutta were arrested.

Sarat Bose, the brother of the well-known Barrister Subhash, came down to defend Surjya Sen. Unfortunately, Gandhiji did not intervene. On 12 January 1933, Surjya Sen and Tarakeshwar Dastidar were hanged in Chauliaganj Jail. Fearful of a popular backlash, the bodies were carried in a British Cruiser, *The Renowned* and thrown into the Bay of Bengal. Kalpana Datta who was in the Rajshahi Jail was later released, given her young age and gender. With this, the curtain came down on the Chittagong Armoury Raid.

It is worth recalling, in this context, what Surjya Sen said in his last message before he was hanged at midnight:

This is the task for preparation: to embrace death as a friend and this is the time to recall light of other days as well. At such a solemn moment, what shall I leave behind for you? Only one thing, that is my dream, a golden dream—the dream of a free India. How auspicious a moment it was when I first saw it! Through out my life, most passionately and untiringly I pursued it like a lunatic ...onward my comrades! Never fall back! The day of bondage is disappearing and the dawn of freedom is ushered in!

(To be concluded)

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

THE INDIAN APPROACH TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from the issue of October 2003)

The Problem of Indian Unity during the Gupta Age

THE emerging trends of thought are severely critical of all forms of centralised government and in favour of radical decentralisation. “Empowerment”, local autonomy and maximum delegation of power are the watch-words of the new and emerging socio-political thought. But the significance of these two methods of Nature in steering the evolution of humanity is not fully understood. The centralisation of power is an evolutionary necessity at a certain stage in the collective evolution of groups. It is the method used by Nature to give an organised and self-conscious outer vital and material form to an inner psychological entity like the mind and soul of a Nation.

When we examine the political and social history of civilisation, we can see that it begins with a loose association of small autonomous units of clans, tribes or regional people held together by a vague or a vivid inner sense of a psychological and cultural unity but not yet outwardly organised or even with the idea of a self-conscious political unity. When this idea or need of political unity begins to crystallise in the group, the first method Nature uses to precipitate it is a strong centralised government in the form of a monarchy or a ruling class. The more obstinate and unwilling to unite the physical and vital ego of the local units the greater is the need of a strong centralised government. And this process is carried out either by a strong ambitious military genius from within, imposing by military conquest and administrative organisation an absolute centralised authority over the whole society, or by a foreign invasion from without.

But in India the situation was rather unique and complex. The ancient political traditions of India were strongly in favour of local autonomy and against centralised despotism. But, on the other hand, the local and regional communities were so diverse in nature and so obstinate in clinging to their provincial patriotism, it required the strongest of centralised pressure of an organised political authority to bring about the outer unity. The other alternative is an inner evolution of the collectivity or in other words an intellectual, moral or psychological revolution in the collective consciousness which can bring about a free and harmonious federation based on an inner psychological spiritual unity. In fact this is the only way by which an enduring reconciliation between the need of unity and the need of a free diversity can be realised. But this is a possibility which belongs to the future and the age of great empires is not yet ready for this possibility. So the only way left is to impose unity through a strong centralised government. It is this evolutionary need of the age which was met by the Maurya and Gupta empires.

But most of the Indian monarchs brought up as they were in the enlightened and benevolent traditions of ancient India, never tried to impose absolute despotic rule over the society. Even the most centralised, well-organised and efficient administration with a strong military machinery like that of the Guptas did not dismantle the well-established

tradition of communal freedom and autonomy which was one of the unique features of the Indian culture. Even the Muslim rule could not destroy the spirit of communal liberty deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Indian civilisation. Whenever the Muslim rulers like Aurangzeb tried to impose an absolute despotism over the nation, they had to encounter stiff resistance of small kingdoms like the Rajputs, Marathas and Sikhs. And this heroic resistance of small Hindu clans was one of the factors which caused the disintegration of Mughal empire. But, without a broader unifying political ideal which can lead to a harmonious federation of free, mutually interacting communities, this deeply rooted spirit of communal freedom and autonomy created only a strong regional ego and provincial patriotism or an insular self-sufficient community like the ancient Indian village isolated from the rest of the nation. And this remained as one of the major stumbling blocks in the way of political unity of India.

But most of these obstacles offered by the conditions prevailing in ancient India are disappearing in our modern age. The British rule had awakened our Nation to political self-consciousness. But still the right reconciling equation between the powers of central government and the need for local autonomy has not yet been found. Here experiences of the past history of India may throw some resolving insights.

Lessons for the Future of India

We have seen that the most stimulating and creative periods in our ancient civilisation were when the nation was divided into small and free kingdoms and republics. We have also discussed the reasons for this phenomenon and the conditions under which this can happen. We have also seen how this spirit of communal autonomy is deeply ingrained in the political consciousness of the community. So the cry for state autonomy which is a persistent demand of the states in modern India, should be given due consideration. We have to create the conditions under which such free communal units can become a creative force for national progress without becoming a divisive force.

Here we must be careful to avoid the tendency of the average mind to float enthusiastically with the new fad and swing dogmatically towards massive decentralisation and autonomy. We have to examine deeply what is the essential truth or intention of evolutionary Nature behind these two modes of organisation and discover the optimum balance between them which will serve best the evolutionary progress of the collectivity in the future. As we have seen, the purpose of centralisation or central government is to enforce unity, order, stability and continuity of administration. But there are two ways of achieving this purpose. The first method is to create a psychological and cultural solidarity which unites the consciousness of the people through shared vision, values and ideals and a common purpose and allows each sub-group within the community to organise their life according to their unique economic, social and cultural characteristics, swadharma. The main advantage of this method is that it promotes a free and rich diversity which is conducive to a creative flowering of the collective life. The main drawback of this method is that if the political consciousness of the community is not sufficiently

mature and developed, the psychological and cultural solidarity of the community remains only a vague and weak sentiment without much power to weld the community into a strong and enduring external unity which can safeguard it against external aggression or internal strife.

The other method is to create a strong economic, social and political unity through a centralised administrative organisation. The main advantage here is that it ensures peace, stability and security of the outer collective life. But the main drawback of this method is that it tends towards uniformity and mechanisation of life and the concentration of power in the ruling elite and the upper classes and prevents the flowering of a free, rich and creative diversity of communal life diffused throughout the collective life. Now the problem is how to find the optimum balance which will minimise the disadvantages and maximise the advantages of both these methods. We must also take into consideration the evolutionary conditions of the collectivity, stressing on either of these methods depending on the particular needs of the collectivity in different stages of its evolution. All this requires two things: a unifying national vision and a very flexible, mobile and evolving social, political and legal organisation which retains the capacity for both centralised as well as decentralised functioning as the occasion demands and can respond with alacrity to the changing conditions and needs of the collectivity and the environment.

The emerging new breed of political, social and organisational thinkers with their ardent enthusiasm for autonomy, empowerment and decentralised functioning tend to ignore the need to retain the capacity for centralised function. In fact there is no real dichotomy between a strong centre and autonomous states, if by strong we mean the capacity to impose unity and order over the nation—sometimes even by force if necessary—and ensure the sovereignty and solidarity of the nation under external aggression or internal conflict. As long as the spiritual and cultural unity of the Nation has not become a concretely conscious feeling in the consciousness of her people and remains only a vague subconscious sentiment, the outer unity of the nation cannot be entirely sound and secure. This is all the more true for a country like India with a wide variety of ethnic and linguistic and cultural groups. Centrifugal and divisive tendencies can any moment gain the upper hand and jeopardize the unity of the nation. In such situations of internal or external emergency, a strong centre with sufficient power and capacity for centralised decision-making and action may be crucial for keeping the integrity of the nation. Instances of gross misuse of such emergency powers in modern India have provoked much controversy regarding whether such emergency provision is necessary in the Indian constitution. We believe that an emergency provision should be there in the constitution but with sufficient safeguards against misuse of such powers. A day may come when humanity as a whole will rise to a higher level of consciousness beyond mind where it feels its unity and solidarity as a concrete fact of experience and human life no more needs any external controls like constitutions and laws and government. Until that diamond moment of fulfilment arrives for humanity, some form of external organisations and controls for maintaining unity and order may be necessary.

So the problem here is not centralisation as opposed to decentralisation as an either/

or issue. The problem is how the advantages of both can be combined in an optimum proportion which is appropriate to the present and future evolutionary needs of humanity. The studies of futurist thinkers like Alvin Toffler indicate that modern society is moving towards an increasing complexity and diversity. And the past experiences of the political history of India and humanity as a whole indicate that a free diversity is essential for the power, richness and creative vitality of the collective life. So decentralisation and local autonomy will be the dominant trends of the future. This means the political power and initiative will pass more and more from the central government, administration and the bureaucracy to the state and the local people. We have to examine what are the minimum powers which the centre has to retain, and the principles which must govern the relations between the central and the local authority.

What are the minimum powers which the central Government should retain? In the political field, foreign relation and national security—internal and external—can be under the central Government. In economics some amount of central taxation which helps in funding the government is acceptable. In all other activities the central Government should assume the role of the co-ordinator, facilitator and promoter. The functions of the central Government would be co-ordination, promotion and monitoring the progress of the states and the nation as a whole; minimising conflict and maximising co-operation between states; generating synergy by linking the unique strength and competence and genius of all states in a mutually complementing harmony; evolving a national consensus and vision on the long-term policy, goals, values, purpose and mission of the nation as a whole and in every department of national life, finally keeping an overall eye on the material, social, and moral and spiritual well-being and progress of the nation as a whole with enough powers, resources and the capacity—under sufficient safeguards against misuse—to ensure unity, order and stability of the nation and a balanced development of all the organs of the society.

In short as the nation's polity matures, the central Government will become less and less a controlling and regulating authority and more of a co-ordinating and facilitating organ. All the rest of the nation's life will come under the jurisdiction of the states, management of private enterprise and the self-government of the local people. This should not be taken as a fixed dogma but as the ideal towards which we can move through whatever steps and stages on the way. The function of the central Government is to represent the unity and solidarity of the nation and to provide an overall sense of direction and purpose to national life. This involves three major tasks.

The first task is to make each sub-group of the nation—the state, city, district and village—and each department of national life conscious of itself as part of a larger whole and an interdependent and interrelated organ of the organic unity of the nation. In the socialistic countries this was done by enforcing a uniform, mechanised and standardised pattern of life based on a single dogmatic ideology on the whole of the nation through centralised organisation and a brain-washing propaganda. But such methods are now becoming out-of-date in the new and emerging social order which is moving towards a predominantly democratic, decentralised and highly diversified society. In such a free

and diversified society the only durable path towards national integration is through education—not propaganda—which educes a free inner growth—intellectual, moral, psychological and spiritual—in the consciousness of the people and which leads to a conscious realisation of the inner brotherhood and solidarity of the people or in other words to the realisation of the psychological and spiritual solidarity which unites the heart and mind of the people. This fact is beginning to be recognised by the educated intelligentsia in India and all over the world. For example, the National Integration conference report of 1961 mentioned that “national integration is a psychological and educational process involving the development of a feeling of unity, solidarity and cohesion in the hearts of the people.”

But this inner solidarity cannot be achieved by mere intellectual education or by sermons and lectures or by group-singing. This does not mean as some excessively “spiritual” people say that these things are “useless”. Man is at present essentially a mental being and any inner change has to begin with the change in the “thought-process”. So anything which can give the true and the right idea and set the intellectual being in man thinking in the right direction is good and helpful for the inner change. But changing the “thought-process” is not enough. What we need is a new system of education which can make the Idea inwardly concrete, real, and living to the consciousness of the people and galvanise the thinking, feeling and active faculties of the consciousness towards a harmonious and spontaneous realisation of the idea in their inner as well as the outer life. An intellectual environment permeated with the right thought and idea, powerful technological instruments for the communication and diffusion of the idea, and an appropriate outer environment, organisations and institutions favourable to this task. But none of these can bring any lasting and permanent change without a system of education which leads to a psychological transmutation in the consciousness of the people. Such a psychological transformation can be achieved only through a system of education based on the principles of Indian Yoga.

(To be continued)

M. S. SRINIVASAN

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

1. **An Interview with Nirodbaran** compiled and edited by Supriyo Bhattacharya. Published by Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata. Price: Rs. 10.00; pp. 23.
2. **Selected Essays and Talks of Nirodbaran** compiled and edited by Supriyo Bhattacharya. Published by Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Barrackpore. Price: Rs. 100.00; pp. 271.

SUPRIYO BHATTACHARYA must be congratulated for taking the initiative in bringing out these two books, one a short interview with Nirodda and another a selection of some old essays and talks written over a long period of time.

The first one, which consists of an interview with Nirodbaran, is a small book of just a little more than 20 pages. In this short interview Nirodda illumines us on two aspects of Sri Aurobindo. The first one is the help he got from Sri Aurobindo in his poetic creation and the second some very illuminating aspects of the composition of *Savitri*. Both these aspects are very interesting and useful. To the budding artist and poet, there are profound hints, which will help him in his creative work. The second aspect regarding the composition of *Savitri* is a wonderful testimony to the creative genius of Sri Aurobindo. It depicts the way a Yogi goes about his creative work.

The second book *Selected Essays and Talks of Nirodbaran* is a very fine and timely production. It contains a series of talks and essays written by Nirodda spread over a long period of time. These writings are mainly descriptions and pen-sketches of the sadhaks who formed the backbone of the Ashram in the early days. Of course, there is a chapter on Sri Aurobindo as Guru and this is definitely the most inspiring chapter in the book.

The Ashram was formed or rather formed itself in 1926. It started with a small number of disciples. Over the years the numbers started increasing and quite naturally the outer form and structure also underwent great changes, sometimes even radical changes. But through all these changes the central spirit and ambience of the Ashram has always remained the same. However to be able to see and feel this central spirit is not always easy. For we human beings tend to be carried away by the external form and often miss the depths. It is in this context that this book serves a very useful purpose. Through the lives of the early sadhaks, through very interesting anecdotes and above all their interaction with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, one is taken back to the old ambience and atmosphere of the early Ashram. To all those who are sensitive and open, it can become the starting point of a deeper contact with the Mother and the Master. Written in a simple and intensely personal style, this book can be a springboard for newcomers in particular to go back in time and feel the old atmosphere, which though apparently covered up is always there below the surface waiting to be discovered.

Starting from the apparently aloof spiritual personality of Nolinida, the witty and ever charming personality of Amritada, the author moves through a gamut of personalities, each one unique in his own way till we come to the dogged determination and ever faithful personality of Nishikanta. The author has traced some very interesting aspects of these early sadhaks; much more he has brought out some intimate aspects of the Mother

and Sri Aurobindo, which are generally not known to most disciples. The selection of these essays and talks is also quite remarkable. For they throw a great deal of light on the Ashram of the early days. All the names selected have been stalwarts in their own way and have played their role in the great work and the formation of the Ashram. As one goes through the chapters one is taken back to the spiritual ambience when Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were in their physical bodies. For those who were fortunate to live in the Ashram during those wonderful days, it is a very sweet reminder of the past, and for those who were not fortunate to be physically present then, it opens the door to feel the atmosphere of those wonderful days.

This book is, to put it simply, a timely and fine contribution to kindle the fire of aspiration in the hearts of the devotees and disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

KITTU REDDY