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"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

CONTENTS

LAY ALL ON HER; SHE IS THE CAUSE OF ALL

THE air awoke perturbed with scaling cries,
And the swift parents hurrying to their child,—
Their cause of life now who had given him breath,—
Possessed him with their arms. Then tenderly
Cried Dyumathsena chiding Satyavan:
"The fortunate gods have looked on me today,
A kingdom seeking came and heaven's rays.
But where wast thou? Thou hast tormented gladness
With fear's dull shadow, O my child, my life.
What danger kept thee for the darkening woods?
Or how could pleasure in her ways forget
That useless orbs without thee are my eyes
Which only for thy sake rejoice at light?
Not like thyself was this done, Savitri,
Who ledst not back thy husband to our arms,
Knowing with him beside me only is taste
In food and for his touch evening and morn
I live content with my remaining days."
But Satyavan replied with smiling lips:
"Lay all on her; she is the cause of all.
With her enchantments she has twined me round.
Behold, at noon leaving this house of clay
I wandered in far-off eternities,
Yet still, a captive in her golden hands,
I tread your little hillock called green earth
And in the moments of your transient sun
Live glad among the busy works of men."
Then all eyes turned their wondering looks where stood
A deepening redder gold upon her cheeks,
With lowered lids the noble lovely child,
And one consenting thought moved every breast:
"What gleaming marvel of the earth or skies
Stands silently by human Satyavan
To mark a brilliance in the dusk of eve?
If this is she of whom the world has heard,
Wonder no more at any happy change.
Each easy miracle of felicity
Of her transmuting heart the alchemy is."
Then one spoke there who seemed a priest and sage:
"O woman soul, what light, what power revealed,

Working the rapid marvels of this day,
Opens for us by thee a happier age?"
Her lashes fluttering upwards gathered in
To a vision which had scanned immortal things,
Rejoicing, human forms for their delight.
They claimed for their deep childlike motherhood
The life of all these souls to be her life,
Then falling veiled the light. Low she replied:
"Awakened to the meaning of my heart,
That to feel love and oneness is to live
And this the magic of our golden change
Is all the truth I know or seek, O sage."
Wondering at her and her too luminous words
Westward they turned in the fast-gathering night.
From the entangling verges freed they came
Into a dimness of the sleeping earth
And travelled through her faint and slumbering plains.
Murmur and movement and the tread of men
Broke the night's solitude. The neigh of steeds
Rose from that indistinct and voiceful sea
Of life and all along its marchings swelled
The rhyme of hooves, the chariot's homeward voice.
Drawn by white manes upon a high-roofed car
In flare of the unsteady torches went
With linked hands Satyavan and Savitri,
Hearing a marriage march and nuptial hymn,
Where waited them the many-voiced human world.
Numberless the stars swam on their shadowy field
Describing in the gloom the ways of light.
Then while they skirted yet the southward verge,
Lost in the halo of her musing brows
Night, splendid with the moon dreaming in heaven
In silver peace, possessed her luminous reign.
She brooded through her stillness on a thought
Deep-guarded by her mystic folds of light,
And in her bosom nursed a greater dawn.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, SABCL, Vol, 29, pp. 722-24)

THE IDEAL OF THE KARMAYOGIN

A NATION is building in India today before the eyes of the world so swiftly, so palpably that all can watch the process and those who have sympathy and intuition distinguish the forces at work, the materials in use, the lines of the divine architecture. This nation is not a new race raw from the workshop of Nature or created by modern circumstances. One of the oldest races and greatest civilisations on this earth, the most indomitable in vitality, the most fecund in greatness, the deepest in life, the most wonderful in potentiality, after taking into itself numerous sources of strength from foreign strains of blood and other types of human civilisation, is now seeking to lift itself for good into an organised national unity. Formerly a congeries of kindred nations with a single life and a single culture, always by the law of this essential oneness tending to unity, always by its excess of fecundity engendering fresh diversities and divisions, it has never yet been able to overcome permanently the almost insuperable obstacles to the organisation of a continent. The time has now come when those obstacles can be overcome. The attempt which our race has been making throughout its long history, it will now make under entirely new circumstances. A keen observer would predict its success because the only important obstacles have been or are in the process of being removed. But we go farther and believe that it is sure to succeed because the freedom, unity and greatness of India have now become necessary to the world. This is the faith in which the *Karmayogin* puts its hand to the work and will persist in it, refusing to be discouraged by difficulties however immense and apparently insuperable. We believe that God is with us and in that faith we shall conquer. We believe that humanity needs us and it is the love and service of humanity, of our country, of the race, of our religion that will purify our heart and inspire our action in the struggle.

The task we set before ourselves is not mechanical but moral and spiritual. We aim not at the alteration of a form of government but at the building up of a nation. Of that task politics is a part, but only a part. We shall devote ourselves not to politics alone, nor to social questions alone, nor to theology or philosophy or literature or science by themselves, but we include all these in one entity which we believe to be all-important, the *dharma*, the national religion which we also believe to be universal. There is a mighty law of life, a great principle of human evolution, a body of spiritual knowledge and experience of which India has always been destined to be guardian, exemplar and missionary. This is the *sanātana dharma*, the eternal religion. Under the stress of alien impacts she has largely lost hold not of the structure of that *dharma*, but of its living reality. For the religion of India is nothing if it is not lived. It has to be applied not only to life, but to the whole of life; its spirit has to enter into and mould our society, our politics, our literature, our science, our individual character, affections and aspirations. To understand the heart of this *dharma*, to experience it as a truth, to feel the high emotions to which it rises and to express and execute it in life is what we understand by Karmayoga. We believe that it is to make the *yoga* the ideal of human life that India rises today; by the *yoga* she will get the strength to realise her freedom, unity and greatness, by the *yoga* she

will keep the strength to preserve it. It is a spiritual revolution we foresee and the material is only its shadow and reflex.

The European sets great store by machinery. He seeks to renovate humanity by schemes of society and systems of government; he hopes to bring about the millennium by an act of Parliament. Machinery is of great importance, but only as a working means for the spirit within, the force behind. The nineteenth century in India aspired to political emancipation, social renovation, religious vision and rebirth, but it failed because it adopted Western motives and methods, ignored the spirit, history and destiny of our race and thought that by taking over European education, European machinery, European organisation and equipment we should reproduce in ourselves European prosperity, energy and progress. We of the twentieth century reject the aims, ideals and methods of the anglicised nineteenth, precisely because we accept its experience. We refuse to make an idol of the present; we look before and after, backward to the mighty history of our race, forward to the grandiose history for which that destiny has prepared it.

We do not believe that our political salvation can be attained by enlargement of Councils, introduction of the elective principle, colonial self-government or any other formula of European politics. We do not deny the use of some of these things as instruments, as weapons in a political struggle, but we deny their sufficiency whether as instruments or ideals and look beyond to an end which they do not serve except in a trifling degree. They might be sufficient if it were our ultimate destiny to be an outlying province of the British Empire or a dependent adjunct of European civilisation. That is a future which we do not think it worth making any sacrifice to accomplish. We believe, on the other hand that India is destined to work out her own independent life and civilisation, to stand in the forefront of the world and solve the political, social, economic and moral problems which Europe has failed to solve, yet the pursuit of which and the feverish passage in that pursuit from experiment to experiment, from failure to failure she calls her progress. Our means must be as great as our ends and the strength to discover and use the means so as to attain the end can only be found by seeking the eternal source of strength in ourselves.

We do not believe that by changing the machinery so as to make our society the ape of Europe we shall effect social renovation. Widow-remarriage, substitution of class for caste, adult marriage, intermarriages, interdining and the other nostrums of the social reformer are mechanical changes which, whatever their merits or demerits, cannot by themselves save the soul of the nation alive or stay the course of degradation and decline. It is the spirit alone that saves, and only by becoming great and free in heart can we become socially and politically great and free.

We do not believe that by multiplying new sects limited within the narrower and inferior ideas of religion imported from the West or by creating organisations for the perpetuation of the mere dress and body of Hinduism we can recover our spiritual health, energy and greatness. The world moves through an indispensable interregnum of free thought and materialism to a new synthesis of religious thought and experience, a new religious world-life free from intolerance, yet full of faith and fervour, accepting all

forms of religion because it has an unshakable faith in the One. The religion which embraces Science and faith, Theism, Christianity, Mahomedanism and Buddhism and yet is none of these, is that to which the World-Spirit moves. In our own, which is the most sceptical and the most believing of all, the most sceptical because it has questioned and experimented the most, the most believing because it has the deepest experience and the most varied and positive spiritual knowledge,—that wider Hinduism which is not a dogma or combination of dogmas but a law of life, which is not a social framework but the spirit of a past and future social evolution, which rejects nothing but insists on testing and experiencing everything and when tested and experienced, turning it to the soul's uses, in this Hinduism we find the basis of the future world-religion. This *sanātana dharma* has many scriptures, Veda, Vedanta, Gita, Upanishad, Darshana, Purana, Tantra, nor could it reject the Bible or the Koran; but its real, most authoritative scripture is in the heart in which the Eternal has His dwelling. It is in our inner spiritual experiences that we shall find the proof and source of the world's Scriptures, the law of knowledge, love and conduct, the basis and inspiration of Karmayoga.

Our aim will therefore be to help in building up India for the sake of humanity—this is the spirit of the Nationalism which we profess and follow. We say to humanity: "The time has come when you must take the great step and rise out of a material existence into the higher, deeper and wider life towards which humanity moves. The problems which have troubled mankind can only be solved by conquering the kingdom within, not by harnessing the forces of Nature to the service of comfort and luxury, but by mastering the forces of the intellect and the spirit, by vindicating the freedom of man within as well as without and by conquering from within external Nature. For that work the resurgence of Asia is necessary, therefore Asia rises. For that work the freedom and greatness of India are essential, therefore she claims her destined freedom and greatness, and it is to the interest of all humanity, not excluding England, that she should wholly establish her claim.''

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

We say to the individual and especially to the young who are now arising to do India's work, the world's work, God's work: "You cannot cherish these ideals, still less

can you fulfil them if you subject your minds to European ideas or look at life from the material standpoint. Materially you are nothing, spiritually you are everything. It is only the Indian who can believe everything, dare everything, sacrifice everything. First, therefore, become Indians. Recover the patrimony of your forefathers. Recover the Aryan thought, the Aryan discipline, the Aryan character, the Aryan life. Recover the Vedanta, the Gita, the Yoga. Recover them not only in intellect or sentiment but in your lives. Live them and you will be great and strong, mighty, invincible and fearless. Neither life nor death will have any terrors for you. Difficulty and impossibility will vanish from your vocabularies. For it is in the spirit that strength is eternal and you must win back the kingdom of yourselves, the inner Swaraj, before you can win back your outer empire. There the Mother dwells and She waits for worship that She may give strength. Believe in Her, serve Her, lose your wills in Hers, your egoism in the greater ego of the country, your separate selfishness in the service of humanity. Recover the source of all strength in yourselves and all else will be added to you, social soundness, intellectual pre-eminence, political freedom, the mastery of human thought, the hegemony of the world.''

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Karmayogin*, SABCL, Vol. 2, pp. 16-21)

In order that we may do this, the terms concentration and Samadhi must assume for us a richer and profound meaning. All our concentration is merely an image of the divine Tapas by which the Self dwells gathered in itself, by which it manifests within itself, by which it maintains and possesses its manifestation, by which it draws back from all manifestation into its supreme oneness. Being dwelling in consciousness upon itself for bliss, this is the divine Tapas; and a Knowledge-Will dwelling in force of consciousness on itself and its manifestations is the essence of the divine concentration, the Yoga of the Lord of Yoga. Given the self-differentiation of the Divine in which we dwell, concentration is the means by which the individual soul identifies itself with and enters into any form, state or psychological self-manifestation (*bhāva*) of the Self. To use this means for unification with the Divine is the condition for the attainment of divine knowledge and the principle of all Yoga of knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 320-21)

TO MY BROTHER

(A Letter to Manmohan Ghose)

ONLY a short while ago I had a letter from you—I cannot lay my hands on the passage, but I remember it contained an unreserved condemnation of Hindu legend as trivial and insipid, a mass of crude and monstrous conceptions, a lumber-room of Hindu banalities. The main point of your indictment was that it had nothing in it simple, natural, passionate and human, that the characters were lifeless patterns of moral excellence.

I have been so long accustomed to regard your taste and judgment as sure and final that it is with some distrust I find myself differing from you. Will you permit me then to enter into some slight defence of what you have so emphatically condemned and explain why I venture to dedicate a poem on a Hindu subject, written in the Hindu spirit and constructed on Hindu principles of taste, style and management, to you who regard all these things as anathema maranatha? I am not attempting to convince you, only to justify, or at least define my own standpoint; perhaps also a little to reassure myself in the line of poetical art I have chosen.

The impression that Hindu Myth has made on you, is its inevitable aspect to a taste nourished on the pure dew and honey of Hellenic tradition; for the strong Greek sense of symmetry and finite beauty is in conflict with the very spirit of Hinduism, which is a vast attempt of the human intellect to surround the universe with itself, an immense measuring of itself with the infinite and amorphous. Hellenism must necessarily see in the greater part of Hindu imaginations and thoughts a mass of crude fancies equally removed from the ideal and the real. But when it condemns all Hindu legend without distinction, I believe it is acting from an instinct which is its defect,—the necessary defect of its fine quality. For in order to preserve a pure, sensitive and severe standard of taste and critical judgment, it is compelled to be intolerant; to insist, that is, on its own limits and rule out all that exceeds them, as monstrous and unbeautiful. It rejects that flexible sympathy based on curiosity of temperament, which attempts to project itself into differing types as it meets them and so pass on through ever-widening artistic experiences to its destined perfection. And it rejects it because such catholicity would break the fine mould into which its own temperament is cast. This is well; yet is there room in art and criticism for that other, less fine but more many-sided, which makes possible new elements and strong departures. Often as the romantic temperament stumbles and creates broken and unsure work, sometimes it scores one of those signal triumphs which subject new art forms to the service of poetry or open up new horizons to poetical experience. What judgment would such a temperament, seeking its good where it can find it, but not grossly indiscriminating, not ignobly satisfied, pronounce on the Hindu legends?

I would carefully distinguish between two types of myth, the religious-philosophical allegory and the genuine secular legend. The former is beyond the pale of profitable argument. Created by the allegorical and symbolising spirit of mediaeval Hinduism, the religious myths are a type of poetry addressed to a peculiar mental constitution, and the

sudden shock of the bizarre repels occidental imagination the moment it comes in contact with Puranic literature, reveals to us where the line lies that must eternally divide East from West. The difference is one of root-temperament and therefore unbridgeable. There is the mental composition which has no facet towards imaginative religion, and if it accepts religion at all, requires it to be plain, precise and dogmatic; to such these allegories must always seem false in art and barren in significance. And there is the mental composition in which a strong metaphysical bent towards religion combines with an imaginative tendency seeking symbol both as an atmosphere around religion, which would otherwise dwell on too breathless mountaintops, and as a safeguard against the spirit of dogma. These find in Hindu allegory a perpetual delight and refreshment; they believe it to be powerful and penetrating, sometimes with an epical daring of idea and an inspiration of searching appropriateness which not unoften dissolves into a strange and curious beauty. The strangeness permeating these legends is a vital part of themselves, and to eliminate the bizarre in them—bizarre to European notion, for to us they seem striking and natural—would be to emasculate them of the most characteristic part of their strength. Let us leave this type aside then as beyond the field of fruitful discussion.

There remain the secular legends; and it is true that a great number of them are intolerably puerile and grotesque. My point is that the puerility is no essential part of them but lies in their presentment, and that presentment again is characteristic of the Hindu spirit not in its best and most self-realising epochs. They were written in an age of decline, and their present form is the result of a literary accident. The Mahabharata of Vyasa, originally an epic of 24,000 verses, afterwards enlarged by a redacting poet, was finally submerged in a vast mass of inferior accretions, the work often of a tasteless age and unskilful hands. It is in this surface mass that the majority of the Hindu legends have floated down to our century. So preserved, it is not surprising that the old simple beauty of the ancient tales should have come to us marred and disfigured, as well as debased by association with later inventions which have no kernel of sweetness. And yet very simple and beautiful, in their peculiar Hindu type, were these old legends with infinite possibilities of sweetness and feeling, and in the hands of great artists have blossomed into dramas and epics of the most delicate tenderness or the most noble sublimity. One who glances at the dead and clumsy narrative of the Shacountala legend in the Mahabharata and reads after it Kalidasa's masterpiece in which delicate dramatic art and gracious tenderness of feeling reach their climax, at once perceives how they vary with the hands which touch them.

But you are right. The Hindu myth has not the warm passionate life of the Greek. The Hindu mind was too austere and idealistic to be sufficiently sensitive to the rich poetical colouring inherent in crime and sin and overpowering passion; an Oedipus or an Agamemnon stands therefore outside the line of its creative faculty. Yet it had in revenge a power which you will perhaps think no compensation at all, but which to a certain class of minds, of whom I confess myself one, seems of a very real and distinct value. Inferior in warmth and colour and quick life and the savour of earth to the Greek, they had a superior spiritual loveliness and exaltation; not clothing the surface of the earth with

imperishable beauty, they search deeper into the white-hot core of things and in their cyclic orbit of thought curve downward round the most hidden foundations of existence and upward over the highest, almost invisible arches of ideal possibility. Let me touch the subject a little more precisely. The difference between the Greek and Hindu temperaments was that one was vital, the other supra-vital; the one physical, the other metaphysical; the one sentient of sunlight as its natural atmosphere and the bound of its joyous activity, the other regarding it as a golden veil which hid from it beautiful and wonderful things for which it panted.[1] The Greek aimed at limit and finite perfection, because he felt vividly all our bounded existence; the Hindu mind, ranging into the infinite tended to the enormous and moved habitually in the sublime. This is poetically a dangerous tendency; finite beauty, symmetry and form are always lovely, and Greek legend, even when touched by inferior poets, must always keep something of its light and bloom and human grace or of its tragic human force. But the infinite is not for all hands to meddle with; it submits only to the compulsion of the mighty, and at the touch of an inferior mind recoils over the boundary of the sublime into the grotesque. Hence the enormous difference of level between different legends or the same legend in different hands,—the sublimity or tenderness of the best, the banality of the worst, with a little that is mediocre and intermediate shading the contrast away. To take with a reverent hand the old myths and cleanse them of soiling accretions, till they shine with some of the antique strength, simplicity and solemn depth of beautiful meaning, is an ambition which Hindu poets of today may and do worthily cherish. To accomplish a similar duty in a foreign tongue is a more perilous endeavour.

I have attempted in the following narrative to bring one of our old legends before the English public in a more attractive garb than could be cast over them by mere translation or by the too obvious handling of writers like Sir Edwin Arnold;—preserving its inner spirit and Hindu features, yet rejecting no device that might smooth away the sense of roughness and the bizarre which always haunts what is unfamiliar, and win for it the suffrage of a culture to which our mythological conventions are unknown and our canons of taste unacceptable. The attempt is necessarily beset with difficulties and pitfalls. If you think I have even in part succeeded, I shall be indeed gratified; if otherwise, I shall at least have the consolation of having failed where failure was more probable than success.

The story of Ruaru is told in the very latest accretion layer of the Mahabharata, in a bald and puerile narrative without force, beauty or insight. Yet it is among the most significant and powerful in idea of our legends; for it is rather an idea than a tale. Bhrigou, the grandfather of Ruaru, is almost the most august and venerable name in Vedic literature. Set there at the very threshold of Aryan history, he looms dim but large out of the mists of an incalculable antiquity, while around him move great shadows of unborn peoples and a

1. O fostering Sun, who hast hidden the face of Truth with thy golden shield, displace that splendid veil from the vision of the righteous man, O Sun.

O fosterer, O solitary traveller, O Sun, O Master of Death, O child of God, dissipate thy beams, gather inward thy light; so shall I behold that splendour, thy goodliest form of all. For the Spirit who is there and there, He am I.

The Isha Upanishad, 15 & 16.

tradition of huge halfdiscernible movements and vague but colossal revolutions. In later story his issue form one of the most sacred clans of Rishies, and Purshurama the destroyer of princes was of his offspring. By the Titaness Puloma this mighty seer and patriarch, himself one of the mind-children of Brahma had a son Chyavan,—who inherited even from the womb his father's personality, greatness and ascetic energy. Chyavan too became an instructor and former of historic minds and a father of civilisation; Ayus was among his pupils, the child of Pururavas by Urvasie and founder of the Lunar or Ilian dynasty whose princes after the great civil wars of the Mahabharata became Emperors of India. Chyavan's son Pramati, by an Apsara or nymph of paradise, begot a son named Ruaru, of whom this story is told. This Ruaru, later, became a great Rishi like his fathers, but in his youth he was engrossed with his love for a beautiful girl whom he had made his wife, the daughter of the Gundhurva King, Chitroruth, by the sky-nymph Menaca; an earlier sister therefore of Shacountala. Their joy of union was not yet old when Priyumvada perished, like Eurydice, by the fangs of a snake. Ruaru inconsolable for her loss, wandered miserable among the forests that had been the shelter and witnesses of their love, consuming the universe with his grief, until the Gods took pity on him and promised him his wife back, if he sacrificed for her half his life. To this Ruaru gladly assented and, the price paid, was reunited with his love.

Such is the story, divested of the subsequent puerile developments by which it is linked on to the Mahabharata. If we compare it with the kindred tale of Eurydice, the distinction I have sought to draw between the Hindu and Greek mythopoetic faculty, justifies itself with great force and clearness. The incidents of Orpheus' descent into Hades, his conquering Death and Hell by his music and harping his love back to the sunlight, and the tragic loss of her at the moment of success through a too natural and beautiful human weakness, has infinite fancy, pathos, trembling human emotion. The Hindu tale, barren of this subtlety and variety is bare of incident and wanting in tragedy. It is merely a bare idea for a tale. Yet what an idea it supplies! How deep and searching is that thought of half the living man's life demanded as the inexorable price for the restoration of his dead! How it seems to knock at the very doors of human destiny, and give us a gust of air from worlds beyond our own suggesting illimitable and unfathomable thoughts of our potentialities and limitations.

I have ventured in this poem to combine, as far as might be, the two temperaments, the Greek pathetic and the Hindu mystic; yet I have carefully preserved the essence of the Hindu spirit and the Hindu mythological features. The essential idea of these Hindu legends, aiming, as they do, straight and sheer at the sublime and ideal, gives the writer no option but to attempt epic tone and form,—I speak of course of those which are not merely beautiful stories of domestic life. In the choice of an epic setting I had the alternative of entirely Hellenising the myth or adopting the method of Hindu epic. I have preferred the course which, I fear, will least recommend itself to you. The true subject of Hindu epic is always a struggle between two ideal forces universal and opposing, while the human and divine actors, the Supreme Triad excepted, are pawns moved to and fro by immense world-impulses which they express but cannot consciously guide. It is perhaps

the Olympian ideal in life struggling with the Titanic ideal, and then we have a Ramaian. Or it may be the imperial ideal in government and society marshalling the forces of order, self-subjection, self-effacement, justice, equality, against the aristocratic ideal, with self-will, violence, independence, self-assertion, feudal loyalty, the sway of the sword and the right of the stronger at its back; this is the key of the Mahabharata. Or it is again, as in the tale of Savitrie, the passion of a single woman in its dreadful silence and strength pitted against Death, the divorcer of souls. Even in a purely domestic tale like the Romance of Nul, the central idea is that of the spirit of Degeneracy, the genius of the Iron age,—overpowered by a steadfast conjugal love. Similarly, in this story of Ruaru and Priyumvada the great spirits who preside over Love and Death, Cama and Yama, are the real actors and give its name to the poem.

The second essential feature of the Hindu epic model is one which you have selected for especial condemnation and yet I have chosen to adhere to it in its entirety. The characters of Hindu legend are, you say, lifeless patterns of moral excellence. Let me again distinguish. The greater figures of our epics are ideals, but ideals of wickedness as well as virtue and also of mixed characters which are not precisely either vicious or virtuous. They are, that is to say, ideal presentments of character-types. This also arises from the tendency of the Hindu creative mind to look behind the actors at tendencies, inspirations, ideals. Yet are these great figures; are Rama, Sita, Savitrie, merely patterns of moral excellence? I who have read their tale in the swift and mighty language of Valmekie and Vyasa and thrilled with their joys and their sorrows, cannot persuade myself that it is so. Surely Savitrie that strong silent heart, with her powerful and subtly-indicated personality, has both life and charm; surely Rama puts too much divine fire into all he does to be a dead thing,—Sita is too gracious and sweet, too full of human lovingness and lovableness, of womanly weakness and womanly strength! Ruaru and Priyumvada are also types and ideals; love in them, such is the idea, finds not only its crowning exaltation but that perfect *idea* of itself of which every existing love is a partial and not quite successful manifestation. Ideal love is a triune energy, neither a mere sensual impulse, nor mere emotional nor mere spiritual. These may exist, but they are not love. By itself the sensual is only an animal need, the emotional a passing mood, the spiritual a religious aspiration which has lost its way. Yet all these are necessary elements of the highest passion. Sense impulse is as necessary to it as the warm earth-matter at its root to the tree, emotion as the air which consents with its life, spiritual aspiration as the light and the rain from heaven which prevent it from withering. My conception being an ideal struggle between love and death, two things are needed to give it poetical form, an adequate picture of love and adequate image of death. The love pictured must be on the ideal plane, and touch therefore the farthest limit of strength in each of its three directions. The sensual must be emphasised to give it firm root and basis, the emotional to impart to it life, the spiritual to prolong it into infinite permanence. And if at their limits of extension the three meet and harmonise, if they are not triple but triune, then is that love a perfect love and the picture of it a perfect picture. Such at least is the conception of the poem; whether I have contrived even faintly to execute it, do you judge.

But when Hindu canons of taste, principles of epic-writing and types of thought and character are assimilated there are still serious difficulties in Englishing a Hindu legend. There is the danger of raising around the subject a jungle of uncouth words and unfamiliar allusions impenetrable to English readers. Those who have hitherto made the attempt, have succumbed to the passion for "local colour" or for a liberal peppering of Sanscrit words all over their verses, thus forming a constant stumbling-block and a source of irritation to the reader. Only so much local colour is admissible as comes naturally and unforced by the very nature of the subject; and for the introduction of a foreign word into poetry the one valid excuse is the entire absence of a fairly corresponding word or phrase in the language itself. Yet a too frequent resort to this plea shows either a laziness in invention or an unseasonable learning. There are very few Sanscrit words or ideas, not of the technical kind, which do not admit of being approximately conveyed in English by direct rendering or by a little management, or, at the worst, by coining a word which, if not precisely significant of the original, will create some kindred association in the mind of an English reader. A slight inexactness is better than a laborious pedantry. I have therefore striven to avoid all that would be unnecessarily local and pedantic, even to the extent of occasionally using a Greek expression such as Hades for the lord of the underworld. I believe such uses to be legitimate, since they bring the poem nearer home to the imagination of the reader. On the other hand, there are some words one is loth to part with. I have myself been unable or unwilling to sacrifice such Indianisms as Rishi, Naga, for the snake-gods who inhabit the nether-world; Uswuttha, for the sacred fig-tree; Chompuc (but this has been made familiar by Shelley's exquisite lyric); coil or Kokil, for the Indian cuckoo; and names like Dhurma (Law, Religion, Rule of Nature) and Critanta, the ender, for Yama, the Indian Hades. These, I think, are not more than a fairly patient reader may bear with. Mythological allusions, the indispensable setting of a Hindu legend, have been introduced sparingly, and all but one or two will explain themselves to a reader of sympathetic intelligence and some experience in poetry.

Yet are they, in some number, indispensable. The surroundings and epic machinery must necessarily be the ordinary Hindu surroundings and machinery. Properly treated, I do not think these are wanting in power and beauty of poetic suggestion. Ruaru, the grandson of Bhrigou, takes us back to the very beginnings of Aryan civilisation when our race dwelt and warred and sang within the frontier of the five rivers, Iravatie, Chundrobhaga, Shotodrou, Bitosta and Bipasha, and our Bengal was but a mother of wild beasts, clothed in the sombre mystery of virgin forests and gigantic rivers and with no human inhabitants save a few savage tribes, the scattered beginnings of nations. Accordingly the story is set in times when earth was yet new to her children, and the race was being created by princes like Pururavas and patriarchal sages or Rishies like Bhrigou, Brihuspati, Gautama. The Rishi was in that age the head of the human world. He was at once sage, poet, priest, scientist, prophet, educator, scholar and legislator. He composed a song, and it became one of the sacred hymns of the people; he emerged from rapt communion with God to utter some puissant sentence, which in after ages became the germ of mighty philosophies; he conducted a sacrifice, and kings and peoples rose on its seven flaming

tongues to wealth and greatness; he formulated an observant aphorism, and it was made the foundation of some future science, ethical, practical or physical; he gave a decision in a dispute and his verdict was seed of a great code or legislative theory. In Himalayan forests or by the confluence of great rivers he lived as the centre of a patriarchal family whose link was thought-interchange and not blood-relationship, bright-eyed children of sages, heroic striplings, earnest pursuers of knowledge, destined to become themselves great Rishies or renowned leaders of thought and action. He himself was the master of all learning and all arts and all sciences. The Rishies won their knowledge by meditation working through inspiration to intuition. Austere concentration of the faculties stilled the waywardness of the reason and set free for its work the inner, unerring vision which is above reason, as reason is itself above sight; this again worked by intuitive flashes, one inspired stroke of insight quivering out close upon the other, till the whole formed a logical chain; yet a logic not coldly thought out nor the logic of argument but the logic of continuous and consistent inspiration. Those who sought the Eternal through physical austerities, such as the dwelling between five fires (one fire on each side and the noonday sun overhead) or lying for days on a bed of swordpoints, or Yoga processes based on an advanced physical science, belonged to a later day. The Rishies were inspired thinkers, not working through deductive reason or any physical process of sense-subdual. The energy of their personalities was colossal; wrestling in fierce meditation with God, they had become masters of incalculable spiritual energies, so that their anger could blast peoples and even the world was in danger when they opened their lips to utter a curse. This energy was by the principle of heredity transmitted, at least in the form of a latent and educable force, to their offspring. Afterwards as the vigour of the race exhausted itself, the inner fire dwindled and waned. But at first even the unborn child was divine. When Chyavan was in the womb, a Titan to whom his mother Puloma had been betrothed before she was given to Bhrigou, attempted to carry off his lost love in the absence of the Rishi. It is told that the child in the womb felt the affront and issued from his mother burning with such a fire of inherited divinity that the Titan ravisher fell blasted by the wrath of an infant. For the Rishies were not passionless. They were prone to anger and swift to love. In their pride of life and genius they indulged their yearnings for beauty, wedding the daughters of Titans or mingling with nymphs of Paradise in the august solitudes of hills and forests. From these were born those ancient and sacred clans of a prehistoric antiquity, Barghoves, Barhaspathas, Gautamas, Kasyapas, into which the descendants of the Aryan are to this day divided. Thus has India deified the great men who gave her civilisation.

On earth the Rishies, in heaven the Gods. These were great and shining beings who preserved the established cosmos against the Asuras, or Titans, spirits of disorder between whom and the Hindu Olympians there was ever warfare. Yet their hostility did not preclude occasional unions. Sachi herself, the Queen of Heaven, was a Titaness, daughter of the Asura, Puloman; Yayati, ally of the Gods, took to himself a Daitya maiden Surmishtha, child of imperial Vrishopurvan (for the Asuras or Daityas, on the terrestrial plane, signified the adversaries of Aryan civilisation), and Bhrigou's wife, Puloma, was of the Titan

blood. Chief of the Gods were Indra, King and Thunderer, who came down when men sacrificed and drank the Soma wine of the offering; Vaiou, the Wind; Agni, who is Hutaashon, devourer of the sacrifice, the spiritual energy of Fire; Varouna, the prince of the seas; Critanta, Death, the ender, who was called also Yama (Government) or Dhurma (Law) because from him are all order and stability, whether material or moral. And there were subtler presences; Cama, also named Modon or Monmuth, the God of desire, who rode on the parrot and carried five flowery arrows and a bow-string of linked honey-bees; his wife, Ruthie, the golden-limbed spirit of delight; Saraswatie, the Hindu Muse, who is also Vach or Word, the primal goddess,—she is the unexpressed idea of existence which by her expression takes visible form and being; for the word is prior to and more real, because more spiritual, than the thing it expresses; she is the daughter of Brahma and has inherited the creative power of her father, the wife of Vishnou and shares the preservative energy of her husband; Vasuquie, also, and Seshanaga, the great serpent with his hosts, whose name means finiteness and who represents Time and Space; he upholds the world on his hundred colossal hoods and is the couch of the Supreme who is Existence. There were also the angels who were a little less than the Gods; Yukshas, the Faery attendants of Kuvere, lord of wealth, who protect hoards and treasures and dwell in Ullaca, the city of beauty,

> the hills of mist
> Golden, the dwelling-place of Faery kings,
> And mansions by unearthly moonlight kissed:—
> For one dwells there whose brow with the young moon
> Lightens as with a marvellous amethyst—

Ullaca, city of beauty, where no thought enters but that of love, no age but that of youth, no season but that of flowers. Then there are the Gundhurvas, beautiful, brave and melodious beings, the artists, musicians, poets and shining warriors of heaven; Kinnaries, Centauresses of sky and hill with voices of Siren melody; Opsaras, sky-nymphs, children of Ocean, who dwell in Heaven, its songstresses and daughters of joy, and who often mingle in love with mortals. Nor must we forget our own mother, Ganges, the triple and mystic river, who is Mundaquinie, Ganges of the Gods, in heaven, Bhagirathie or Jahnavie, Ganges of men, on earth, and Boithorinie or coiling Bhogavatie, Ganges of the dead, in Patala, the grey under-world and kingdom of serpents, and in the sombre dominions of Yama. Saraswatie, namesake and shadow of the Muse, preceded her in her sacredness; but the banks of those once pure waters have long passed to the barbarian and been denounced as unclean and uninhabitable to our race, while the deity has passed to that other mysterious under-ground stream which joins Ganges and Yamouna in their tryst at Proyaga.

Are there not here sufficient features of poetical promise, sufficient materials of beauty for the artist to weave into immortal visions? I would gladly think that there are, that I am not cheating myself with delusions when I seem to find in this yet untrodden path,

via...qua me quoque possim
Tollere humo victorque virum volitare per ora.

Granted, you will say, but still *Quorsum haec putida tendunt*? or how does it explain the dedication to me of a style of work at entire variance with my own tastes and preferences? But the value of a gift depends on the spirit of the giver rather than on its own suitability to the recipient. Will you accept this poem as part-payment of a deep intellectual debt I have been long owing to you? Unknown to yourself, you taught and encouraged me from my childhood to be a poet. From your sun my farthing rush-light was kindled, and it was in your path that I long strove to guide my uncertain and faltering footsteps. If I have now in the inevitable development of an independent temperament in independent surroundings departed from your guidance and entered into a path, perhaps thornier and more rugged, but my own, it does not lessen the obligation of that first light and example. It is my hope that in the enduring fame which your calmer and more luminous genius must one day bring you, on a distant verge of the skies and lower plane of planetary existence, some ray of my name may survive and it be thought no injury to your memory that the first considerable effort of my powers was dedicated to you.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Supplement*, SABCL, Vol. 27, pp. 148-60)

By way of this integral knowledge we arrive at the unity of the aims set before themselves by the three paths of knowledge, works and devotion. Knowledge aims at the realisation of true self-existence; works are directed to the realisation of the divine Conscious-Will which secretly governs all works; devotion yearns for the realisation of the Bliss which enjoys as the Lover all beings and all existences,—Sat, Chit-Tapas and Ananda. Each therefore aims at possessing Sachchidananda through one or other aspect of his triune divine nature. By Knowledge we arrive always at our true, eternal, immutable being, the self-existent which every "I" in the universe obscurely represents, and we abrogate difference in the great realisation, So Aham, I am He, while we arrive also at our identity with all other beings.

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 424)

SOME LETTERS

(*Continued from the issue of November 2003*)

Yesterday P gave me information about Mr. D from Surat. But this brought with it some memories about the man and ideas associated with him. Why do these things still enter and find importance?

It is the physical mind, which is made up of associations—give it a touch and all the associations come back in a heap.

And the hilarious talk with P also left its mark. There was a slight weakening of the will as a result. This was apparently due to my disobedience of the rule that only what is "useful" should be done.

Yes. But also a certain levity in the dispersion or throwing out of the energies automatically relaxes the tone of the consciousness—and with it the concentrated condition of the will.

People here sometimes say that for a particular person a certain stage is settled for this life and then he cannot go further. Is there any truth in it? P said it about D yesterday.

It may be so for D or another if one considers only the justice of finite things, the present capacity or the faults committed etc.—but if one opens to the Divine Grace, then one can no longer fix limits like that—the fields of the Infinite are open.

My vital is still interested in its own pleasures and egoism, in however diminished a way. There are still remnants which give an opening to the hostiles. But now I do not feel their attacks so acutely as before. Is it because I am much relaxed and so not able to recognise them?

A relaxation of the tension, possibly, because you feel yourself on easier ground. But now there has been a vigilance established which will, it is to be hoped, react whenever danger is seen, and has acquired enough sensitiveness to feel an attack.

The thick Khaddar dhoti created great disturbance in me. As soon as I took it, I felt it was too thick. But immediately I knew it was a blow to my mind, which had argued for returning the fine dhoti given by Mother on the 1st. I was about to get angry with myself for asking for another dhoti; there was a desire for self-injury and a rapid sex-pressure. But all the time I was on guard, for I knew that this was a strong attack of the hostiles—and all the force of it fizzled away. But I do not see

what sex-pressure had to do with the dhoti and the hostiles.

As to the Khaddar dhoti, it is simply that the Mother has only the fine ones *and* these thick ones with nothing in between — so, when you asked for something thicker, there was only that kind to give. Would you like to keep the thinner one? if so, you can always take it back.

The sex-pressure has no rational connection with the disappointment about the Dhoti — but that was only used by the Hostiles for an attempt at entrance. And when they approach it is with their different formations joined pell-mell or with a logic of their own which is a logic not of rational coherence, but of effectivity.

13 April 1933

After sex dreams at night, there is more sensitiveness to the sex-influence in the morning and it is difficult to reject it entirely.

The dreams—until one learns to refuse this effect—lower the physico-vital energy for the moment inducing some tamas in that part and the tamasic condition is always favourable to sex-suggestions.

Is there something in my physical-vital that is sensitive and absorbs the sex-influence in the atmosphere?

It can be an old line of weakness in the physical-vital stressed by the sex dream and also a susceptibility to something in the atmosphere.

When I got the suggestion of self-injury, I felt as if someone was beating me and wanted to use my hand for the purpose—the same with the sex-pressure.

Yes; it means that when those things were happening, it was not your own action, but you were being used by the vital Force (or being) for its own purpose against you.

In the waking state it is possible to reject the sex-impulse—not only the act of seeing or touching, but the impulses, thoughts, etc. Why is it not possible in dreams to reject the wish to touch or kiss, or at least the act of touching or kissing? That indicates a strong desire in the subtle vital.

No. If it is not entertained in the waking state, it does not mean a strong desire in the subtle vital—but only an impression left in the subconscient vital or physical only. If it is the subconscient vital, then the dream has some intensity—if it is in the subconscient physical, then the dream is something more pale and mechanical.

How to be constantly and strongly aware of the psychic?

It is necessary to accustom oneself to do things from within, not to let the consciousness be thrown outward. If it is thrown outward, then to step back inwardly and regard the action or movement from within. Of course there must be the habit of self-offering too or turning all to the Divine.

Just as the hostiles have no logic of rational inference but only one of "effectivity", have not the forces of Light some such logic of effectivity?

The lesser forces of Light are usually too much insistent on seeking for Truth to make effectivity their logic or their rule—the hostiles are too pragmatic to care for Truth, they want only success. As for the greater Forces (e.g. Overmind) they are dynamic and try always to make consciousness effective, but they insist on consciousness, while the hostiles care nothing for that—the more unconscious you are and their automatic tool, the better they are pleased—for it is unconsciousness that gives them their chance.

How to arrive at a moment-to-moment constant and direct control by the Divine, rejecting all guidance of the universal forces?

Offering everything to the Divine—until the Divine takes up the control of everything.

14 April 1933

There is a feeling that it is not possible for me to be concretely aware of the environmental consciousness or of the psychic or anything subtler because of the obstruction of mental activity. But will this check progress?

It is naturally easier to become aware if there is complete silence of the mind within with the mental activities occurring only on the surface and at will—but that usually comes only later on. If the mind's action is of the right kind, it need not check progress.

The habit of getting angry with workmen is practically gone. Is it because I can speak Tamil better—partly at least?

It is rather perilous to think of anything like that "Now it is finished"—it is better to wait some time and see. The hostiles have a habit of trying their strength when they hear anything like that; they want to show you that it is not so.

After writing the above words, I got slightly angry with a workman. At that time I felt something at the top of the head—not exactly uneasiness but some feeling of hardness. What could it be?

That was the pressure (subtle physical) on the mind stuff by which they prevent the immediate action of the will against what they throw into the system.

What is the psychology of jealousy? Is it hurt egoism?

Yes, but more precisely the sense of claim or the sense of possession rather than egoism generally.

One day P and C were criticising people for doing Pranam when putting their letters to you at the top of the staircase. I did not see anything wrong in doing Pranam.

They were quite wrong—if the sense of devotion was moved to express itself in that way, what objection can there be to it? Nobody is likely to do it, unless the sense of the devotion is in him and he feels the need and the use—and in that case it should be respected by others even if they do not feel the need themselves or not in that way.

Do the hostiles know anything about the cosmic consciousness or the Overmind?

Yes, in a way, but with a wrong and egoistic knowledge.

Is it possible now to feel the Divine on the mental or vital plane?

Yes— even on the physical, on any plane.

15 April 1933

(*To be continued*)

SRI AUROBINDO

To Thee who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to Thee our infinite gratitude. Before Thee who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before Thee who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee.

9 December 1950

The Mother

WHEN TWILIGHT FALLS IN A DIM CASCADE

"Because, to him who ponders well,
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
Of things discovered in the deep,
When only body's laid asleep."

[Lines from To Ireland in the Coming Times, by W. B. Yeats.]

When twilight falls in a dim cascade
Over the eastern bars,
And vapour-woven tent of shade
Makes earth forget the stars,
The Bringers of the hidden sleep
From inworld of star-lotus deep
Are burthened with a heavy cry;
They mourn and half forget to fly.

But when star-dignities exult
Through twilight-softened air,
The Borderers of sleep consult
With violet-shadowed hair
Waving across the evening's cool
Pellucid-watered lotus pool.
And night is stirred by tremulous wings
To dream of unimagined things.

December 7, 1934

Arjava

Sri Aurobindo's comment: A truly beautiful poem perfect in its felicity and in close touch with the things of which it speaks.

ON CHINA

1. Story of Two Priests

[Story of two priests on their boat journey to China to convert the Chinese and their interaction with the Mother on the boat.]

Sweet Mother, in the world today most people follow some sort of religion. Are they helped?

NOT much.

Perhaps they are taking it up again now, but for a very long time, towards the beginning of this century, they had repudiated religion as something opposed to knowledge—at least all intellectual people had. And it is only recently that a movement of return to something other than a thorough-going positivism has begun.

People follow religion by social habit, in order not to get into the bad books of others. For instance, in a village it is difficult not to go to religious ceremonies, for all your neighbours will point at you. But that has absolutely nothing to do with spiritual life, nothing at all.

(*Silence*)

The first time I came to India I came on a Japanese boat. And on this Japanese boat there were two clergymen, that is, Protestant priests, of different sects. I don't remember exactly which sects, but they were both English; I think one was an Anglican and the other a Presbyterian.

Now, Sunday came. There had to be a religious ceremony on the boat, or else we would have looked like heathens, like the Japanese! There had to be a ceremony, but who should perform it? Should it be the Anglican or should it be the Presbyterian? They just missed quarrelling. Finally, one of them withdrew with dignity—I don't remember now which one, I think it was the Anglican—and the Presbyterian performed his ceremony.

It took place in the lounge of the ship. We had to go down a few steps to this lounge. And that day, all the men had put on their jackets—it was hot, I think we were in the Red Sea—they put on their jackets, stiff collars, leather shoes; neckties well set, hats on their heads, and they went with a book under their arm, almost in a procession from the deck to the lounge. The ladies wore their hats, some carried even a parasol, and they too had their book under the arm, a prayer-book.

And so they all crowded down into the lounge, and the Presbyterian made a speech, that is to say, preached his sermon, and everybody listened very religiously. And then, when it was over, they all came up again with the satisfied air of someone who has done his duty. And, of course, five minutes later they were in the bar drinking and playing cards, and their religious ceremony was forgotten. They had done their duty, it was over, there was nothing more to be said about it.

And the clergyman came and asked me, more or less politely, why I had not at-

tended. I told him, "Sir, I am sorry, but I don't believe in religion."

"Oh! oh! you are a materialist?"

"No, not at all."

"Ah! then why?"

"Oh!" I said, "if I were to tell you, you would be quite displeased, perhaps it is better for me not to say anything."

But he insisted so much that at last I said, "Just try to see, I don't feel that you are sincere, neither you nor your flock. You all went there to fulfil a social duty and a social custom, but not at all because you really wanted to enter into communion with God."

"Enter into communion with God! But we can't do that! All that we can do is to say some good words, but we have no capacity to enter into communion with God."

Then I said, "But it was just because of that I didn't go, for it doesn't interest me."

After that he asked me many questions and admitted to me that he was going to China to convert the "heathens". At that I became serious and told him, "Listen, even before your religion was born—not even two thousand years ago—the Chinese had a very high philosophy and knew a path leading them to the Divine; and when they think of Westerners, they think of them as barbarians. And so you are going there to convert those who know more about it than you? What are you going to teach them? To be insincere, to perform hollow ceremonies instead of following a profound philosophy and a detachment from life which lead them to a more spiritual consciousness?… I don't think it's a very good thing you are going to do."

Then he felt so suffocated, the poor man; he said to me, "Eh, I fear I can't be convinced by your words!"

"Oh!" I said, "I am not trying to convince you, I only described the situation to you, and how I don't quite see why barbarians should want to go and teach civilised people what they have known long before you. That's all."

And there, that was the end of it.[1]

2. Chinese Sayings in the Handwriting of the Mother[2]

1. The ancient wisdom of China says: “He who knows how to find instructors for himself, arrives at the supreme mastery... He who loves to ask, extends his knowledge; but whoever considers only his own personal opinion becomes constantly narrower than he was.”—15.11.34.

2. Confucius has said: “It is impossible to arrive at the summit of the mountain without passing through rough and difficult paths.”—18.11.34.

3. Here is a bit of Chinese wisdom expressed by Meng-Tse: “Our inner self is provided with all necessary faculties.”—6.12.34.

4. Confucius has said: “There is as much virtue in the humblest things as in the most sublime.”—8.12.34.

5. One can read in the Chu-king: “It is easy to know what is good, but not so easy to practice it.”—9.12.34.

6. Confucius has said: “It is better to love the Truth than merely to know its principles, but better than loving the Truth is to make it one’s sole delight and practice.”—13.12.34.

7. The buddhist scripture Fo-sho-hing-Tsan-king tells us: “When you have learned the teaching, let your purified hearts find their joy in doing actions that are in harmony with it.”—19.12.34

8. Lao Tse has said: "When the intelligence is master over the vital movements, then one has force."—9.1.35

9. Lao Tse has said: "The spiritual man thinks more of what is within him than of outer things."—11.1.35

10. Lao Tse has said also: “He makes his thought dynamic, he opens his heart, he assembles the inner lights.”—12.1.35

11. Theng-Tse has said: “In this state of pure felicity the soul is enlarged and the material substance that is subject to it profiteth also.”—3.2.35

12. The Fo-shu-hing-tsan-king says: "As the light of a torch illumines the objects in a dark room, even so the light of wisdom illumines all men, whosoever they be, if they turn towards it."—14.2.35

13. Tseu-tse has said: "The sage's rule of moral conduct has its principle in the hearts of all men."—2.3.35

14. Lao-Tse has said: "Something beyond our power of discrimination existed before Heaven and Earth. How profound is its calm! How absolute its immateriality! It alone exists and does not change; It penetrates all and It does not perish. It may be regarded as the Mother of the universe. For myself I know not Its name, but to give it a name I call It Tao."—23.3.35.

15. Chwang-Tse has said: "When water is still, it reflects objects like a mirror. This stillness, this perfect level is the model of the sage. The heart of the sage in perfect repose is the mirror of earth and heaven and all existences."—23.4.35.

References

1. *Questions and Answers 1956*, CWM, Vol. 8, pp. 148-50.
2. *The Lesson of Life*.

THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS

(*Continued from the issue of November 2003*)

(9)

Mother Divine,

Sometimes You say "all right" even to our desires and ambitions. But now I shall be more happy if You correct my steps and show me the light and truth rather than support my desires.

As I was feeling some uneasiness I took it to be an indication of the presence of desire and decided to give up the idea of having the proposed library at "Tiny House".

But "Tiny House" being not so tiny friends and relatives will naturally wish to occupy the remaining space. So I have decided to accommodate only one person there on payment basis. And that person too must be of a sadhak type or somebody with whom I have an inner understanding.

Do *You* think my decisions are correct? Take me into Your confidence and tell me the truth.

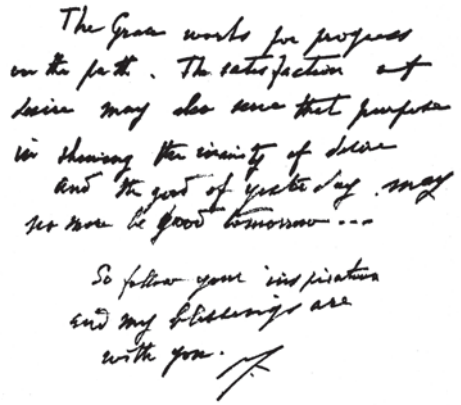
The money realised will naturally be offered to the Mother.

Now I feel much relieved. The uneasiness is gone!

With grateful pranams,

Your child

30-5-68 Abani



The Grace works for progress on the path. The satisfaction of desire may also serve that purpose in showing the inanity of desire and the good of yesterday may no more be good tomorrow.

So follow your inspiration and my blessings are with you.

The Mother

(*To be continued*)

AN INTERVIEW WITH AMAL KIRAN

*(*Place: *The Ashram Nursing Home;* Date: *6 September 2003*
Interviewer: *Maurice Shukla;* Videorecording: *Sharad Patnaik*
Also present: *R.Y. Deshpande, Nilima Das, Ashalata Dash, Anant and, towards the end, Dr. Dilip Dutta)*

Maurice: Amal, it is not every day that we get to interview a centenarian!

Amal Kiran: No.

M.: So excuse us if we are a little overwhelmed in your ancient presence. Coming to centenarians, your dear old friend Nirod has just passed the milestone. Do you have any particular feelings, anything you'd like to say about this?

Amal Kiran: I am just behind him. (*laughter*)

M.: Any other special feelings you have regarding your own reaching this milestone?

Amal Kiran: I don't know.

M.: How do you feel?

Amal Kiran: About the centenary?

M.: Yes.

Amal Kiran: Well, it is God's grace, that's all.

M.: Have you been thinking about it?

Amal Kiran: Not much.

M.: Do you think it is an important milestone? Crossing a hundred?

Amal Kiran: It depends. Nowadays it is not so infrequent. Many people touch their hundred because health has improved.

M.: Talking about health, you've had a number of accidents in your life. What has been your feeling about them?

Amal Kiran: Yes, yes.[1] I've had small pox twice and plague once. Bubonic plague, the most dangerous one. And I hardly knew that it was dangerous, the most dangerous one.

M.: Have you felt any special presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother whenever you've had ailments or…

Amal Kiran: Yes, yes. Certainly, that they were there beside me, taking care…

M.: Did the Mother ever cure you of any physical disease or any physical discomfort? Do you have any memory of that?

Amal Kiran: No.

M.: Did you ever talk to the Mother about any of your physical problems?

Amal Kiran: Yes, yes. She knew I was prone to accidents.

M.: Did she tell you why?

Amal Kiran: I don't know, she never said why. She never explained but she told me to take care, not to get into situations that will lead to disaster.

M.: There has been quite a lot of curiosity about your name *Amal Kiran* given by Sri Aurobindo.

Amal Kiran: 'The Clear Ray' and not 'the Pure Ray'! People mistake the two. 'The Clear Ray'.

M.: Did you feel any affinity to the name that was given to you?

Amal Kiran: Yes, so far as the mind was concerned, yes, because I always wanted a clear view of things.

M.: Did you feel at times that this desire for clarity became somewhat obsessive? In your correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, for instance?

Amal Kiran: Yes, I always wanted clarity. My name is not a 'Pure Ray' but a 'Clear Ray'.

M.: Are there any echoes of this name in *Savitri*? Do you remember?

Amal Kiran: No. Maybe. *Savitri* is so comprehensive, it can contain many things that we are not aware of at the moment.

M.: You've had a long, eventful, interesting life, both under the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Amal Kiran: Yes.

M.: Can you tell us what it was in Sri Aurobindo that really touched you very deeply, that marked you very deeply?

Amal Kiran: The wideness of understanding, the capacity to view a thing from many points of view.

M.: But when you were with him physically? What did you feel?

Amal Kiran: Physically means only by correspondence.

M.: You did not spend any time with him physically?

Amal Kiran: No, not physically in that sense.

M.: And what about the Mother?

Amal Kiran: The Mother, of course.

M.: Did you feel any difference in the presence of the Mother and that of Sri Aurobindo?

Amal Kiran: I don't know. I can't say. With the Mother I had a sense of close relationship and with Sri Aurobindo there was always a sense of a distance, though in another sense he came very near. Still, when I first saw him and people asked me "What was your impression?", I said, "A combination of a lion and the Himalayas." So much Power was there and closeness of feeling, and yet an infinite distance.

M.: We hear that you used to meet the Mother outside her bathroom, just before she went for lunch, when she would answer your written questions.

Amal Kiran: Yes.

M.: Did she, during these meetings, ever tell you anything important you had to do?

Amal Kiran: No. She did not say anything about my staying outside the Ashram. She never made a point of it in any discussion, as far as I recollect.

M.: Did she make any reference to your correspondence with Sri Aurobindo?

Amal Kiran: I don't remember now. She must have, especially as it was very large.

M.: Tell us Amal, did you always have this astounding memory right from your early days, or was it something that developed with sadhana?

Amal Kiran: In my early days I had no idea of sadhana.

M.: But what then is the secret of this impressive memory? You know lines from hundreds of poems.

Amal Kiran: You mean my referring to texts themselves?
M.: Yes.
Amal Kiran: It must have developed to some extent. What I remember is that it was fairly common as regards poetry.
M.: Did you feel a very noticeable change in the atmosphere after the descent of the Overmind? In 1926?*
Amal Kiran: No. I do not think I felt something in the natural way. When I think about it, there may have been many other aspects.
M.: Isn't it quite curious that a lot of your own correspondence on art and poetry happened after this event, during the 30s…
Amal Kiran: Yes.
M.: A most significant coincidence, wouldn't you say?
Amal Kiran: I don't know.
M.: We hear that people started seeing gods and goddesses in the atmosphere.
Amal Kiran: Yes.
M.: Did you yourself have any personal experience?
Amal Kiran: No. No.
M.: I wonder if you could tell us, Amal, about the finest moment in your life that has remained with you?
Amal Kiran: The finest moment?
M.: Or the finest experience.
Amal Kiran: With Sri Aurobindo?
M.: With Sri Aurobindo or with the Mother, is there something that keeps returning to you, keeps coming back?
Amal Kiran: You mentioned the appearance of gods and goddesses. Well, I never had any direct vision of a god or goddess, unless you mean Sri Aurobindo himself and the Mother.
M.: Coming to the current trends in poetry, I suppose you've followed them a little?
Amal Kiran: Yes.
M.: Do you feel we are anywhere near Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future poetry?
Amal Kiran: No.
M.: Are we headed in that direction?
Amal Kiran: I can't say, I wish we were.
M.: Do you think the arrival of this new consciousness in poetry has been postponed? Are we going through a slump?
Amal Kiran: Maybe; it sometimes very much looks like it.
M.: People often ask the question whether things have changed after the descent of the supramental consciousness.
Amal Kiran: I have no such impression. Slight changes were noticed here and there but nothing on a grand scale.

* Amal, accompanied by his wife Lalita, came first to the Ashram on 16 December 1927, after the Descent of the Overmind on 24 November 1926.

M.: What do you feel about the Ashram atmosphere?

Amal Kiran: I think it is good enough. It may not be ideal as yet but it is carrying on well enough. The Ashram is not likely to dwindle and fade away. Sri Aurobindo, the Mother have laid it on a solid foundation.

M.: Sri Aurobindo gave a hint about his departure on the 5th December.

Amal Kiran: Sri Aurobindo did what?

M.: Hinted about his departure in 1950.

Amal Kiran: I don't know. Did he prepare his departure?[2]

M.: I believe he spoke to the Mother about it.

Amal Kiran: Did he?

M.: Yes, in her conversations the Mother tells us that Sri Aurobindo once told her that he might go…

Amal Kiran: He might go?

M.: Yes. Did you have any intimation from the Mother about her own departure?

Amal Kiran: No, about the departure of Sri Aurobindo, no indication at all.

I thought he would go on as they worked, more and more intensely, that's all. Nothing was ever going to change.

M.: Have you been following the current events in the world, the political developments?

Amal Kiran: Not much.

M.: Any signs of hope?

Amal Kiran: When I was editor of *Mother India*, I took more interest in world-politics, but after that the interest has dwindled.

M.: Have you been following a little bit the war in Iraq? The American war in Iraq?

Amal Kiran: I can't say anything. I hope the Americans come through well enough. Iraq belongs to the old consciousness. America, for all its faults, is a modern power, its drive is towards new things. The Americans in their views and many aspects have a progressive vision.

M.: How do you feel about India?

Amal Kiran: Very ambiguous. I don't know whether there is a clear light guiding India. I don't feel that in things that happen or don't happen….there does not seem to be a line of progress.

M.: There is a question from somebody who wants to know if physical transformation is possible without the physical presence of the Guru?

Amal Kiran: I doubt very much. I had great hopes at one time. But after the departure of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother later on, my view became hazy. Transformation seems to me now practically an impossible thing, the reason why there is not much hope.

M.: Does it mean Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have to come back?

Amal Kiran: Yes, yes. To put it bluntly, yes. But whether there will result a falling back on things, I doubt. We have come to a certain point and we have to stick there. We may go forward, very gradually, if at all.

M.: The Mother spoke about the Mind of Light in the *Agenda*.

Amal Kiran: Yes, yes. It is the physical mind receiving the supramental light. How far it will succeed in doing its job, we have no idea.

M.: Did you, in your relentless pursuit of the Muse of poetry, feel the workings of this Mind of Light?

Amal Kiran: No. I can't say for sure…I have my own private feelings but beyond that, nothing.

M.: In your writing of poetry, sometimes when the *mot juste* was not coming, did you have the miraculous experience of the felicitous word just flashing onto your inner mind?

Amal Kiran: No, I never had a flow like that, never like Harindra Chattopadhyaya, like a cataract. Nor like Dilip. Dilip, in his own way was a very fluent writer. I was a slow coach; I went about gradually.

M.: Somebody would like to know what you feel about the problem in Kashmir. What do you think is the solution?

Amal Kiran: If there is any solution, it can only be along certain lines. Kashmir should belong to India. Any other solution will leave things undeveloped. We lost a chance when we had a war with Pakistan and we were on the way to Pakistan, to capturing it, when Nehru thought that he would lose his international character. So he took the case to the General Council. It was a tragic, a dangerous policy. When the chance was there to go and take Pakistan, we lost it; we lost our nerve, I think. And Nehru thought that he would lose his reputation as a peacemaker. That is all I can say at the moment.

M.: Coming to all the books you have written, now, is there any book among these that is your favourite?

Amal Kiran: My own book? I can't say, like that, I cannot say.

M.: Which book did you enjoy writing the most?

Amal Kiran: My editorials. There is an underlying fighting quality in them.

M.: You seem to delight in the epistolary side of yourself as well; you have loved writing letters.

Amal Kiran: Letters, yes, yes.

M.: And the best came out in you in your letters.

Amal Kiran: Yes, yes, in answer to a challenge.

M.: You love challenges, don't you? What is your next challenge, Amal?

Amal Kiran: I don't know. It's an intimidating question. The war with Pakistan should put an end to Pakistan. That used to be my hope. A peaceful solution was not on the cards. Some sort of violent solution was necessary but it never came. Thanks to Nehru's fear that he would lose the peace prize which in any case he never got.

M.: What are your feelings about Islam?

Amal Kiran: Islam has to undergo a fundamental change, I think, before it can fit into the world of the Future. Islam, as represented by Pakistan, is not a thing of the future.

M.: Talking about editorials, is there a message or something you would like to give to *Mother India*, to your fondest child?

Amal Kiran: A message to *Mother India*?

M.: A special message on this occasion?

Amal Kiran: Be bold always, brave and bold and forthright in speech. Not to slur over important matters. India and Pakistan must become one. This is the forthright message I can give, forthright and forward-looking. We had a chance by way of war but we lost our nerve and appealed to the General Council. We were in range of Rawalpindi and Pakistan would have fallen to us but we lost our nerve.

M.: Do you still think of that nondescript newspaper wrapping of your shoes which brought you serendipitously to the Ashram?

Amal Kiran: Yes, that is how I came here.

M: Does that sometimes flash back on your mind?

Amal Kiran: Yes, it is quite vivid.

M.: Coming back to your centenary, Amal, how do you feel after having lived almost a hundred years? Has it all been worth it?

Amal Kiran: You should ask this first to Nirod, because he is nearer the centenary than I am.

M.: Does he come and see you sometimes? Do you sit and chat about your time with Sri Aurobindo?

Amal Kiran: Not much. Of course, Sri Aurobindo is a standing subject, but it does not crop up always.

M.: How do you feel about your long innings in the Ashram? Do you see a bright future?

Amal Kiran: Yes, the future of the Ashram is quite rosy. There may be obstructions and problems now and then. Still, the Ashram has a clear future, to my mind.

M.: When people like you, Nirod-da, will all have gone, who will be the guiding lights for us, for those who are left behind?

Amal Kiran: People like him. (*pointing to Deshpande*)

M.: Since the physical presence of the Guru is important, the physical presence of disciples who were close to the Guru can perhaps also help?

Amal Kiran: Yes, we can't have it the way we want….

M.: Do you still dream, Amal?

Amal Kiran: Dreams? At night? Yes, but not very clear.

M.: You don't get any glimpses of the future?

Amal Kiran: No, I have become a little distant from things, I feel. I am in a sort of a world by myself, not quite in touch with the world of reality.

M.: Looking at you one would say you live in a state of beatitude, in a state of Ananda, a very stable quiet joy.

Amal Kiran: There you are right. Ananda plus indifference.

M.: Is it indifference or detachment?

Amal Kiran: A mixture of the two, perhaps. Indifference is there as a strong force.

R.Y. Deshpande: Amal, can I ask you a question? Have you studied the Mother's *Agenda*?

Amal Kiran: No, not very carefully and systematically. Just a rapid reading. Many things are there to be discovered. I have that feeling but I have never tried.

RYD.: What is your general impression about it? I am asking this because she has said a number of things about physical transformation. Would you like to comment upon the physical transformation that she talks about?

Amal Kiran: It is a difficult thing to talk about.

M.: Did you have any contact with Satprem? Through letters or …?

Amal Kiran: Yes, in the beginning. He used to send me magazines and other things. Afterwards the connection was completely gone.

M.: Would you like to say something to the students of the Ashram, the young students?

Amal Kiran: I have not thought of it… Students should have a sense of faithfulness to the central ideal of Sri Aurobindo, which the Ashram is trying to realize.

RYD.: Amal, how intimately were you connected with Auroville?

Nilima: And what is the difference between Auroville and the Ashram?

Amal Kiran: I think the Ashram should develop more understanding of Auroville.

N.: What is the difference between Auroville and the Ashram—your attitude towards the Ashram and Auroville.

Amal Kiran: I can't say offhand. The Ashram is concentrated on achieving something solid of vital value while Auroville is still a broad growing concept.

RYD.: But how close were your contacts with Auroville? What kind of contact did you have with Auroville?

Amal Kiran: As a collaborator with the Ashram.

M.: What was your personal contact with Auroville? Did you know a lot of people from Auroville?

Amal Kiran: Yes, I knew many people.

M.: Would they come to you for advice?

Amal Kiran: Some sort of discussion was always there. Lately I have been very detached.

M.: Do you think the Ashram and Auroville are inextricably linked in the future evolution?

Amal Kiran: I hope so! Hopeful we must always be. My own mind's inclination is more towards the Ashram than towards Auroville.

M.: Why?

Amal Kiran: I don't know, it is an instinctive movement.

N.: One question: will the consciousness of the Ashram lead to human unity?

Amal Kiran: Yes, I hope so. Human unity has always to be kept in view.

M.: Are you hopeful about the future?

Amal Kiran: We have to force ourselves to be hopeful.

Dr. Dilip Dutta: What factors go to make you hope? What is it that makes you a little reluctant about the hope for the future?

Amal Kiran: There doesn't seem to be much understanding.

M.: Is it because of a lack of focus on personal sadhana that we are in a state of ambiguity, flux?

Amal Kiran: I do not know how much people are really interested now in the future of the Ashram or of Auroville. It is a question of personal sadhana, I feel. But I now am more or less aloof from all these things.

M.: Do you still live, to a large extent, focused on your mental consciousness, in your mind, in your thoughts? On what plane of consciousness are you stationed, mostly?

Amal Kiran: In a general loose way, a little above the mind, just a little.

N.: Most of the time you tell me, "I am going inward and I have connection with the psychic being".

Amal Kiran: Yes, it is true—inward and aloof.

M.: Are you, in a loose way, in touch with your psychic being?

Amal Kiran: I hope so. At least in touch.

M.: You feel its effects?

Amal Kiran: Yes, I feel a Presence here (indicating his heart), all the time.

M.: And there isn't any iota of sadness in you?

Amal Kiran: Sadness? No, … some kind of indifference is there, but not sadness. I am too old to afford the pleasure of sadness. At the same time I have no definite view about my own future. It just drifts on.

M.: In joy?

Amal Kiran: Yes.

M.: Which means we are on the right way.

Amal Kiran: Perhaps.

M.: Thank you very much, Amal.

Amal Kiran: Thank you.

M.: Thank you for giving us your time and your energy.

Amal Kiran: It is a pleasure always.

M.: Thank you.

Dr. Dilip Dutta: Do you feel old anytime?

Amal Kiran: I don't know about feeling old but these questions are so far away from me. Or I am far away from them.

RYD: Let me ask you in another way: If you had to start your life over again, how would you start it?

Amal Kiran: Nearer to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo than I ever have been. At times I developed a certain indifference to things. I would want every moment of my life to be an intense moment as the Ashram goes on…that's all.

Notes

1. Amal mistook the question for "ailment". Apropos of it we may refer to the following:

Soon after my arrival [in Bombay] I contracted scarlet fever, bringing a high temperature that went down by slow degrees over almost a week. It was 105 F one whole day, then 104 the next day and so on. A severe headache persisted all through. I am a person who despite sustained reading and prolonged brain-work, never suffers from headaches. Only during this fit of fever and once before when I had an attack of bubonic plague I experienced pain in the head—indeed pain with a terrific vengeance. But all through the illness I had the firm assurance of a cure and not the slightest idea of any danger. The Mother later told me that it was my sense of certainty of her help that made the curative power of her Grace work so well and save me from the possibility of meningitis which is a common sequel to scarlet fever.

(*Our Light and Delight*, First Edition, pp. 89-90)

Once I had a fall very badly hurting my left knee and resulting in a large collection of water over the joint. I went through a whole night of acute pain. My inner appeals to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother brought on some alleviation now and again but no appreciable relief. Soon after sunrise, my friend Ambu who used to be a great help to me in the early days of my stay in the Ashram came to enquire how I was. I told him of my restless night and gave him a note for the Mother to be taken immediately to her door and to see that it got into her hands as soon as possible. Shortly after this the pain was completely gone. (*Ibid*., pp. 49-50)

…The reference is to my taking, under a wrong impression, a huge quantity of a powerful drug prescribed by a doctor friend during a visit of mine to Bombay. I took forty-eight times the normal dose and was about to die. Nirod, after meeting me on 21 March 1940 in Pondicherry, informed Sri Aurobindo of my conviction that I had been saved by a special divine intervention. Sri Aurobindo emphatically said: "Yes." (*Ibid*., p. 100)

2. Words could not be more explicit and emphatic in asserting that the Mother would not pass away as she has done. And so ratify further the assertion—if at all there was any necessity to do so after the Mother had set her seal in article—*we had the authorised report of the talk between her and Sri Aurobindo some months before* he left his body on December 5, 1950. They had envisaged the contingency of one of them having to leave the body in the interests of their work. The Mother had said she would do it. Sri Aurobindo had refused to let her undertake the sacrifice. He had said that he would go and that she must stay to fulfil their Yoga of Supramental descent and transformation. (*The Mother: Past-Present-Future*, pp. 17-18; see also "A 'Call' from Pondicherry" by Dr. Prabhat Sanyal, *Mother India*, December 5, 1953, p. 187.)

I: "Why did you tell me in the evening of the 3rd of December that Sri Aurobindo would take up his usual work with my editorials? Two days after this he passed away."

Mother: "It was not certain that he would leave his body."

This was a strange declaration. It could mean either that Sri Aurobindo, for a reason of his own, kept secret from the Mother his decision to depart, or else that the uncertainty lay not in the Mother's consciousness but in Sri Aurobindo's own because he was working out momentous possibilities one way or the other. From the snatch of conversation between Sri Aurobindo and his attendants on the 4th of December, the second alternative seems unlikely. He was asked: "Aren't you using your Yogic force on yourself?" His reply was "No." Astonished, the attendants stammered out: "Why?" He answered: "Can't explain. You won't understand." The conclusion that he was acting out a decision already made dawns also from the Mother's words soon after his departure: "When I asked him to resuscitate he clearly answered: 'I have left the body purposely, I will not take it back. I shall manifest again in the first supramental body built in the supramental way.' " Thus the first alternative should hold.

Then the sole reason one can think of is that the Mother had not accepted the idea of Sri Aurobindo's departure and would have tried to stop it if she had known anything before it was too late. We may recollect the talk they both had some time in April of the same year. When Sri Aurobindo said that one of them might have to go in the interests of their work, the Mother immediately offered to do so. Sri Aurobindo turned down the proposal and added that if necessary he would go. The Mother had to acquiesce. Perhaps a finer explanation for the Mother's unawareness of the precise time he had chosen for his withdrawal is that, although she had fully accepted his terrible resolve, he did not want to create any unpleasantness for her and she did not wish to cause any difficult situation for him. He knew that she preferred her own going to his and she knew that he was bent on departing rather than let her do so. Hence a veil was drawn tacitly by him over what was to take place on the 5th of December. (*Our Light and Delight*, First Edition, pp. 45-46)

PSYCHIC LYRE

You have not the violin's rapturous ardour
Nor the tabla's compelling power.
You have not the soul-burning cry of the shenai in the temples
Nor the bright lightning of their cymbals.
Nor the stunning reverberation of the gong do you possess.
It is with a peaceful pulse's song you bless.
You do not call the soul to dance in ecstasy as do the gem notes of the flute.
You are the quietness of my lyre when my mind longs to be mute.

Yours is the music that once soothed the melancholy of a mad king
When David played to him in his sad ire.
Yours were the limpid ripples and shimmering
That melted it in cool and healing fire.
It is on your strings that bards and minstrels play
When words no longer serve the poignancy of their lay.
The very angels are depicted holding you at Heaven's gate
When all earth's passions finally abate.

You are comfort in the night
And a boon by day.
You draw close to the mind in need of light.
You are the cup of water for the traveller on his desert way.
You are the occult hand that lifts us when we stumble,
The murmur that is heard above the senses' panicked mumble.
The silence that penetrates the storm
And dissolves the dread invader without form.
Your fine serenity for all its mildness
Tames the unquiet spirit's mischief in its wildness.
The devils withdraw at the purity of your sound,
Their shafts of total malice falling useless to the ground.

You dissolve the drudgery of daily living
And resolve the discords with which critical hours are rife.
You are the inner knowing that comes singing
To the surface of my awkward life.
And your pauses between the chords resonate
In ways which draw me closer to my fate.

You have the art that can make our senses taste the moonbeams
And know the perfume of their light

You unveil the web and woof of life itself in dreams
And its drops of pearl and gem beyond our normal sight.

You are the sounds that my soul would give my tongue if it could make it talk.
You are the courage which, when I would give in, can make me stand and walk.
You are what hangs on in the still air when the music is all done.
And the colours that glide back into the white Light of the One.

Yours the sweetness of the ever-burning flame
That opens up the inner ear to the hidden Name.
Yours the still small voice that knows no lies,
The mystery that enters many births but never dies.
You are the strong chain-breaker that in the end will set me free.
You are the instrument that Mother tuned in me.

MAGGI

HOMAGE TO SRI AUROBINDO

PERHAPS my thought was a deeper seeing
When the mind fell still and the inner being
Seemed to hear his voice from the silent page
Speak softly of the coming age.

My heart attuned, my body heard
From the Lord of Life the mantric Word
Of life transformed, earth by His kiss
Rewed to beauty, man to bliss.

A sweetness descending from realms above
Borne earthward on the wings of love
Envelopes our lives and immortal, brings
The Godhead's touch to mortal things.

Slowly the golden light draws near
And the children of the dawn appear.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

THE SUNLIT PATH

Path Paved for the Followers' Safety, Ease and Success

AFTER the Siddhi of the descent of Anandmaya Krishna representing the Overmind into the physical on 24th November 1926, Sri Aurobindo delegated all the external dealings of the Ashram to the Mother in order to focus on the descent of the Supramental on earth and to address all the associated known and unforeseen issues arising out of the integral transformation. For the Sadhaks (disciples) there was a procedural change to have the Mother as their direct personal contact, which was for their best interest as they got the benefits of the Mother's participative attention. This led to the establishment of a unique spiritual guidance system called 'Pursuing the Sunlit Path'—pursuing integral Truth along the illumined yoga path directed by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

The fundamental tenet of the Sunlit Path is that the Guru has faced all the perils and traumas of the Integral Yoga's transformative processes, scaled the supreme heights of the Supramental Consciousness as well as dived into the darkest abyss of the Super-inconscient for the integral transformation of matter, life and mind, realized the Siddhis and through the grace of the Guru, such Siddhis and spiritual growth can be developed in a Sadhak who simply needs to follow the triple principles of aspiration, rejection and surrender. The Guru undertakes the full responsibility for the Sadhak's spiritual journey, carries the burden of the Sadhak's limitations, and endures all the trauma of the sadhana for the Sadhak. He shelters him, fosters him, guides him and lets his free will shape his as-pirations. All that is required of the Sadhak is that he utterly, constantly and always be sincere in opening his psychic to the Grace of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and let his psychic take the lead in the transformation of his being.

Sri Aurobindo's letter of 5 May 1932 to a disciple explains the concept of the sunlit path:

"As for the Mother and myself, we have had to try all ways, follow all methods, to surmount mountains of difficulties, a far heavier burden to bear than you or anybody else in the Ashram or outside, far more difficult conditions, battles to fight, wounds to endure, ways to cleave through impenetrable morass and desert and forest, hostile masses to conquer—a work such as, I am certain, none else had to do before us. For the Leader of the Way in a work like ours has not only to bring down and represent and embody the Divine, but to represent too the ascending element in humanity and to bear the burden of humanity to the full and experience, not in a mere play or Lila but in grim earnest, all the obstruction, difficulty, opposition, baffled and hampered and only slowly victorious labour which are possible on the Path. But it is not necessary nor tolerable that all that should be repeated over again to the full in the experience of others. It is because we have the complete experience that we can show a straighter and easier road to others—if they will only consent to take it. It is because of our experience won at a tremendous price that we can urge upon you and others, 'Take the psychic attitude; follow the straight sunlit path, with the Divine openly or secretly upbearing you—if secretly, he will yet show

himself in good time,—do not insist on the hard, hampered, roundabout and difficult journey.' "[1]

A small illustrative sample of their correspondences with disciples is provided that focuses on some issues involving the Physical Mind and its transformation, which is a pivotal point in progressing from man to Overman leading to the Supramentalised Being. These letters demonstrate their infinite patience with the disciples, full-scale insight into their difficulties, very clear and compassionate guidance to overcome obstacles, and caring encouragement to strive on:

"The deficiency is not in the higher mind or mind proper; there is therefore no use in going back to establish mental peace. The difficulty is in that part of the vital being which is not sufficiently open and confident and not sufficiently strong and courageous and in the physical mind which lends its support to these things. To get the supramental light and calm and strength and intensity down there is what you need.

"You may have all the mental knowledge in the world and yet be impotent to face vital difficulties. Courage, faith, sincerity towards the Light, rejection of opposite suggestions and adverse voices are there the true help. Then only can knowledge itself be at all effective.

"Not mental control but some descent of a control from above the mind is the power demanded in the realisation. This control derived eventually from the supermind is a control by the Divine Power."[2]

"What you have now seen and describe in your letter is the ordinary activity of the physical mind which is full of ordinary habitual and constantly recurrent thoughts and is always busy with external objects and activities. What used to trouble you before was the vital mind which is different,—for that is always occupied with emotions, passions, desires, reactions of all kinds to the contacts of life and the behaviour of others. The physical mind also can be responsive with these things but in a different way—its nature is less that of desire than of habitual activity, small common interests, pains and pleasures. If one tries to control or suppress it, it becomes more active.

"To deal with this mind two things are necessary, (1) not so much to try to control or fight with or suppress it as to stand back from it: one looks at it and sees what it is but refuses to follow its thoughts or run about among the objects it pursues, remaining at the back of the mind quiet and separate; (2) to practise quietude and concentration in this separateness, until the habit of quiet takes hold of the physical mind and replaces the habit of these small activities. This of course takes time and can only come by practice."[3]

"First of all, these thought-waves, thought-seeds or thought-forms or whatever they are, are of different values and come from different planes of consciousness. The same thought-substance can take higher or lower vibrations according to the plane of consciousness through which the thoughts come in (e.g., thinking mind, vital mind, physical mind, subconscient mind) or the power of consciousness which catches them and pushes them into one man or another. Moreover, there is a stuff of mind in each man and the incoming thought uses that for shaping itself or translating itself (transcribing we usually call it), but the stuff is finer or coarser, stronger or weaker, etc., etc., in one mind than in

another. Also, there is a mind-energy actual or potential in each which differs and this mind-energy in its recipience of the thought can be luminous or obscure, sattwic, rajasic or tamasic with consequences that vary in each case."[4]

"These small things of the physical mind are such as everybody has and they will fall off when the truer wider consciousness comes out. You have the understanding in your mind, but these things persist because they really belong to the smaller vital part and when that part widens, then they will no longer be able to recur. One can discourage them by keeping certain ideas in mind, such as that the things which vex you belong to the nature and can go only with the change of the nature, that one has to do the work well oneself but not be troubled by the defects of others in their work, that a quiet inner will for their doing right is more effective than getting vexed and disturbed by their lapses. But fundamentally it is by the widened consciousness in your mind and vital and physical that you will be quite freed from these small reactions. You have only to continue with the Mother's Force working in you and these things will smooth themselves out hereafter."[5]

The Mother's force was traditionally invoked for the individual's progress. The Mother in this role was the Universal Mother acting on an individual or group of individuals. We may note that in the early 70s when the Mother was doing the Yoga of the Body her focus was on the same issues of physical-mind, subconscient and inconscient. The Mother in her role of the incarnate Avatar undertook the sadhana of cellular transformation when Sri Aurobindo opted to withdraw into the subtle physical and passed the baton to her for the successive laps in the grand relay race of the integral transformation of the body to house the Supramental Consciousness. The Mother used her body as a representative of the human race and focused on the fundamental issues of transformation of the physical-mind, subconscient and inconscient to battle against the negativistic and opposing "Four Matter Forces" identified by Sri Aurobindo to forever pave the path for the human race to advance to the next rung of evolution leading to Overman and subsequently to the Supramentalised Gnostic Beings.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had in all earnest even as Avatars endured all the challenges of the Path and attempted all for the integral transformation for the world. They secured the sadhana path for the disciples. This was for us not for themselves, as they did not need personal Siddhis. We have numerous letters of Sri Aurobindo expressing this fact, "I have no intention of achieving the Supermind for myself only—I am not doing anything for myself, as I have no personal need of anything, neither of salvation (Moksha) nor supramentalisation. If I am seeking after supramentalisation, it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth-consciousness and if it is not done in myself, it cannot be done in others. My supramentalisation is only a key for opening the gates of the supramental to the earth-consciousness; done for its own sake, it would be perfectly futile."[6] In addition, "My point about my Sadhana was that my Sadhana was not done for myself but for the earth-consciousness as a showing of the way towards the Light, so that whatever I showed in it to be possible—inner growth, transformation, manifesting of new faculties, etc.—was not of no importance to anybody, but meant as an opening of

lines and ways for what had to be done."[7] Furthermore, "My sadhana is not a freak or a monstrosity or a miracle done outside the laws of Nature and the conditions of life and consciousness on earth. If I could do these things or if they could happen in my Yoga, it means that they can be done and that therefore these developments and transformations are possible in the terrestrial consciousness."[8]

Sri Aurobindo was very clear in conveying that Integral Yoga is not magic but a yoga sadhana: "Strive rightly and thou shalt have; trust and thy trust shall in the end be justified; but the dread Law of the Way is there and none can abrogate it."[9] In a letter of August 1935 Sri Aurobindo had emphasized the same theme again, "Nobody has found this Yoga a Grand Trunk Road, neither X nor Y nor even myself or the Mother. All such ideas are romantic illusions."

Sri Aurobindo's April 1920 letter to his younger brother Barin indicates the stage of his arduous journey undertaken for the world, the role of the Supramental and the basis of the Sunlit Path: "If we cannot rise above, that is to the supramental level, it is hardly possible to know the ultimate secret of the world and the problem it raises remains unsolved. This is no easy change to make. After these fifteen years, I am only now rising into the lowest of the three layers of the Supermind and trying to draw up all my movements into it. But when this Siddhi is complete, then there is no doubt that the Divine will give the Siddhi of the Supermind to others through me with very little effort. Then my real work* will begin." He further goes on to indicate his preference for the quality in disciples over the quantity, "I do not want hundreds of thousands of disciples. It will be enough if I can get a hundred complete men, purified of petty egoism, who will be the instrument of the Divine..." As in a nuclear chain reaction critical mass of the required matter is essential for the transformation of matter into energy, it seems that for the collective-general transformation of the consciousness, a critical mass of the purified and receptive disciples is also needed!

The integral transformation sought by Sri Aurobindo encompassed mind, life and matter. It had an occult and ominous implication of facing the opposition of the Matter Forces. Purani narrates a first-hand account of this problem: "In one evening talk he [Sri Aurobindo] said that he was engaged in the tremendous task of opening up the physical cells to the Divine Light and the resistance of the Inconscient was formidable."[10] This problem required a different strategic approach as narrated in a letter dated 25 November 1935 to Nirodbaran, "The tail of the supermind is descending, descending, descending. It is only the tail at present, but where the tail can pass, the rest will follow.... The attempt to bring a great general descent having only produced a great ascent of subconscient mud, I had given up that as I already told you. At present I am only busy with transformation of overmind (down to the subconscient) into supermind;…"[11]

To put things in a proper perspective of the unique opportunity availed to us to follow the Sunlit Path, we may consider the arduous endeavours Dhruva had to undergo and the self-sublimation Prahlad undertook in ancient times to realize the grace of Lord

* Implied: Transformation of the human race into the Superman race or the Supramentalisation of the terrestrial consciousness. Self-Siddhi was never Sri Aurobindo's goal. —A.V.

Vishnu. How can one overlook what Vishwamitra and Valmiki had to endure in their transformation process to change from being a King to a Brahmarshi—Seer of Eternal Truth, and from a highway robber to the first epic-poet of India to write the epic *Ramayana*? It seems that the offer of the Sunlit Path for the supramental transformation is a Divine Boon in the present time. The sadhak does not have to be exceptional and he does not have to undergo the efforts of the caliber of Bhagiratha who had succeeded in the descent of Ganges from Heaven to earth. To pursue the Sunlit Path the only requirements are the disciple's unabated resolve and his psychic-driven pursuit of the Integral Yoga to be fully and constantly sincere in all the parts of his being—physical, vital and mental.

Succinctly, the Sunlit Path is to enable the successive triple transformation in a disciple: Psychicisation, Spiritualisation, and Supramentalisation by pursuing the triple conditions of the Integral Yoga: Aspiration, Rejection, and Surrender.

ARUN VAIDYA

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From Mind towards Supermind

...from the point of View of the ascent of consciousness from our mind upwards through a rising series of dynamic powers by which it can sublimate itself, the gradation can be resolved into a stairway of four main ascents, each with its high level of fulfilment. These gradations may be summarily described as a series of sublimations of the consciousness through Higher Mind, Illumined Mind and Intuition into Overmind and beyond it; there is a succession of self-transmutations at the summit of which lies the Supermind or Divine Gnosis.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Life Divine,* SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 938)

INTEGRAL YOGA AND THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD*

Introduction: Two "9/11"s and the Ideal of Human Unity

SEPTEMBER 11, 1893, when Swami Vivekananda spoke at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, marked the beginning of direct spiritual contact between East and West in modern times. This is the most significant date in the history of the relations between India and America, two countries that are sure to play crucial roles in the emergence of a future world-order. The overwhelming response to Vivekananda's impassioned appeal for an end to all sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism signalled the beginning of the end of the age of religious division and the start of a turn towards the spiritual unity of mankind.

But collective progress in such matters is slow, and each step forward is resisted and opposed by powerful conservative and reactionary forces. This was dramatically demonstrated a hundred and eight years after Vivekananda's historic speech, ironically on its anniversary, September 11, 2001, and in the same country, the United States of America. On that day, a desperate outlash of the dying spirit of religious intolerance, politicised and making an ingeniously perverted use of modern technology, gave an indication of how far humanity still has to travel before Vivekananda's vision can be realised.

Sri Aurobindo, who in 1893 returned to India after his education in England and later continued in his own manner Vivekananda's work of revitalising an ancient knowledge and restating eternal truths for the modern mind, grappled with the problems involved in achieving a consciousness of global unity and harmony. He recognised realistically the obstacles in the way of such an attempt. In *The Ideal of Human Unity* he observed:

> This material world of ours, besides its fully embodied things of the present, is peopled by... powerful shadows, ghosts of things dead and the spirit of things yet unborn. The ghosts of things dead are very troublesome actualities and they now abound.... Repeating obstinately their sacred formulas of the past, they hypnotise backward-looking minds and daunt even the progressive portion of humanity.[1]

Sri Aurobindo did not mean that the "formulas of the past" have or had no truth in them. But in this evolving world, the Time-spirit always moves forward, and the truths of the past have to be reformulated in the context of a constantly enlarging present.

Religion, Science and Spirituality

Among these past truths that have to be reformulated, the greatest are those that already contained the seed of "things yet unborn", particularly the knowledge which in India is

* Professor N. A. Nikam Memorial Lecture at the Indian Institute of World Culture, Bangalore on Thursday, November 28, 2002. Revised for publication in *Mother India*.

called Yoga. Broadly speaking, there are three levels of consciousness whose interaction accounts for the whole phenomenon of our existence. The first is the infrarational, out of which we have emerged in the course of evolution and which remains as the source of much of our feeling and action. The second is the rational, whose growing influence in our lives constitutes most of what we call progress. The third is the suprarational; it is what we are moving towards, usually without knowing it.

Yoga has come down to us from ancient times, but represents the third level, the suprarational, and therefore belongs really to the future much more than to the past. The past was dominated to a large extent, throughout the world, by religions whose core of inner truth was thickly encrusted with unenlightened beliefs, rituals and customs. It has been part of the progress of mankind to shake off more and more the irrationalism of such religion, which is a very different thing from true spirituality, and to replace it by an intelligent view of things, nowadays often in the form of a scientific mentality.

The modern formula for a rational world is science, democracy and capitalism. But the success of this formula, though brilliant in some directions, has been extremely mixed. It may be doubted whether, on the whole, it has made life better or worse than before. There is no good reason to think it could be otherwise. For scientific materialism is an incomplete view of existence which leaves out the all-important factors of who we are and why we are here. These are questions that science in its present form cannot even begin to address.

Science studies the machinery of things, but it cannot tell us anything about the purpose of this machinery. It can, based on the knowledge of physical processes, give us an astonishing power over Matter—a power whose most spectacular uses so far have often been destructive. But something more seems to be needed if we are to have any chance of solving the more and more complex problems of life. Scientific discoveries, as we all know, have in many ways multiplied and aggravated these problems more than they have helped to solve them.

It is only when we go beyond science that the true value of science itself appears in the right perspective. Sri Aurobindo once wrote in a striking aphorism:

> God's negations are as useful to us as His affirmations. It is He who as the Atheist denies His own existence for the better perfecting of human knowledge.[2]

The temple of the suprarational requires a firm foundation of rationality. A materialistic age has been necessary as a stage in the preparation of the earth to be changed into the image of heaven. The decline of religion has been a necessary step towards the terrestrial kingdom of God glimpsed in the scriptures of the religions.

The founders of most of the major religions have been, in Sri Aurobindo's words,

> ...the great dynamic souls who, feeling themselves stronger in the might of the Spirit than all the forces of the material life banded together, have thrown themselves upon the world, grappled with it in a loving wrestle and striven to compel its consent to its own transfiguration.[3]

These "great dynamic souls", born in various parts of the world, have always been far ahead of their time and have tried to bring about a radical change in human life, which mankind was unwilling or simply unable to accept. Again and again, the result has been only the establishment of one more creed, instead of a living embodiment of the truth brought by the inspired founder of the religion. Man's natural ignorance has been too strong for even God's mightiest messengers to prevail against it.

Nevertheless, these visionaries cannot have been wrong and their work cannot have been in vain. The cause for which they have sacrificed themselves—the divinising of earthly life—is ultimately the one aim worth pursuing and it cannot fail to be fulfilled. Each outburst of spiritual light leaves a trace in the earth's subtle atmosphere, so to speak, and the cumulative effect of these bombardments is to weaken the strongholds of darkness so that the victory of consciousness over unconsciousness is brought closer and closer.

The country which has done the most to prepare the world for this victory is undoubtedly India, the land of the Rishis, Yogis and Avatars. Here alone there was created, as Sri Aurobindo put it,

> ...a society which lent itself to the preservation and the worship of spirituality, a country apart in which as in a fortress the highest spiritual ideal could maintain itself in its most absolute purity unoverpowered by the siege of the forces around it.[4]

But if the purity of the spiritual ideal has been successfully upheld through the centuries in India as nowhere else, this was achieved only by compromising the dynamism of that ideal and its impact on life. Although this may have been unavoidable under the circumstances of those times, it has to be recognised that it led to a gradual decline in the vitality of Indian civilisation as a whole and the present marginalisation of a country, or rather a subcontinent, that was in the vanguard of the world's progress. India's spiritual genius was diverted mainly to the pursuit of individual liberation and the society was left to stagnate in a more and more rigid and unprogressive framework.

This, in any case, is how Sri Aurobindo analysed the problem. He wrote in one of the introductory chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga*:

> In India, for the last thousand years and more, the spiritual life and the material have existed side by side to the exclusion of the progressive mind. Spirituality has made terms for itself with Matter by renouncing the attempt at general progress. It has obtained from society the right of free spiritual development for all who assume some distinctive symbol, such as the garb of the Sannyasin, the recognition of that life as man's goal and those who live it as worthy of an absolute reverence, and the casting of society itself into such a religious mould that its most customary acts should be accompanied by a formal reminder of the spiritual symbolism of life and its ultimate destination.[5]

This describes the system of life which existed in India until recently, and even now has not entirely disappeared. It had its unique value and it served its purpose. But Sri Aurobindo regarded it as a compromise, not the true victory of Spirit over Matter which still lies ahead of us. He goes on to point out the serious disadvantage of this arrangement, which proved almost fatal in the end. This was that

> ...there was conceded to society the right of inertia and immobile self-conservation. The concession destroyed much of the value of the terms. The religious mould being fixed, the formal reminder [of the spiritual symbolism of life] tended to become a routine and to lose its living sense. The constant attempts to change the mould by new sects and religions ended only in a new routine or a modification of the old; for the saving element of the free and active mind had been exiled.[6]

Not that India has lacked intellectuals, far from it. It is not by accident that the now universally popular word "pundit" has been borrowed from Sanskrit. But the Pundits, too, like the Yogis, respected what Sri Aurobindo has termed the "pact with an immobile society". There has been a deficiency in the dynamic, pragmatic intelligence dealing with life freely, forcefully and creatively.

In contrast to India, the Western world meanwhile followed precisely the opposite line of development. There the "free and active mind", which was for a long time almost missing in India, has been dominant for some centuries now, with results we all know. Sri Aurobindo has explained the evolutionary purpose of this movement, which has left no corner of the earth untouched. He notes that

> ...the whole trend of modern thought and modern endeavour reveals itself to the observant eye as a large conscious effort of Nature in man to effect a general level of intellectual equipment, capacity and farther possibility by universalising the opportunities which modern civilisation affords for the mental life. Even the preoccupation of the European intellect, the protagonist of this tendency, with material Nature and the externalities of existence is a necessary part of the effort. It seeks to prepare a sufficient basis in man's physical being and vital energies and in his material environment for his full mental possibilities.[7]

Sri Aurobindo goes on to list some notable contributions of the modern enterprise to the general improvement of the quality of human life:

> By the spread of education, by the advance of the backward races, by the elevation of depressed classes, by the multiplication of labour-saving appliances, by the movement towards ideal social and economic conditions, by the labour of Science towards an improved health, longevity and sound physique in civilised humanity, the sense and drift of this vast movement translates itself in easily intelligible signs.[8]

This was written early in the last century. Since then, much progress has been made in some of these areas as well as in others, such as the remarkable developments in instantaneous communication annulling barriers of distance and bringing the latest information within the reach of inhabitants of all parts of the globe. All this is positive and constructive, but it is only one side of the picture. Even leaving aside the havoc wreaked on the natural environment and the terrible dangers due to the invention and proliferation of the devastating weapons now put at the service of human irrationality—for if science itself is a great unifier, it has disastrously armed the forces of division—how much have the masses been elevated to a higher level of the mental life in its intellectual, aesthetic and ethical dimensions? Rich traditions are perishing and their place is taken by cheap entertainment, crass commercialism, undigested information, an unprecedented vulgarity, an alarming moral bankruptcy. The negative side of the story is too well-known and too often decried to need elaboration.

We are faced with two fiascos. The first is the fiasco of the East, where spirituality has failed to illumine society with its inner knowledge and instead has only imposed a static religious framework on life. The second is the fiasco of the West, where the free thinking mind has failed to uplift the masses to a true mental life and has only produced a restless materialism, always hungry for new gadgets. So where do we go from here? There seems to be only one solution: for the East and the West to join forces in order to tackle the cause of both failures, namely, the inertia and downward pull of Matter. The Thinker in man and the Seer in man, the rational and the suprarational, must unite to transform the Animal in man, the infrarational.

This is the solution proposed by Sri Aurobindo. In October 1914 when Europe was collapsing into the chaos of a world war, he wrote in the chapter of *The Synthesis of Yoga* from which I have already quoted:

> The truth is that neither the mental effort nor the spiritual impulse can suffice, divorced from each other, to overcome the immense resistance of material Nature. She demands their alliance in a complete effort before she will suffer a complete change in humanity.[9]

This alliance of the powers of the mind with those of the spirit implies enlarging the old other-worldly Eastern ideal to include collective progress and physical perfection among the aims of spiritual aspiration. Equally, it means heightening the this-worldly Western ideal to accept a spiritual transformation as the true and ultimate goal of all progress. Today one can see a more integral ideal slowly being accepted everywhere and it looks as if the conditions are gradually being created for the united effort that is demanded of us. But a decisive change in human life is unlikely to begin until this ideal takes possession of many more minds and hearts, is understood with a more clear-sighted vision and inspires a far greater resolve in the endeavour to realise it.

(*To be continued*)

RICHARD HARTZ

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NIRODBARAN'S SURREALIST POEMS

(*Continued from the issue of November 2003*)

CHILD

On earth's bosom behold that motherless child
Immersed in play in a lone soundless world!
From afar so many rapt streams of Life
Arriving merge in his vermilion ocean-creek!
Crimson-footed, sleep-wrapped earth's unlettered
Language writes with Adoration-Pollen
His hidden history in Creation's sky.
Ancient thirst
Withered in poison-throated desert stretches
Like a calf-dead cow—is it slaked
Today in a blue sky's nectarous rain?
In new Spring-breeze, whose conscious form, child-guised
Steers secretly this voyaging earth-craft?

DEBASHISH BANERJI

(*To be continued*)

THE MOTHER IS SO CLOSE TO US!

"HELLO Murti, what are you doing today, sitting in your armchair? We've never seen you resting at this time."

"When the Divine wishes someone to rest, he has to, Sukhdev," Ramamurthi said sitting up straight. But that sudden movement forced out an involuntary "Ah!" from his mouth.

"What happened?" exclaimed Sukhdev, as he instinctively moved forward to help steady him.

"Nothing much. Day before yesterday in the morning I had a minor accident."

"Accident! How did it happen?"

"I had been to the Ashram after my morning constitutional, and on my way back, a scooter came and hit me from behind."

"A scooter hit you? Where were you hurt? Have you shown it to the doctor or not? You could have at least telephoned me!"

"It wasn't serious at all, no bones were broken. Come, sit down and relax."

"Okay, but where are you hurt?"

"Come, sit down. I'll tell you the whole story."

"I was walking by the pavement, somewhat lost in myself. I have no idea when and how the scooter came and hit me. I fell down, but all I then felt was as if a thick mattress had been placed under me. I did not feel it was on a stony road that I was thrown on, rather as if laid on a soft mattress.

"People surrounded me and began to ask, 'Where are you hurt?' I did not know what had actually happened. So, saying, 'I am quite all right; nothing has happened to me', I got up. Someone said I ought to go and see a doctor, but I refused.

"In the afternoon, when I returned home, I began to feel some pain in the ribs and found some difficulty in breathing, but there was nothing more. In fact, I am quite fine now. In a day or two everything will be normal."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sukhdev.

"What made you exclaim like this? Did my story remind you of something?"

"So that Rama was none other than you!"

"Which Rama? What are you talking about, Sukhdev?"

"I was reminded of my dream of last night. Now I wonder whether to call it a dream or a vision."

"What was it? and how was it connected with my experience?"

"When you let out that soft 'Ah!' while sitting up in your chair, memory of that dream flashed by. The same sort of 'Ah!' had escaped the Mother's lips then."

"An 'Ah!' from the Mother's lips? What was the dream, tell me."

"I see the Mother sitting on a chair, Her face seems somewhat tired. I go near and do Pranam. She smiles and as She stretches out Her hand to bless me, a mild 'Ah!' escapes Her lips. And, you know, the sound of Her 'Ah!' was exactly like the one that came from your lips! I was shaken up and asked Her, 'What happened Mother?'

"She said, 'Rama has met with an accident.'

"I asked, 'But then why did you feel the pain, Mother?'

"Mother's expression changed immediately. 'Do you think it is you who meet with the accident and I merely get an intimation? My child, you people forget that I am always with each one of you.' She paused and continued, 'I am with you in your rise and your fall, in your victory and your defeat, in every circumstance I am with you. When you fall, I fall with you. When you are hurt it first hits me. If you are drowning, I don't just stand on the bank and watch, when I cannot save (if that happens to be your destiny), I sink with you. The day you will understand this truth, you will feel my constant presence, as I am always living with you, experience me actually beside you.'"

For a long time after Sukhdev stopped, the two were silent.

Then Murti said, "After I returned home, I thanked Mother again and again. Compared to what could have happened, nothing at all did—a mere pin-prick where it could have been the thrust of a spike. But... I never realised that the Mother had taken the whole thing on Herself! Who but She could have placed a mattress under me at that time on the place I fell? I did feel it was indeed Her saviour Hand, but... to imagine that She herself has to suffer so much on our behalf!..."

His voice choked, and his eyes filled with tears of gratitude. "O Mother! You are so close even to us destitute sadhaks; You take up on Yourself our smallest and biggest problems. Why don't we realise that You rejoice in our joys and are sad in our sorrows? Why don't we, my friend?" He exclaimed, clasping Sukhdev's hands in his own.

JNANVATI GUPTA

(A real-life story published in Hindi in *Barte Kadam* by Jnanvati Gupta. English translation by Sunjoy V. Bhatt)

We stand before Thee that Thy will may be fulfilled in us, in every element, in every activity of our being from our supreme heights to the smallest cells of the body.

The Mother

(*Prayers and Meditations,* October 23, 1937)

THE WORLD IN TRANSITION...

'Being' in the 'Making'

OUR lives are a saga of 'beings in the making'. We often speak of a world that is in transition—the world that is changing too fast, too rapidly. Not only in terms of technology, but of ideology—in the sense and meaning of life that we hold, as individuals, as nations, as a world community of people. Not only is the pace of this change imbued with another kind of 'movement', but the fact of 'change' is in a process of re-defining itself. It has become 'radical' in its contours, in its direction towards different goals. Change appears to be leading towards something called 'transmutation'—with new possibilities emerging. But transmutation of what? Of the world? Of our surroundings? Of the means at our disposal? Or, of *ourselves*, as such?

Transmutation of ourselves, as beings! For everything is inextricably inter-twined. No longer can being and nature be seen as separate—as subject and object. All is laced together and functions or dis-functions as 'one'. But the centre seems to be in 'ourselves'—as 'beings'.

And this 'being' seems to be in a process of transmutation—not change, that is slowly wrought about by circumstance or otherwise. But a transmutation working itself out in the very stuff of what we know to be ourselves. A being re-moulded, cast anew! All its layers—from the inner to the most outer—are sort of 'kneaded' together, till the distinction and separateness between the inner and the outer no longer remains. A curious process, that blends all into one continuum.

Even 'life' and 'death'—or, all that is 'beyond' what we know as 'life'—merge into a strange cycle of experience, the experience of Reality. The many dimensions of the Real are like a stairway—one traverses them, one step or rather one 'field' leading on to the other. There isn't a 'break'. There is a *piercing* through, a going through, different orders of 'densities', of lightnesses, of hues—but there is a curious, inexplicable continuity. It is like travelling through many dimensions—all of them conscious, though in different ways. Till one reaches a kind of 'expanse'—where all *is*.

And, then, one returns to what we know as the 'world'! The world of material moorings, of interactions, of necessities as we call them. The world of sensibilities, of ideas—if they are still around!—of technology, of our 'tools' of living.

But where is the 'fact' of living in all this? They have to discover their relationship in this new experience. This rediscovery will possibly create the new being in us—the transmutation we talked about earlier. It is too soon to say with any definiteness—for the process is active and on-going. And the results are in the making but nowhere visible.

The 'absoluteness' present *in* things and wanting to reveal itself to our experience, the vast and the eternal merging with the small and the ephemeral—is this the burden this process carries?

The light that is on the heights seems also to be in the depths—the depths of our life *in* matter. A 'Whole' of existence given in experience? The Real given to us as one

continuum? Is it from such experience that will emerge the new being?

Eternality in our moments—death revealing other dimensions of the experience of the One Reality...

One awaits—since all is in process. What is the being in the chrysalis going to be like?

Such are our times. Not repetitive of the old—but creating something totally new. Not known, altogether unforeseen.

Thus we wait—in the depths of silence, aware of the singularity of the moment...

September 2000

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Time grows ripe—and 'being' flows into the 'other' to make it 'whole'. There is a 'newness' of being—in a 'substance' that is everywhere.

The act of creation has not yet begun—another world has yet to take form.

But 'being' is almost there, tangible in its 'flow'—a 'flow' which has itself become the new 'form'. As fluidity having a 'shape'. Held in a space that knows another 'density'—lightly porous, holding together in a way invisible, warm, supple, living, vibrant with a symphony of sound, that is almost like a 'touch'.

The 'world' has still to come—from such 'being'....

And we wait again—but this time, as 'wholes'. In a oneness beyond compare. Of being merging with being, in space that is boundless and in a time that holds all eternity in its single embrace.

ASTER PATEL

What has to be will be, what has to be done will be done....
What a calm assurance Thou hast put into my being, O Lord...
Oh, the sweetness of Thy calm assurance, the power of Thy Peace!...

The Mother

(*Prayers and Meditations,* June 22, 1914)

WHISPER

LISTEN to the whisper that lives in the breeze,
Hear the wind sigh in the ancient trees.
Feel the gentle teardrops that fall on the dew,
Tears that are being wept for you.

In the ocean of dreamlight, the timeless womb,
Where the moon bewitches the sea,
From a sky of love that is far above,
The whispering comes to me.
In the deepest night, when the stars are bright,
When the heart is at rest in the soul,
From the mystery of eternity
Comes a call to a distant goal.
Silver is the moonlight, and deep her spell,
Lost is the world in its sleep;
Fated is the tide where the dreamers dwell,
Precious are the tears that weep.
I have no understanding, my eyes are blind,
I am held by the moon as a thrall,
But I long to fly in my heart's own sky,
To follow a whispered call.

Listen to the whisper that lives in the breeze,
Hear the wind sigh in the ancient trees,
Feel the gentle teardrops that fall on the dew,
Tears that are being wept for you.

ALLAN STOCKER

THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(*Continued from the issue of November 2003*)

3. India's Bhagavata World

FOR the last one thousand years and more, the Bhagavata has been translated, transcreated and transmuted in innumerable ways in Indian languages. The original Sanskrit is, of course, used as a holy scripture, especially for the "saptaham" (recitation in seven days) ritual. We are told that this saptaha-yajna which consists in merely listening to its stories can confer priceless boons. Even sages who are beyond the net of desires remain filled with Ananda reading it, says the Padma Purana:

"People undoubtedly attain by hearing a seven day's exposition of Srimad Bhagavata that destiny which people cannot attain by living on the air, water or dry leaves and emaciating the body, (nay) through severe austerities practised for long periods of Time and yogic practices. Staying in Chitrakuta, the great sage Sandilya too reads out this sacred story while immersed in the bliss of oneness with Brahma (the Absolute)."[1]

Sanskrit has also some recreations of the Bhagavata, the most famous being Narayaneeyam of Melputhur Narayana Bhattatiri. Born in 1560, the Nambudiri brahmin came from a family of scholars. When his guru, Achutha Pisharodi was disabled by rheumatism, he drew the illness to himself by yoga, went to Guruvayur and for one hundred days transcreated the Bhagavata story at the temple to Krishna. The 1036 verses in the poem are addressed to the presiding deity of Guruvayur. Bhattatiri speaks of the several incarnations and forms taken by the Supreme to help his devotees. Here is an instance of his style:

> O Lord! Daksha of the Prachetas
> Worshipped you praying for progeny.
> Did you not appear eight-armed in his vision,
> To grant his prayer and a wife, Asigni?[2]

But it is through the regional languages that the entire Bhagavata world percolated to all classes of Indian devotees. This wide dissemination really started with the Bhakti Movement which was first based on Vishnu Purana. By the time the Movement began spreading in North India, the more detailed Bhagavata had taken over.

George Hart, the eminent Dravidologist, strongly feels that the culture of South India formed a major foundation for Indian culture as a whole, and Sanskrit literature drew from the poetic and religious elements of ancient Tamil literature. In the course of his argument he subscribes to the view that the Alwars were the inspiration for the Bhagavata Purana and finds the use of *avamochanam* for an inn to be an indicator as it chimes in with the Tamil *vituti*, both the words coming from roots, *munch* and *vitu* that mean "to leave".[3] Indeed this chimes in with the way the Alwars anchored themselves in

Vishnu Purana, the earliest Purana and the Acharyas who came after them referred to it all the time and hailed it as the "Purana ratna".

With the spread of the Bhakti Movement and the increasing popularity of the Bhagavata over the rest of the Puranas, the stage was set for regional languages to become the carriers of its message to the unlettered masses. Already translations (adaptations) had been attempted of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. These regional works may be said to have formed the character of the entire Indian nation. As Sri Aurobindo says of the former:

"The work of Valmiki has been an agent of almost incalculable power in the moulding of the cultural mind of India: it has presented to it to be loved and imitated in figures like Rama and Sita, made so divinely and with such a revelation of reality as to become objects of enduring cult and worship, or like Hanuman, Lakshmana, Bharata the living human image of its ethical ideals; it has fashioned much of what is best and sweetest in the national character, and it has evoked and fixed in it those finer and exquisite yet firm soul-tones and that more delicate humanity of temperament which are a more valuable thing than the formal outsides of virtue and conduct."[4]

Too numerous are the great regional adaptations of the epics to be exhausted in a passing mention, though Sri Aurobindo chooses two in particular as the very best: Kamban's Tamil Ramayana and Tulsidas's Ramcharit Manas. The Oriya Mahabharata of Saraladas is also very famous. The two epics were thus important for the spread of the Bhakti Movement. But it was the Bhagavata that became the sole flag-ship of the Movement. Whereas the characters in the epics are often drawn close to our human ways for comparative and contrastive purposes, the figures of the Bhagavata are altogether beyond criticism, as it were. We may spend hours and reams discussing who was the greatest villain in the Mahabharata and whether Rama was right in killing Vali and rejecting Sita; no such discussions are possible with the Bhagavata world. The Avataras, the asuras, good and bad women are just what they are. They exist. We accept. Draw unto ourselves the good and the loving devotion; reject the evil and hate.

In many ways, more than the epics, it is the Bhagavata world that has given total solace to the struggling soul in this world of human affairs. Man wants something to hold on to while bobbing up and down in the oceanic problems that confront him and the Bhagavata acts literally as a raft to sail to safety despite the terrifying spectres that float around him. You have total faith in the theme and there ends the matter. He will save! Had He not saved this creation by descending as the Matsya? Had He not upheld the Meru Mountain in the sea as the Kurma? Hadn't He restored Mother Earth from Hiranyaksha by incarnating as the Varaha? As the Narasimha, He had hidden within a pillar to save his devotee Prahlad! And the glory and grandeur of the Vamana metamorphosing as Trivikrama! Then, the charming sweetnesses of the Supreme's childhood which we have missed in all earlier incarnations but have the honeyed delight immerge us in the Krishna avatar! Then, the unquenchable hope that He will yet come to save us from our present ills, the Kalki!

This approach has made the Bhagavata the favourite of every one in the world of

devotees as also all who love a good tale. All ages, all classes of people have enjoyed the Puranic scenario through dance and drama, festivals and paintings, sculptures and bronzes. Nor do we see only stories in the narration. We get a feel of history, cosmogony and sociology as well. While presenting the regional versions, some straining of such heavy matter does take place, but then sociology gets a big boost. There have been some critics who have found that the sacred story of Krishna has been invaded by sexism from Harivamsa downwards. None of these has made a dent on the popularity of the Purana or stained the Bhagavata world.

Almost every regional language speaks of at least one popular writer on the theme and all of them have enriched the language by judiciously mingling Sanskrit with the local dialects which were majoring into languages quite fast a thousand years ago. Shankaradev translated eight of the twelve books of the Purana into Assamese, while Oriya's Jagannath Dasa (16th century) is very well known. He seems to have met Sri Chaitanya. It is said he wrote the Oriya version for the sake of his mother who could not understand Sanskrit. Chandrasekhar Rath says this Oriya classic set the standard for the language with its "sanskritised, elegant poetic diction and the unparalleled Navakshyari rhyme scheme". One hears of special Bhagabata Gharas (Halls of Bhagavata) which were built just for reciting the epic in public and of course, it is read and worshipped in homes with great reverence.

Sri Chaitanya pervades both the Oriya and Bengali Bhagavata worlds. Interestingly enough Maladhar Basu (15th century) who translated the Tenth Book into Bengali did so under the patronage of Ruknuddin Barbak Sah who was the Sultan of Gaud. Among Indian languages, very few have the entire work in translation done by the same author. Telugu has the immortal creation of Pothana's Andhra Mahabhagavatamu. Reading Pothana is an adventure because sometimes he gives literal translations which are amazingly close to the original. But quite often he leads us away with the enchanting flow of his imagination and the utter music of his style.

While many of the episodes dealt with by him are famous (Ambarisha's prayer, the song of the Gopis), his "Gajendra Moksham" remains a gem spreading serene rays of devotion all over the place. He follows closely the original tale in the Eighth Book of the Bhagavata but veers away at times adding new loveliness to the fascinating picture of a Lordly Elephant being rescued by Narayana. Whereas the original Purana says that Vishnu decided to help the elephant when he heard its cries of distress, Pothana introduces some drama. It is all Ananda consciousness in that lovely garden-house in the heavens where Narayana and Lakshmi are playing at dice, and the Lord is pulling the upper end of her garment to make a point. Suddenly the serenity is pierced by the cry of the elephant: "Save me!" The action of the Lord's Grace is so quick that between the cry and the relief there is no interval, as is recorded in the verse, "Sirikin cheppadu":

> The Lord does not inform Lakshmi;
> nor does he stretch out his hands
> for his conch and discus;

nor call out for any of his servants;
nor order his mount Garuda to get ready;
nor bind his tresses that fly about;
nor leave the garment-end of Lakshmi
that covered the breasts of the Mother;
so eager was he to rush
and save the life of the elephant.[5]

Naturally we watch the scene with astonished eyes as Lakshmi runs behind him dragging her garment to cover herself and Garuda and the weapons rush to take their places. The rescue is swift. Pothana then takes his own time to show how the Lord soothed the wounded Gajendra. This episode of the Bhagavata world is typical of the power of the Purana to instil in us a rare faith that asks no questions. We simply tell ourselves that as we struggle through the crocodile-infested world of human affairs and are wounded grievously at each turn of our lives, the Lord's Grace guards us and soothes us as well. When the Supreme is visualised as a Mahapremi who guarded even an animal in distress, all must needs be well with humanity.

Pothana's version popularised the Bhakti Movement in a very big way and was no doubt the inspiration for several Telugu composers like Ramdas of Bhadrachalam and Tyagaraja of Tiruvaiyaru. Indeed, one can boldly say that there is not a devotional poet or Telugu scholar who has not been influenced by Pothana. The sweet poetic voice of Pothana can be heard in several modern poets. Lakshmana Yateendra's Puta Putana (1980) is an epyllion on the demoness who sought to kill Krishna by breast-feeding him. The moment she sees baby Krishna in the cradle, a tremendous change comes over her:

What has happened to me?
Am I myself?
What is this indescribable brilliance
(*anirvachya prabha raasi)?*
What is this transformation that kills my past?
A curtain has been drawn aside![6]

The poet finds the smile of the divine child to be the supreme weapon that draws to it and destroys the demonaic qualities in man:

That smile is the missile
Of enchantment (*mohana astra);*
Who is luckier than me? Not even the gods
Could fondle Him as I have done!
O imaged loveliness!
(*murti bhuta saundaryamaa*)![7]

The Tamil language has two major versions. Madhurakavi Varadaraja Iyengar, known as Arulaladasar (18th century) has presented the whole of the original Purana with some thoughtful condensations. Sevvaichooduvar's (17th century) retelling was rescued from Time's destruction by the legendary editor, U.V. Swaminatha Iyer seventy-five years ago. Sevvaichooduvar, known also as Madhava Pandit hailed from Vembattur, and his version reveals that he was well-versed in Sangham poetry as well as Kamban's Ramayana. 4970 verses spread through twelve Books move with a steady grace while the prayers (by Dhruva, Prahlada, Ambarisha and others) have the typical wonderment and joy of Bhakti yoga. In fact, Sevvaichooduvar's epic loses no chance to refer to the yoga of devotion. At the same time, as in the original Bhagavata, the spaces given to the cosmogony, philosophy, spirituality and ethical maxims are also given their proper spread.

The widespread use of the Bhagavata (in Sanskrit or regional languages) for religious and spiritual discourses has given a special power to the term, "bhagavat". Literally speaking, the term denotes a follower or serviteur of Bhagawan, the Supreme Lord. In common parlance, the term invokes an immediate respect and even religious mood. Hence important works of hagiology go by the term, "bhagavat". In Bengali we have the Chaitanya Bhagavat of Vrindavan Das which retells the life of Sri Chaitanya in fifty-two chapters. Isvara Das wrote an Oriya biography of Sri Chaitanya in sixty-five chapters with the same title. During the last century, we even had a Christu Bhagavatam (1977) written in Sanskrit by P.C. Devassia. Reading the work in thirty-three cantos, one realises how deep are the roots of our Puranas in the psyche of India. While retelling the life of Christ, the poet brings in very apt references to Puranic matter. The golden image on the Temple of Jerusalem shines like the kausthubha on Vishnu's chest (*Murareva kausthubah*); Ashtravakra, Ajigarta, Menaka and other Puranic characters fill the spaces. Salome is described as worse than Kaikeyi. The transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain of Thabor is related to Krishna's Viswarupa:

Drishtva rupaantharam praptham yesur sarve prakampithaa
Vismithaschaabhavat pasyanviswarupamivaarjunah[8]

The typical Bhagavata ambience is created in passages as this on the Sermon on the Mount:

Lokaanthah kalidharma ithyapi bahun bhaaviprameyan yatha
Markandeyamuniryudhishtiradhatraapaalaadhikaan kaanane[9]

The Bhagavata world is not confined only to literature, religion and poetry. It is very much part of our temple worship and history. For this world is one of incarnations. And the various incarnations have been recorded in stone for more than fifteen hundred years. Manisha Mukhopadhyay finds that the Puranic world expanded in such a way that the incarnational theory prevailed as it helped assimilate varied local customs with the Vedic stream. Taking a cue from Sukumari Bhattacharji, she says:

"The totem-worshippers, the animists, the hero-worshipers, all had to find their respective places in this Neo-brahmanical religion. This could only be done by acknowledging them as manifestations of one fundamental theophany. With the idea of metempsychosis accepted on the human level, it needed but one step of sublimation to transfer it on to the divine, and thus unite the different cults and people into one fold by harmonising their faiths. None was denied a place; all felt that they worshipped the supreme being in one or other manifestation."[10]

But this approach need not make out the Bhagavata world to be no more than an *olla podrida* of Indian culture. Fortunately, we have had a clear enunciation of the avatara theory by Sri Aurobindo in *Essays on the Gita*. It is not merely worshipping one or the other form of the Divine; one is oneself the Divine, though we have been rendered ignorant of it by the veil of Prakriti's Maya. The Descent comes "to exemplify the possibility of the Divine manifest in the human being, so that man may see what that is and take courage to grow into it."[11]

The incarnations are an important part of the Bhagavata world. Nay, they are vital to its philosophy and poetry. Instead of arguing over whether the incarnation theory would stand the scrutiny of rationalism, the Bhagavata world simply accepts them with joy. Since the mystery cannot be unveiled totally, it is best we do not lose its power by tomes of dry scholarship regarding partial manifestations and Poorna Avatars. As Sri Aurobindo put it beautifully, having admitted the possibility of avatarhood, we have already entered its mystic world, and "once entered, may as well tread in it with firm footsteps." Writing his epic poem, Krishna Geetam (1994) after having lived in the Aurobindonian ethos all his life, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar tries to explain why the Divine descends in different forms:

> The crises in phenomenal earth-life—
> the existential lures, traps
> and dangers—varied as they are, ask for
> the relevant responses.
>
> And often enough, just a casual breeze
> From some far-off potent nook
> Might effect the called-for ambrosial change,
> And withdraw as in a dream.
>
> At other times, an Asuric challenge
> From a far-entrenched bastion
> May call for a proportionate answer
> And a prolonged clash of arms.
>
> Meeting, mastering—or alchemising—
> Whole varieties of challenge

Could mean a plurality of response
And matching machinery.

This is the reason the Divine Descents
Sport a multiplicity
In the actors, armaments, durations,
And the achieved victories.[12]

We may of course never know what kind of crises caused a little known Hamsa Avatar or a brief Dattatreya Avatar or the unique Krishna Avatar. What we would be gaining from the Bhagavata world regarding the challenges in man's past would be almost nothing as millennia have gone by. But the icons remain as creative guardians for us to understand our own problems, relate the earlier happenings with our own century and gain the light to format our action for the Next Future.

(*To be continued*)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

Notes and References

1. Translated by C.L. Goswami.
2. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.
3. *The Poems of Ancient Tamil: Their Milieu and Their Sanskrit Counterparts* (1975), p. 279.
4. *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (1972 edition), p. 290.
5. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.
6. *Ibid*.
7. *Ibid*.
8. "Seeing the transfigured Jesus all of them shuddered with astonishment, even as Arjuna when he saw the Viswarupa." (Translated by P.C. Devassia)
9. "Thus the Lord spoke in the valley of the mountain to His eager followers, concerning the End of the World and the Last judgement; even as the sage Markandeya did speak in the forest to king Yudhisthira and others regarding the end of the world and character of the Kali Yuga and many other problems of the future." (Translated by P.C. Devassia)
10. *Brahmanical Mythology in Sanskrit Inscriptions* (1981), p. 69.
11. *Essays on the Gita* (1972 edition), p. 150.
12. Book I, Canto 2, verses: 75-79.

GLIMPSES OF CHINA—
CIVILISATION VS DEVELOPMENT

I WORKED with a tour company based in the UK specialising in holidays for Britishers in the Indian subcontinent. As a part of the expansion an opportunity arose to reconnoiter China as a potential tourist destination. I rejoiced. China has always been a mystery for me and despite the adverse reports of the Western media I wanted to dig deeper to get nearer to the truth. After all China, along with Egypt, Mesopotamia and India, is one of the four oldest civilisations of the world and it would be a journey going back in time to discover mankind's inspirational moments.

China is the fourth largest country in the world and has 27 UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Geographically it is in the far east of Asia and hence a bit isolated and so its evolution has mainly been on its own initiative. Its civilisation dates back to 2100 BC and the country's topography is wide and diverse and an explorer's dream. China has some pioneering achievements, for instance: the 5th cent. BC Great Wall of China which was a precursor for all walled cities in the world, a 2200 year old hand-made grand canal which is 1200 miles long and the longest in the world, casting of bronze in 1500 BC which was far ahead of its time, and advanced knowledge in mathematics and astronomy in the 15th cent. BC. In addition, their skills in making silk, terracotta and porcelain are unparalleled. Their art forms include music with traditional Chinese instruments, calligraphy, porcelain, painting, literature, etc. The Mother had remarked that the Chinese had a very high philosophy, dating more than 2000 years, and know a path leading them to the Divine. This is the ultimate accolade that a civilisation could receive. In the book *Lessons of Life* there are a number of philosophical sayings from China that the Mother has quoted in her own hand. (See pp. 1020-27)

My mission was to explore almost all the areas of tourist interest and to understand the people, its culture and feel its art forms. The 22-day tour encompassed as many sites as was possible to make the tour as diverse and enriched as possible.

Because I travelled alone my interaction with the country was direct which gave me a more wholesome experience of China. Also I had local English-speaking guides at each of the twelve towns I visited, which meant I could ascertain the political, social and cultural attitudes of the Chinese. Considering the fact that very few Chinese speak English and my questions were of a very delicate and sensitive nature my guides were critical in understanding China from a wider angle. Almost all my guides were very warm and hospitable and I soon managed to become friends with all and our rapport allowed me to ask uncomfortable questions regarding Tibet, Taiwan, the Communist Government, Tiananmen Square massacre, Mao, etc., and I even had debates on these issues. The guides were really special to me and I was even presented gifts by a few which is truly astounding. I never expected in my dream of dreams that China would be so warm, friendly and helpful.

The sites I visited also were wonderful but if I had to give 3 highlights they would

be the Terracotta Warriors in Xian, Marco Polo's beloved Hangzhou, and the Li River Cruise in Guilin. However, Beijing and its five UNESCO World Heritage sites including the Great Wall of China, the classical gardens in Suzhou, the landscapes and local costumes in the Province in Yunnan, Mt. Huang Shan and the village of Honcun were all outstanding and memorable.

The article below is a travelogue given in a date-wise manner and attempts to take the reader into the day-by-day experience of the traveller. It is in the nature of letters written to my father back in England.

03 March—Arrive Beijing

Arrived Beijing after a 9 hour flight from London. Pretty quick if you consider it takes the same time from London to Delhi. China has been a mystery for many and my mission was to unravel it. By the time I reached the immigration desk the mystery deepened as there was not a hint or iota of expression on the immigration official's face and I wondered if my face or passport was not good enough to cross this hurdle. With a rather officious way I was allowed to go through. It was like a freedom license into China and I rejoiced. I was received by a rather cool early spring—my guide had not yet arrived and this caused a few flutters as I had no contact numbers of my China agent. Lo, and behold! the guide arrived at last, to my relief, greeting and gushing as if the Chinese New Year was on the horizon and with such warmth that it almost neutralised the cold air. Soon I was introduced to a pleasant mannered driver and off we were to my hotel. This was my first interaction with a Chinese in China (I had a Chinese friend in London) and the first of many pleasant exchanges with the Chinese. Such hospitality was a consistent theme on my 22-day tour. Indeed, a revelation to me and quite in contrast to the slanty eyed, cold, unsmiling, inhospitable people as reported by the Western media. Many Western tourists have complained about their attitude but these are tourists who do not travel individually but travel in tourist groups, so nearly all the interaction is amongst the group members and hardly any with the local people. They see everything through the tinted windows of their coach.

My guide was pleasant, friendly and went out of her way to help. Indeed, I felt obliged to invite her for lunch and she discreetly ordered the food maintaining a fine balance between quality and price. Keeping to the dictum of 'When in Rome do as the Romans do' I tried to use the chopsticks under the guidance and watchful eye of my guide; but my clumsy fingers were totally flummoxed by the process despite my enthusiasm. I would however like to qualify the above by stating that, by the end of the trip, I was almost successful in using chopsticks and did somewhat dimly impress my hosts in the various cities I visited. Just an hour in China and it was already promising to be a revelation or as some would put it a revolution—despite all the Occidental views. It was a fine introduction to China.

Beijing however was in some kind of construction frenzy and there was the oncoming Beijing 2008 Olympics that added to the confusion. The roads from the airport, and

in the city, were far superior to those in India but there was intense building work all over the place besides the ones already completed. It did not require one to be a mathematical genius to realise the amount of wealth poured into the roads, flyovers and buildings which must be exceeding billions of dollars. My only reservation was with the aesthetics of this modern economic revolution, as there was almost no greenery and yet all was a jungle, a concrete one that is. It later transpired that there are some fine gardens; but these are quietly tucked away, and do not make an ample green cover by any means. This was the Chinese zest for economic development and power at all costs; for the Chinese are very proud (though personally they can be quite humble) of their country and want to be recognised and have a say in international affairs. In fact the two reasons the Communist Government has been by and large accepted is because they brought the country unprecedented economic growth in the past 10 to 20 years and the standard of living has gone up substantially. Also, by nature and culture they are quite obedient people and hence the Communist Government may have a long tenure. The Government has moved intelligently (unlike the Soviets) by keeping economics away from politics.

In the afternoon Dan (my guide) took me around for some shopping as I had to buy a camera and she was very conscientious in finding the right one. Realise, no western guide would have taken me out to find a camera, let aside make special efforts to find the perfect one to suit quality and price. I bought a Canon but I needed to know the operation of the camera, especially since all the written instructions were in Chinese. I was quite persistent in my rapid fire questioning so that I had all my data intact before I went out shooting. This was my first glimpse (and certainly not the last) of Dan's patience in translating all my questions and the calm replies of the sales girl. It is hard to imagine that any sales girl in UK would withstand such an interrogation. Such are the qualities of the common Chinese—patience, forbearance and goodwill.

04 March—Beijing

In the morning we went to the Temple of Heaven—a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A lovely circular temple with a flat cone-shaped roof. And, presto, there were sprawling gardens to match. Apparently by some quirk the emperors of the Ming (14-17th cent) and Qing/Manchu (17-20th cent) dynasty used to demonstrate their humility and appeal with sacrifices for the mercy of heaven and pray for good harvest and peace. They would pass the night of winter solstice in fasting and meditation. Heaven took another meaning this century for the citizens who used the park enacting opera, playing musical instruments or a Chinese form of chess or even making calligraphic letters on the pavement. Such were the pastimes of these mysterious Chinese.

We then went to the outskirts of Beijing to visit the summer palace of the past Emperors—a UNESCO declared World Heritage Site. The palace has a huge lake (quite a part of it was still frozen—I warned you it was colder than London) with surrounding hills and one was in a quandary on whether to admire the beautiful palace or its picturesque location. One made the most of it by taking a winding walk around. Lunch was a

real treat where I had my finest Chinese meal (Shezwuan cuisine). There were a row of side dishes, each a delicacy to be had with a small bowl of rice (I hope you are not thinking that the lunch was the highlight of the day).

In the afternoon we went to Tiananmen Square where there was the Parliament, Mao Zedong's Mausoleum and other Russian-like gigantic buildings. Suprisingly, my guide revealed to me that she liked Zhou Enlai more than Mao. Was this a portent of history rewriting itself? Adjoining was the Forbidden City where earlier lesser mortals like us were not permitted to enter. Well, thanks to the changing times we entered, unobstructed (barring the entrance fees of course). The Forbidden City is a complex or a series of palaces and the largest in the world. An unending stream of huge courtyards with bridges in the centre and palaces along its perimeters follow one after another. The palaces are in the typical Chinese style and are very impressive. In the evening we were hosted by our China agent and had yet another grand Chinese meal. Once again there were no noodles but some boiled rice and we all feasted on the side dishes. I tried frog legs (do you know the French are called Froggies by the Brits because of their fondness for frog legs?) for the first time and it tasted a bit like chicken. I avoided the snails though, for my adventurous spirit did not extend to slimy things slithering over my palate. Later I discovered that snakes, snake's blood and monkey's head are delicacies too, but I guess these were a bit too much of a delicacy to offer.

(*To be continued*)

GAUTAM MALAKER

INTIMATE PORTRAITS

Hellas 2003—Scattered Thoughts and Diary Notes

Athens—the beginning at the beginning of April

ATHENA'S temple, the Parthenon, a gaze up from where I sit, sunrays falling on it at a perfect angle and the air crystal-crisp; it is all so perfect I can almost hear music in it. There is fruit for breakfast and I am having it out on the veranda.

The sun comes up fast from behind Mount Hymettus and illuminates the Parthenon etching its Doric grace sharply against the cerulean blue of the sky. This is the work of Man building for the Divine. Bathed in the early Attic light, the sheer loveliness of the structure makes once again the statement it was built for. Perfectly beautiful and for a long consummate moment its sight holds me captive. I forget all else and my hand freezes in mid-air (half-finished and juice-dripping peach included!).

This is my first morning in Greece after two years and I feel appropriately welcomed.

I went early to bed last night and it was drizzling and dark when I woke up. With the city still asleep, I could not resist. Raincoat on, I let my soft-rubber steps follow the cobblestone pedestrian walk around the Acropolis. In pace with the gentle rain and with deep breaths accompanying an inner rhythm chanting its own chants, I did the *parikramā* [going round] of the Sacred Rock.[1] It was an impromptu pilgrimage and its completeness left me filled and contented. By the time I came back the grocer was setting up his stall and he let me choose the best he had and I walked away with a bagful of fresh delicious fruit.

I am only staying for a couple of days in Athens. The welcome continues, only I have to learn how to navigate through it. It can be tricky; this city is an extended construction site. Birthplace of the modern Olympic Games, Athens is desperately trying to be ready for their return here next year; every possible and impossible square inch of ground is being dug up. A fine cloud of dust-particles is settled over the city and commuting is difficult. The Athenians are stressed and there is even more they are worrying about: the war in Iraq, the SARS epidemic, the recession and the lack of tourists and the worries as to how and what will be. Above all, will the city be ready for the Games?

Everybody is concerned and preoccupied; loud questions everywhere and matters of interest discussed and I listen to them with the appropriate attention, careful though not to let any of it sink in too deeply. I watch the drama but leave little happy-self out of it; for her, all is well and as good as it gets. Kati is back to where home used to be and she is picking up the threads of her old and inexhaustible affair with Greece exactly from where she had last left it; she is Katerina again!

Comparison with Pondy is inevitable; life is of a definitely higher quality there.

1. That's how Greeks often refer to the hill of Acropolis, which is one of several in Athens.

Here most people seem lost and they are too noisy; Mother Greece isn't quite settled in her being (not quite, not enough, anyhow: priorities are confused and judgement is muddled up)—too many choices coupled with the lack of clear direction. This has always been so, but now it seems to be even more so; I see my dear compatriots focus on the apparent—only and eagerly.

Perhaps I have been away for too long, but I find it difficult to take this continuous parade of hugely involved vitals seriously! (Or, perhaps it is that I would like them to do better than this; I am convinced they can—how much more time would they need?) Still deaf to Socrates's plea, they are forever fascinated with the without and hardly ever have a moment for that daemon within. But they are good willed and full of enthusiasm and this is what draws me ever closer to them.

Besides, I am one of them. I know how it is to stumble and seek without direction; I know the eagerness to know and the need to find out, the wish to think and the will to understand; the drive that pushes one to simply be and let be. These are our positive traits as people—how can they be furthered? The old Mysteries are long since forgotten and no spiritual practice has endured. If they only knew where to turn and how to go about it, these Greeks could do miracles—think I, with my visitor's eyes and long years lived in India.

Pyrgos, eighteen kilometres west of Olympia—April with the Family

Visiting the little town of my birth turns out to be more interesting than expected, also longer. I've been here for almost a month and it has been a good opportunity to know my elder brother and his wife and family better, and to take part in their life. In the last two decades we had very little time with each other. It makes me chuckle to myself whenever I think of it: my life must make as little sense to them as theirs does to me. I can't even conceive we could start explaining ourselves to each other. It must be love holding us together.

Tomorrow, I return to Athens and, looking back at this shared-with-the-family-month, there is one thing that stands out: one of my brother's rare remarks. He is a man of few words dealing mostly with practicalities—what is there to do and how to do it, are his usual concerns. He is a simple and good man and his remark came to reveal the simple source of his goodness. "I must be at ease with myself within," he said, while refusing any reaction or hard feelings towards a man who had plainly wronged him. He just moved on, continuing with what he had to do next.

Athens—main course, part one, in the month of May

I am reintroduced to my true-and-oh-so-fabulously-Greek self (whatever *that* is!). I am blooming; I live with Loukia,[2] I am busy doing all I have to do and exercising daily at my

2. See last month's "Intimate Portraits".

niece's Pilates[3] studio. Moreover, I now consider myself a born-again Athenian, minus some basic drawbacks!

I look at the city-dwellers differently already; I am a little more understanding now that I live their reality. A big city can be burdensome and hard on aspiration. Very little of what it offers is aspiring and the stimuli and constant push it gives to everyday life are far too prominent to disregard. One needs to constantly use one's will and turn to what is to be done and one is forced to deal mostly with the practicalities of the mundane, if not to appease it, then to just manage with its necessities. Or one ends up supporting a vicious circle of choices, contrasts and top-most priorities that feed a ceaseless activity.

At first I was bewildered, then thought the big-city a novelty. It certainly carried attractions. I enjoyed the metropolitan hustle and bustle and the skill of stirring through it; metro rides shortened distances, megastores were convenient (and odd, so many people in them, yet hardly any individual). I delighted in freshly pressed juice, a good movie at an open-air cinema or an interesting talk with someone. There was much to do and I used it as a means to justify the experience. In that way it wasn't just curiosity that took me through these entangled ways; I lived the big city for all it could be worth.

But, all novelties fade and so did this too. What finally remained was human contact and stolen moments of quietude. When it came, I was plainly ready for the retreat my friends Yannis and Moschoula offered—would I like to spend some time at their holiday home in Ikaria? Yannis was certain I would love it.

Ikaria Island—an interlude and it is already the third week of May

Long walks are the order of the day and not the swimming I had been looking forward to; the sea is still too cold and the sun had been hiding for the past few days. But the island is lush and green and trees, flowers, bushes, birds and insects are in wild abundance. This morning I counted seven different types of lizards sunning themselves as enthusiastically as I was!

I am staying in a little stone house surrounded by forest. But for the chirping of birds, the wind rustling the leaves and an occasional car or motorcycle passing, there is very little else I hear. The air is so fragrant and clean, I wish I could take double breaths and store the excess for later use—these are precious and peaceful days.

In some ways, the place reminds me of Pondy. There is a strong sense of community here, a togetherness apparent—from the notices put up on the trunk of the plane tree in the village square, to the warm greetings people exchange when they meet; as if they haven't met a couple of hours or a day ago! Much like the smiling and hand-waving we do in Pondicherry...

Painted on the rocks across the harbour in large while letters is a sign: IKARIA, THE ISLAND OF PEACE. Loukia saw it first and we agreed it was accurate. Silence is easy here and life peaceful, all is held by a calm and slow-paced element. People are

3. Pilates is an exercise method that focuses on building strength and suppleness in the body.

content and we make friends everywhere.

Loukia and I spent three days here together. It was good from the start and it continued till she left late in the afternoon yesterday; a huge rainbow crowned the sky as her ferry sailed off, with the sun just about to set and the western horizon streaked with colours.... A spectacular farewell and it was lengthened as we drove parallel. We both headed west: she on the seaways, I in the taxi on the asphalt road hugging the shoreline; the sun dipped and dipped, golden light lingered, then evening took over.

It was dark when the car started up the hill and sliced through the clouds sitting heavy on the range—thick fog, actually, and it made the ride difficult. There was hardly any visibility and the car's lights went suddenly feeble. When we reached the little house we stepped out into a night happening in a peculiar and powerful setting.

Only a few hundred meters above sea level, the place felt as if on some strange distant mountain; trees crowded the dark and mists replaced the air. I had walked into a fairy-like forest. Indistinct shapes and nameless beings stood where the olive and the chestnut trees had been and the oleander had simply vanished. Ancient trunks and branches were alive in the wind and I could almost make up the tales of old they were telling....

It was an eerie, strange reality. Somehow I liked it; somewhere I feared it. I was certainly glad for the light left on in the courtyard. Zanos, the taxi-driver, walked with me through the high-grown grass and made sure I unlocked the door before he wished me good night. Then, wishfully: "I hope the weather will soon find its peace."

Which it did, to a degree. The cold northern wind is chasing the clouds away today. Slowly, the sun comes through and all is glorious: invigorating, fresh, clear. Everything lovely. A little corner of paradise—yes, good Yannis knew and he was right; I *do* love it here. I turn my face to the sun and through half-closed eyelids watch the lizards; we are all contented. I smile at them and the universe and feel the warmth in my heart expanding.

KATI WIDMER

TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO

(*Continued from the issue of November 2003*)

Songs of Tagore: the Metaphor of Beyonding - I

SANKHO GHOSH, an authority on Tagore, has very interesting things to say on Tagore's songs in his book *E Aamir Aboron* (*The Veil of this 'I').* Ghosh is a renowned poet of modern Bengal. Poetry supports his logic as he seeks to explain for us the mystery of the songs of Tagore. He remembers Valery's words in his own language: the stars and the nights washed by light transform everything in man (p. 16). Everything disappears making room for a sublime simplicity. The songs of Tagore, Ghosh rightly feels, are like that. When we stand before *Rabindrasangeet,* the burden of material life leaves us; all lies within us are removed in a magic moment of the soul; all falsities and decorative gestures disappear. For further clarification of the mystery, we may turn from Sankho Ghosh to Sri Aurobindo.

> A touch can alter the fixed front of Fate.
> A sudden turn can come, a road appear...
> (*Savitri*, p. 256)

Ghosh draws our attention to the tune or *sūr* inviting us to see through the lens of Tagore himself. This *sūr,* Tagore would say, is not just a human song; it is as if the *sūr* emerges out of the whole universe. *Paraj* is sleepy at the end of a tiring night; *Kānādā* is confused nocturnal adventure indicating the dark night of the soul; *Bhairon* shows the pain of lonely infinite's eternal separation; *Multān,* the tired breath of the end-part of a hot day; *Purabi,* the tears of the widow even-fall (p. 16).

Ghosh's revealing observations would have been more revealing if he chose to use a few Aurobindonian points here and there in his book. That would have strengthened his approach. I would like to salute Ghosh as one of the major interpreters of Tagore's songs and then pass on to my own study of the songs with the help of a consciousness approach. Ghosh's response is the response of an aesthete, like his belief in the mellow female self in the writer of the songs. The woman keeps the room clean and waits. Somebody will come and all the cleanings and washings are preparations for an installation. Ghosh rules out the possibility of any religious sense here (p. 20). I beg to differ, because any kind of finer aesthetic sense has a close link with man's religious or spiritual sense. There is no contradiction between finer aesthetics and spirituality, which may be authenticated by the two stories, *The Selfish Giant* and *The Happy Prince,* written by a high priest of aestheticism. If we go by a consciousness approach, we see well that both the stories reflect the psychic being, which starts all our spiritual seekings. Similarly, on various occasions, the 'female self' felt in *Rabindrasangeet* is nothing but the presence or opening of the psychic centre in the speaker. Immediately after ruling out the religious sense in this mellow Tagorean gesture, Ghosh contradicts himself: Tagore's songs are meant for

self-construction (*Rabindranather gaan nijeke rachona kore tolar gaan*); this is an endless song of self-awakening and self-baptisation (*E ek biramheen aatmajagoroner aatmodikshar gaan*).

Sankho Ghosh is a very respected critic in Bengal. And I am one of his admirers. But this is an awful contradiction! I have to mention this just because he is surely influenced by a long tradition of Bengali criticism (at least seventy years old), which believes that 'God' or the 'Divine' or the 'psychic being' is untouchable in the field of criticism. The moment a critic refers to a poet's 'spiritual quest' his status is lost to the Bengali elite. It is not fashionable to see the psychic touch in someone's poetry.

Surprisingly enough, the best part of Ghosh's book speaks of the poetry of silence and the music of silence (pp. 31-39). Sri Aurobindo had spoken of it. Sisirkumar Ghose had explained it for the post-modern audience. However, in the Bengali language, Sankho Ghosh speaks of it first for the post-modern Bengali audience. He has a masterful clarity and allusiveness in these pages. Tagore does try to catch the Eternal in the net of his language. Quite often in his songs, he indicates that silence is the only language and that words are noisy and useless. He seeks to come out of that noisy world in search of another world, which lies deep inside him. It is strange that Ghosh remembers only Mallarmé in this connection ignoring completely Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. Mallarmé does write the poetry of silence in his own way and he too makes music, as he himself admits in a letter to Edmund Gosse: "I make Music and call by that name not only what one can catch from the euphonious combination of words but the Beyond magically produced by certain verbal arrangements."* Mallarmé does see things beyond the intellectual mind. But, who knows better than the poet of *Savitri* the ways to discover the silence that shapes a word or a phrase or a line? Quite correctly, Ghosh detects Tagore's intention in *Gitanjali.* He sees the continuous stress on the image of silence in this anthology: the silence of the harp, the silence of the messages, of the sun and the moon and the stars, the silence of the night and the dark. It is an all pervading silence (p. 33). The difference should be marked. Tagore is simple and direct even in his mystic music. Mallarmé is a hazy kind of mystic, very attractive but not transparent. The Sufi mystics sing like Tagore. But, if we search for the best poetry of silence, nobody comes anywhere near Sri Aurobindo. Tagore is the proper preface to Sri Aurobindo's poetry which is not the borderline poetry of the mystics. Quite often Sri Aurobindo sees the direct face of the Truth. Should we shut our ears to that silence created by words of sight which is a flame-throw from Identity?

> The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone
> In her unlit temple of eternity,
> Lay stretched immobile upon Silence' marge.
> Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,
> In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse

* K. D. Sethna, *The Obscure and the Mysterious: A Research in Mallarmé's Symbolist Poetry*, p. 47.

The abysm of the unbodied Infinite;
A fathomless zero occupied the world. (*Savitri,* p. 1)

The poet of *Gitanjali* was just aspiring for this grand silence in his sweet simple style. That was sufficient achievement for a poet who was struggling to silence his mind from time to time. Immediately after seeing Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry, Tagore expressed a very strong wish to be withdrawn like the recluse of Pondicherry. And yet time and again, even the leading critics forget Sri Aurobindo's poetry while talking on Tagore's.

(*To be continued*)

GOUTAM GHOSAL

BOULDER

IT simply is.
How it came to be
Does not change it.
What it will become
Does not change it.
The waters swirl
Around its Truth
Touching and passing.
Light and shadow
Play upon its back
In transient images.
Ages pass over
Its timeless being
With ice and fire.
In fugitive streams,
A boulder is.

LARRY SEIDLITZ

AMONG THE NOT SO GREAT—XX

Selvanadin

A tutor who tooted the flute
Tried to teach two young tooters to toot.
Said the two to the tutor,
"Is it harder to toot, or
To tutor two tooters to toot?"

The Tutor, CAROLYN WELLS

THERE were, and there are, some very interesting people amongst us. Some are very well known, are very much in the limelight (for want of a better word). Some of them are remarkable but they are lost in the hubbub of everyday life. They are lost not only because they would not (and needed not) step into the limelight, but also the rest could not (and needed not) cast a keener glance at, or spend a precious thought on them. They were all seen as part of the general movement and noise, so in a way, lost to our memories.

I would just take them at random, as they occur to my mind. Not much can be said about them. But what little I can recollect is, I think, remarkable and interesting, even precious or at the least an enjoyable trait that can break a smile on us when in an idle moment we spare that thought on them.

Selvanadin—He was never an "Ashramite"—did not probably consciously aspire to be one. I think he was caught in the "Mother's mood". He was a pakka Pondicherrian. Served in the erstwhile French Military (Inde Française). We first saw him at close quarters in our Playground. It was long, long ago when our J.S.A.S.A. was in its infancy. I do not think we had that title yet. It was simply the Physical Education part of our School. We had no band of our own. But we did celebrate the School's Anniversary on the 2nd of December. In 1945 there were a few items, like Sukol drill or Wand drill, etc. The movements went along with Biren-da's or Pranab-da's counts or whistle! There was even at intervals a crank-up type gramophone pouring out some western music (78 RPM records). After a year or two we got some sophistication. We called in the Police Brass Band to play for us. Selvanadin was a frequent visitor to Monsieur Benjamin's house. (Now Children's Dispensary—M. Benjamin was an interesting character, an Ashramite. He taught French in our school, repaired umbrellas and mattresses, was in-charge of the drinking water filter and the six or seven bicyles that our Ashram possessed and, lastly, he was for a short while the "President" of the newly formed J.S.A.S.A. He was one of our best football referees. He bore the brunt of many pranks we played both in the School and Playground.) On one such occasion Pranab-da too happened to go there, and the topic turned to the 2nd of December Demonstration. Selvanadin suggested that we should approach Capt. Bouhard (the Military Chief here, also a friend of our institution) to allow us to invite the police band to play for our demonstration.

Capt. Bouhard agreed. Selvanadin was glad. He said, "On joue pour quatre groupes ensemble." (We will play music for four groups together.) It was arranged so. Three or four groups did simultaneously four drills accompanied by the same music (unthinkable now).

Selvanadin was the bandmaster of the Pondicherry Police and Military. He was of robust build, short and more than slightly bow-legged. Somewhat dark of complexion. He was well muscled, specially the legs. He had a pleasant face, quite neat handsome features. The eyes were bright and he had a very simple and innocent smile. His laughter was ready but it came out with a phlegmy gurgle, a result of smoking innumerable beedis and I dare say a habit of having a glass of some cheap wine (how much? how often? — enough for us to note, smile and let go and not enough to frown upon). He must have learned the music as a cadet in the military in Pondicherry and come up the ranks. He could play quite a few instruments but trumpet was the instrument of his choice. He was its master. He came along with his party for two or three years. Then it was, I feel, that THE CONTACT was made. He retired from service and immediately joined the Ashram's newly born brass band.

In the late forties the J.S.A.S.A. joined the "Flambeau" on the evening of the 13th of July i.e. the eve of 14th July that marks the French National Day. Most of the sporting clubs of Pondicherry joined this Flambeau which was a long march through the main streets of Pondicherry. On one occasion they marched under the Old Balcony and the Mother along with M. Baron, the then French Governor of Pondicherry, witnessed the March Past from the Balcony. The Mother took the "salute" presented by our contingent. This was incidentally the first time our mode of the salute was presented—the same that we do now. Actually Pranab-da had suggested that we present the usual salute practised by most militaries (bringing up the palm to the forehead). But M. Bouhard explained that it was not correct to salute that way when you don't wear a cap. So this (our present) way of doing it was proposed. We participated maybe for 2 or 3 years. [Once our newly formed women's group took part. I speak of this march past, because the first time we took part, there was great excitement. The ranks were formed in the Ashram for the Mother to see and a rudimentary (1st) band—if one can call it so—was in the lead. There were just three pieces—one bass drum and two kettledrums! Biren-da at the bass, Hriday-da and Debou at the kettledrums. The marchers must have been quite deafened and bored to death with just those three beating up the same 'rote' of a music through an hour or so of their march. Anyway that was our first band.]

We got a few musical instruments. They were housed in a building that was actually one of our offices. The house was situated on Rue De Lally Tollendal (in front of the house Promesse and his sisters live in now). In the afternoon our young musicians would take their instruments and walk to the Tennis Ground, and down to the beach they would go to blare out with lung power or beat the drums. (There was quite a beach then, until men disturbed Nature's rhythm. They are still trying to find out if two "wrongs" can make one "right".) Many joined the band. Along with the instruments came a Bengali band-master, to teach. I do not know what the conditions of the contract were but luckily

for us Selvanadin's arrival overlapped his tenure. I cannot remember the Bengali gentleman's name. We quizzed him on one or two occasions and egged him on to speak a lot of hot air. He thought he had us enthralled. He even gave us to know that Selvanadin was ok, so-so, but not good enough to take charge. When we asked Selvanadin to comment on this Bengali bandmaster he smiled and said "Sais pas—peut être bon joueur." (Don't know— may be a good musician.) Selvanadin took over after the other left—and it was the best thing that could happen to the J.S.A.S.A. band. Selvanadin took to us even as we did to him. The beach was our practice place, for we could not blast the public's ears in town. Then we got the Sportsground in 1951. The band shifted there and remains there in the band quarters. Selvanadin too moved in. He was for a time given a room in the white building there (the band quarters, as they are now, were built a few years later).

Selvanadin was a beautiful man. He, though military trained, at once fell into step with our (peculiar to the Ashram) way of life. A mixture of tolerance and strictness, elder- brotherliness in his approach to teaching, and last but not least a devotion to the Mother (mixed may be with a sort of "military-obeisance" which last he paid to Pranabda too). He took on any newcomer—no matter whether musically dead or innocent. If the student was sent to him he tried, with never a hint of "you would be better off trying some other art" or "do not waste your breath and my time" attitudes. He was a simple man. I joined the band sometime before 1959 without any music in me worth the mentioning. He started me off with the bugle. The effort was to blow out five notes from low to high. He explained that the higher the note you want out of the instrument, the harder you press it against your lips. One-two-three were easy enough. The fourth was a bit more reluctant. My lips were a bit tired and also slightly swollen. The air escaped from the sides of the mouthpiece. The fifth note was not yet attempted. I shifted the bugle a bit to the side (off the swollen part) held the bugle at a slant to the side (not straight ahead as any bugler would tell you is the right way to do it.) Mousieur (as we addressed Selvanadin) left my side and went into his room. I did not wonder 'why'. He came out with a mirror in his hand, held it in front of me and said, "Regarde, comment joue" (see, how play). That was his brand of French. For him it was a musical misdemeanor, for me it was an exigency. Anyway I had to shift it back to the swollen part—and try. Two or three days later as I tried for the fifth note, he stood behind me, I facing the wall, the bugle between me and the wall. He got me to place the mouth of the bugle against the wall and pressed my head forward from behind. The instrument was thus wedged firmly, as also I was between the wall and his helping hand. I blew for all I was worth—out squeaked the fifth note. I could not even break into a smile. Perhaps he was smiling all the time behind me. The way was easy after that. He soon promoted me to an "alto"—something like a horn.

We in the band were treated specially. We got an egg each, every day (may be to augment our lung power). I do not think the (present) general egg distribution was yet in vogue. Most of us band players were not very regular once we got over the preliminaries. There were some (experts) who came one day in the week and took home the seven eggs

"due" to them. I once told Selvanadin, "Monsieur, ne donnez pas l'oeuf—pas de pratique, pas d'oeuf." (Monsieur, do not give the egg—no practice, no egg.) He smiled, shook his head, and said "Non, non, pas comme ça!" (No, that is not the correct way.) I learned my lesson.

One day as I was entering the Sportsground by the back door at about 2 p.m. I noticed the cherry tree in Annexe shaking heavily. Someone was up in the tree. I quietly got off my bicycle and entered the ground to catch the thief. To my surprise I saw Monsieur plucking and eating the cherries. He saw me and gave a happy, half-guilty smile. I returned the smile and left. He used to feel hot at noon and the room on the first floor of the band quarters was an oven (made of hollow blocks, it retained the heat long after sundown). Monsieur found a very cool place for his daily siesta. The passage in the ladies bathroom of the swimming pool, was like AC—the south breeze was funnelled in and cooled by the usually wet floor. He asked me if he could have an hour's nap there. I said "yes" and followed suit when I wanted to indulge in forty winks.

Once when I was still on the bugle, Monsieur was not satisfied with the power of the sound I was blowing out. He said, "Comment joue? Avant quand je joue, le bugle devient droit!" (How you play? Before when I play, the bugle becomes straight! i.e the looped construction of the instrument would straighten out!) Then one day he showed me a unique skill he had developed—by which he had won some wagers—usually a bottle of Champagne. The skill was, he could blow a continuous note, without breaking, even for a second to draw in a fresh breath. It sounded quite weird to hear a long hiss or a sharp intake of air and at the same time the continuous "pooon" of the bugle!

Now for an appreciation of Monsieur's French. He had I suppose picked it up in his "sipahi" days. It was a French without grammar (I wish it was more appreciated) with a Tamil intonation and pronunciation. He often missed out some word. It was interesting and one had to get used to it to understand. We Indians could do it. It was beyond French pundits. When and if Selvanadin had to speak to the Mother, or She to him, Pranab-da had to act as interpreter. He translated Selvanadin's French into English for the Mother and translated into French Mother's reply in English for the bandmaster. Pranab-da knew English and bandmaster's French, and enough of the pukka French spoken by the Mother. Selvanadin knew no English. This trialogue worked well, must have, for we watched from afar all three in smiles!

Monsieur was not only a music teacher for us. He was a great friend too. He played, even in post-middle-age, football with us. He was, understandably, slow, but tough and hard as nails. He kicked the ball with his toes, toes turned back upward i.e. the ball of the foot made contact with the ball. No dribbling or run with the ball. He just ran as fast as he could towards the ball and kicked it as hard as he could in the general direction of a team mate. In his younger days, when in service, he was often inducted into the military team just to contain our Sunil-da who was a strong and good player, nicknamed "Le Tigre" by some of the locals (two musicians clashed—one of brass, the other of silver).

Selvanadin was close neighbour of mine in the Sportsground (adjacent rooms above the band quarters). He was there the whole day—somewhere—down in the band quar-

ters or in the field, ever ready for any student who could or would come to learn or practice music. Most often none came—but he was there. He was a nice person to talk to, seemed to be well contented with life. A good wife, no children—one adopted son whom he managed to send to France (we had a send-off lunch which his wife cooked in my room). He worked on till he took ill and was admitted to a nursing home. I do not think it was a long illness. I visited him a couple of times there. Then we received news he had left us, crossed that threshold, to the sound of the final Bugle call—the Retreat.

PRABHAKAR (BATTI)

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

(*Continued from the issue of November 2003*)

III

THE Chittagong Armoury Raid shook the foundations of the British Empire in India. Its echoes vibrated and reverberated across the length and breadth of the country, inspiring countless young men and women. Why was it subsequently erased from national memory and history? In this section, I shall rely on my recent trip to Chittagong , the visits to the various sites and monuments such as the Pahartali European Club and my conversation with Binode Bihari Choudhury, aged 93, the only surviving member of Surjya Sen's Group at Chittagong.

From the Netaji Subash Chandra Bose International Airport Kolkata to the Shahi Amanat Antarjatik Biman Bandar of Chittagong, it takes less than one hour. As the Bangladesh Biman flight took off on 18 January 2003 invoking the name of Allah, I recalled my meeting with Professor Ghulam Sarwar Chowdhury, chairman of the English Department, Chittagong University. "Will you come for an American Studies Seminar?" he had asked me at Hyderabad. "I will," I had said conditionally, "provided you can let me explore the Surjya Sen trail at Chittagong!" Sarwar had kept his promise, I recalled as he drove me from the airport to the elite *Chittagong Club* for lunch.

Sarwar's colleague at the university, Nuri, met me at the conference held at the auditorium of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce. We had the US ambassador Mary Anne Peters as the chief guest, who certified in the local newspapers the next day that Bangladesh was a moderate Muslim State and ought to receive American support.

With Nuri and Sarwar, I went to the J.M. Sen Center. There is a concentration of Hindu population here. We witnessed at this center the permanent homage to the martyrs. Helpful neighbours announced that the legendary Binode Bihari Choudhury, aged 93, lived close by at 120 Momin Road.

Binode Bihari's home resembles an average middle class household in Kolkata. His bedroom serves as the drawingroom where he meets visitors. The wooden shelves against the wall house memoirs, books of history and other memorabilia. High up on the wall, there are the portraits of Preetilata and Surjya Sen, and some of his own photos of younger days. A framed photograph shows him receiving the award from Sheikh Mujeebur Rahman.

At 93, Binode babu stoops a little. However, his voice exudes strength; he has a sharp memory and recalls facts quickly as he fixes his gaze upon you and recalls his younger days. We sit down. I ask Nuri to take notes:

"What was the influence of Sri Aurobindo on your movements?" I ask him.

"Aurobindo's influence on our movement was immense," he declares. "Aurobindo was Masterda's leader! He was a great inspiration to the revolutionaries."

"Tell me something about the Muslim members of your movement," I ask him.

"Yes, indeed, we had Muslims among us," Choudhury replies in Bangla. "We had Mir Ahmed for instance. He was a trusted comrade. He failed though on his mission of assassination. We had others such as Abdul Sattar and Kamal Ahmed. We made no discrimination on the basis of religion. But Hindus were more in number and Muslims were less educated then. Masterda was very keen all the way to have Muslims perform action. You know, it's easier to die together but hard to die alone. Mir Ahmed lost his nerve in one mission when he was sent alone," says Binode babu.

"Did you take part in action?" I ask him. "Yes." He shows his neck where a bullet had pierced it. He was sent to a jail in far away Rajputana and shifted to a camp in the desert. Kalpana Datta was kept in the Hizli Detention Camp. Later, she became a communist. This was the time when many arrested revolutionaries came in contact with communists in jail, he explained. In April 1971, at the time of the liberation of East Bengal, Choudhury left for India through the Mizo hills and returned to Bangladesh on 3 January 1972.

I ask him about the legacy of Surjya Sen in Bangladesh. He shows a moment's hesitation in the presence of Sarwar and Nuri. "Unfortunately in many quarters, Surjya Sen is described as a dacoit, a Hindu leader!" he regretted. "I met Mujeeb four or five times. In 1972 the idols of goddess Durga were destroyed in many places. Accompanied by Fani Majumdar, a minister in Mujeeb's cabinet, I went to Mujeeb and warned him that he would not remain in power if the pro-Pakistani elements were not checked. There was an upsurge of such elements that were not reconciled to the emergence of Bangladesh as a secular nation."

As we talk, Mrs. Chowdhury, a petite old lady, emerges from inside with cups of tea in hand. I touch her feet. "Where is Bangladesh heading today?" I ask Binode Babu as he shows signs of fatigue. "The BNP and the four party alliance are squeezing out the Hindus from this country. The majority Hindus in the village are a harassed lot especially after Sheikh Haseena's Awami League lost the recent election," he replies. It is time for us to leave. We bow down before him, his parting request to Sarwar is: "I have given away the award money of one lakh received from Haseena to Chittagong University for an endowment lecture in the name of Surjya Sen. Will you kindly follow this up!" he pleads. Sarwar promises to do what he can, and we depart.

The European Club opposite the present Pahartali Railway School is in a state of dilapidation. In front, there is an old marble plaque which enshrines Preetilata's heroic act. The letters are faded and the area looks forsaken.

By now it's late afternoon. We have a quick lunch of rice and fish curry at Burma Raju, a wellknown restaurant and a landmark in the city. It takes a while to locate in the Dampara Police Line the old armoury looted by the revolutionaries. The policemen appear unco-operative until Sarwar tells them that his late father was a subinspector in the same area some years ago!

In the evening, my local host Professor Mohit Alam, currently a Professor at Premier University, takes me to a marriage dinner at the Chittagong Club. Here I meet Robert

Kadir who was a communist and a student leader in Rangoon University. In 1950, he met comrade P.C. Joshi, the Chairman of the Communist Party of India at Beijing. Joshi had married Kalpana Dutta in the forties.

The next day, I am invited to the English Department of Chittagong University for a lecture. After the talk I enquire about Preetilata. "I shall show you Preetilata's basha (home)," says Kachi, a student whose father is a former communist. This time I am armed with a tape recorder. Binode Choudhury, we are told, is at the nearby temple. He gives tuition for his livelihood. At the Sadharan Bramho Samaj Temple, he pushes away the recorder, obviously fearful of the safety for his community. I understand the reasons for fear. At Kachi's place, I see graphic accounts and photographs of atrocities committed against the minorities, men killed, women violated and all because of their support of the Awami League.

IV

Mohit Alam, a secular Muslim, suggests I buy J.N. Dixit's excellent memoir *Liberation and Beyond* brought out by University Press, Dhaka after the Indian imprint appeared. As I read the chilling account I begin to understand the reasons for neglect of Surjya Sen's legacy in Bangladesh.

The Muslim League takes birth in Dhaka in 1906 and flourishes under the leadership of Fazlul Huq, Hassan Saheed Suhrawardy, Mulla Jan Mohammed and Maulana Bhashani. Mujeeb continues to support the Muslim League and Pakistan till his denial of the premiership on 2 March 1971. Between 1945 and 1947, he is an active participant in the Muslim League agitation in Calcutta.

The imposition of Urdu beginning from 1956 ended with the War of 1971. This caused his disillusionment with Pakistan as a failed state.

Many factors were responsible for the end of Bangladesh as a secular republic: Mrs. Indira Gandhi was preoccupied with increasing domestic turmoil at home. Between 1972 to 1975, food shortages, floods, cyclones increased Mujeeb's problems. By 1974 he had formed a one party State and a presidential form of government. The assassination of Mujeeb and all the top leaders of the Bangladesh Liberation struggle between August and November 1975 led to the primacy of the country's armed forces.

Surjya Sen's legacy of freedom struggle rested on a composite culture and inter-religious harmony. On the other hand, Bangladesh today continues to manifest an ethno-religious identity crisis, seriously questioning the earlier legacy of Surjya Sen. The erasure of the Chittagong armoury raid from the public consciousness in Bangladesh has been a logical corollary. Back in India, there is little appreciation of the movement. Such narratives lie trapped on the other side of the political divide. Thus public memory continues to be inhospitable to the Chittagong Armoury Raid.

Today, this memory lies neglected and forsaken, waiting for better days. Its belief in a composite culture, religious harmony, individual freedom and social equality are polar opposites to the various forms of fundamentalism sweeping the subcontinent. There

is hope however that all is not lost. Memories of the Chittagong chapter of the national freedom struggle can yet bring together our estranged neighbours into realising their common destiny.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

(*Concluded*)

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THE INDIAN APPROACH TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

(*Continued from the issue of November 2003*)

OUR modern society is both intellectually and technologically better equipped to achieve this task with a relatively less difficulty than the ancients. Not only do modern communication and transportation technology make the task easier but also some new ideas and concepts in emerging development-thought open up fresh possibilities for a more creative and dynamic integration of communal life with national life and national life with international life. For example, some of the new developments in thought like globalism, holism and ecology with their emphasis on the whole and the interdependence of human life, recognition of the need for solving "local problems with a global approach", growing influence of multi-national mega-corporations and the emergence of a multitude of transnational institutions, all these new developments tend to make the economic and political independence of nations a little hazy and the idea of internationalism is beginning to be felt as a living force in the collective life of the race.

Let us, for example, take the autonomous village community in ancient India. On one hand it created a solid base of grass-root level communal liberty and democracy which helped in preserving our rich and diverse cultural heritage; on the other hand it stood in the way of political unity of the nation by its self-sufficient, insular and closed communal life which refused to interact with the larger life of the nation. Even some of the modern ideas on rural development tend to favour this idea of an insular and self-sufficient village community. But such an approach to village development not only brings back the problems of unity of the ancient world but also cuts off the village community from the influx of the progressive development of the outside world, especially in the urban world of metropolitan cities. The problem here is how to open the village communities to the advances of the urban life especially in the field of thought, information, technology and professional skill but at the same time preserving the village community and its simple, cohesive, self-governing, innocent and ecologically attuned culture from getting contaminated by the undesirable features of the urban culture. This is an undoubtedly difficult problem. But there is no problem which cannot be solved if sufficient creative thought and attention is given to it.

In this task, the new concept of integrated regional development is an idea with rich potentialities for providing a creative solution. This new idea in community development rejects the concept of self-sufficient village community and envisages a new approach which aims at linking the village to the metropolitan city through a system of radially expanding smaller townships. It conceives the village not as a self-sufficient unity closed in itself but an open system interacting dynamically in symbiotic relationship with the larger system of which it is a part. Here we must distinguish between self-sufficiency and self-reliance. The concept of self-sufficiency suggests some sort of an insular economic and political independence which refuses to interact with the world around and wants to live in some sort of a self-absorbed isolation. But we must remember here that inter-

dependence is one of the fundamental laws of life and absolute self-sufficiency is not a viable proposition from a long-term point of view in a world governed by the laws of interdependence. In an interdependent world the ability to interact creatively with the outer environment is a must for survival and progress. On the other hand, self-reliance can co-exist with interdependence. Self-reliance means to have the knowledge, capacity and skill to manage our own life and the life around; it also means realising our individual uniqueness and the genius of our deeper self.

A development strategy based on self-reliance will give a much greater importance to the development of the "human capital" and unique cultural identity of the people than economic and material resources. A group of people who has the required human capital with sufficient intellectual, moral, cultural, vital and technical resources to govern itself and progress continually on all levels—economic, social and cultural—in an open, creative and harmonious interaction with the environment can be called a self-reliant community. When we say "govern itself" we mean the ability to determine the goal and the path of development according to its unique ecological, economic, social and cultural environment and its natural temperament and genius. When we say "creative and harmonious interaction with the environment" we mean the ability to deal masterfully with the environment with a firm foothold in the roots of our own soil, suiting the external environmental influence to the unique needs and temperament of our own being and making it a fuel for our own progress, at the same time shaping the external environment by putting forth a part of our own creative energy and genius and our special contribution to the environment for the progress of the larger whole of which we are a part. This has to be one of the basic principles of collective progress from the village to the nation.

The second task of the central government will be to evolve a long-term national vision which can instil in the national consciousness a sense of direction, mission and purpose. This national vision should be based on a deep understanding of the history of our culture and civilisation, the inherent genius of the mind and soul of our nation and her evolutionary destiny; it should provide to the nation a moral and spiritual cause which can at once transcend and reconcile the economic, social, political, religious and ethnic interests of the various groups within the nation. But this national vision should not be narrowly nationalistic and chauvinistic, concentrated exclusively on national self-realisation. There has to be a much greater emphasis than that given by the ancients on the special contribution of India to the progress and solidarity of the international community and humanity as a whole. Such a unifying national vision requires a long process of dialogue, discussion and debate to evolve and establish itself in the consciousness of the nation. In a democratic and "secular" society which permits freedom of thought and expression and with a bewildering diversity, this process of evolving a national consensus will be a long, slow and difficult process. But the time taken and the difficulties on the way do not matter. For once such a unifying vision becomes a conscious and integral part of our national mind, then it will create an enduring spiritual and cultural unity on the foundations of which any amount of free local diversity can be permitted to flourish.

Fortunately for us in India, we already have such a regenerating and unifying vision in the ancient ideal of Sanatana Dharma, in the all-embracing spiritual vision of our ancient Vedic sages, expanded and reinterpreted to suit the present conditions by our modern Rishis like Sri Aurobindo and Vivekananda. We have to explore further how to translate this spiritual vision into the economic, social and political life.

The third task of the central government is to foster a political and administrative culture which empowers people down the line to the lowest level of the social organisation. When we examine political history of the race including that of the modern age, the administrative culture of the race mostly tends towards the empowerment of the official and the bureaucrat and not the people. Administration, up to now, is mostly an instrument of control and not of freedom. This is so even with the most benevolent and democratic governments. But in the political culture of the future, administration should be an instrument of freedom which releases and empowers the people. This means, greater encouragement to people's initiative and enterprise rather than on government control or patronage and to self-discipline based on some shared and internalised values and common purposes than on external rules and regulations. We have to foster an environment which encourages and promotes communal self-government but not on the ancient formula of closed self-sufficiency but on the new principle of self-reliance we have discussed earlier. There should be numerous, distinct and autonomous centres of power and culture mutually interacting and enriching each other and expressing the national genius in a variety of creative forms.

But the most important lesson we have learnt from the achievements and inadequacies of India's Golden Age is in the task of manifesting our unique national genius in every department of our corporate life. We have discussed in some detail this subject in a few of our earlier articles. We may recollect the salient points of our earlier discussions on the subject.

It has been said over and over again that India is a land of spirituality and spirituality is our national genius. But the word is one of the most misunderstood words in the English language. The most common misconception is to equate spirituality with some form of religious and moral life. But the distinction between the true spiritual life and moral-religious life is not clearly understood. In spirituality there is a sincere quest to discover the highest truth of our being or knowledge of Reality beyond mind and a sincere aspiration to rise beyond the ego-centric individuality of the human consciousness to the higher universal consciousness of this greater Reality beyond mind. This spiritual quest or aspiration does not remain, as in religion, as a mere formal piety but is pursued systematically in the form of scientific inner psychological discipline to enter into and live in the greater consciousness of this higher Self or Reality. In other words, true spiritual life leads to a radical change or revolution in our consciousness. On the other hand, in the moral and religious life there is no such higher aspiration or inner change of consciousness but only a formal external regulation of conduct which brings no inner transformation. It is this higher spirituality as a scientific, systematic and psychological discipline for the transformation of consciousness and the expression of the spiritual consciousness in the

mind and life of the people which is the essential genius of the Indian civilisation and culture. Only a part of this spiritual genius of India found expression in the mind of our ancient civilisation and gave birth to the most profound religio-philosophic culture that ever existed in the history of human civilisation. But in this attempt ancient Indian civilisation achieved only partial success. Ancient India achieved great heights of creative excellence in expressing her innate spirituality in and through the mind of the nation, that is, through religion, philosophy and literature. But she was not able to attain the same amount of success in expressing her spirituality in life, that is in economy, society and polity. Here even the lesser attempt to govern politics through the ethical idea of Dharma broke down after the epical age. Here comes the role of future India. She has to discover the cause of the failure, apply the right remedy and resume and complete her great interrupted endeavour.

Let us examine a little more deeply and closely the causes of the failure of the ancient Indian attempt to spiritualise life. First of all it is relatively easier to open the thinking mind and the higher emotional, ethical and aesthetic being to the spiritual influence than the vital being in man which is the source of his economic, social and political life. This vital ego in man is not merely unreceptive but mostly hostile to the spiritual light or, for that matter, to any higher moral and spiritual ideals beyond its interests and desires. So in the cultural life, the spiritual or intuitive mind of the yogi, the poet and the artist expressed itself directly through thinking and aesthetic faculties giving birth to a rich corpus of spiritual philosophies, spiritual art and spiritual poetry.

But in the economic, social and political life, this influence of the spiritual consciousness is not direct as in the cultural life but indirect, filtering through the mind of the leaders, administrators and decision-makers of society with all the inevitable dilution and distortion involved in the process. We must remember here that most of the cultural leaders and creators in India are yogis or spiritual seekers who have developed an intuitive and seeing mind. In the Indian tradition, philosophy was not mere mental speculation but the intellectual expression of the discoveries of spiritual intuition and vision, *darshana*. Indian art aimed at the expression of the deeper and inner truth and beauty of life and nature with the outer form only as a symbol of this inner beauty. Indian artistic tradition insists that artists should see the deeper and inner truth of the things of life and nature through "spiritual contemplation" before they give an outer form to it with their chisels or brushes. It is the same with literature. Indian literary tradition insists that the literary creator Kavi should create from the intuitive mind. In his *Kavyadarshana*, Dandi says that the Kavi should have inborn intuitive intelligence, *pratibha*, and if he did not have it he can develop it through right effort. But this spiritualising urge and impulse which was so successful in giving an intuitive spiritual turn to the cultural life of the nation—if not fully at least partially—is not able to attain the same amount of success in spiritualising its social and political life.

The original social ideals of the Indian civilisation—the *purusharthas,* the *chaturvarnya,* and the *ashramas*—are undoubtedly the creation of a vast intuitive mind which saw with a deep insight and vision some of the fundamental truths and laws of

man's collective life. But the later developments in Indian social and political thought lost the inspired and intuitive vision of the original founders of Indian civilisation. These later writings on the subject were very pragmatic, turning minutely with an acute sense of practicality within the boundaries set by traditional ideals, but lacking in originality, vision, courage and flexibility to venture into any daring and radical social innovations.

One of the reasons for this lack of original creative impetus in the Indian social thought may be due to the fact that ancient Indian civilisation did not give as much freedom of thought and practice to its social life as it gave to its cultural life. While the cultural life of ancient India, in religion, philosophy, art and literature, breathed in an open air of vast freedom, pulsating with creative thought, experiments and innovations of every kind, its social life was cramped with rigid rules and regulations and superstitions. When we look at the history of ancient Indian civilisation in its various epochs, we find Indian society as a whole remained, as Sri Aurobindo aptly describes, in a state of more or less "half-theocratic half-aristocratic feudalism". The great spiritual and democratic ideals of Vedanta never took concrete social forms which can express all their significance and potentiality in the collective life of the civilisation. These Vedantic ideals are essentially democratic but in a deeper spiritual sense. The spiritual fraternity of the human race in the oneness of the divine Self, spiritual equality of all men in the equal presence of the divine Self in all and the liberty of self-development for each soul to follow the path of its unique self-law, swadharma, and reach its spiritual destiny: these are the democratic ideals of Vedanta. These ideals, proclaimed with a great creative force in the cultural life of the nation, were never fully translated into social life with an equal creative vigour. Perhaps the evolutionary condition of the collective life of the race was not ready, not prepared for those great spiritual truths of Vedanta. But after the epical age, the leaders of thought and action made no serious attempt to change, enlarge and enlighten the social environment so as to make it fit to receive and express the spiritual ideals. Somehow sufficient creative force was not applied as to the social and political life to mould it according to the highest laws of the spirit.

(*To be continued*)

M. S. SRINIVASAN

THE PROBLEM OF *JANANI JANMABHUMISHCHA* IN *ANANDA MATH*

In *Ananda Math,* just before the remarkable passage in Chapter 10 about "Mother as she was, Mother as she has become and Mother as she will be", the protagonist Mohendra is astonished with the song "Bande Mataram" and asks the sanyasi Bhavananda "What Mother?...That is the country, it is not the Mother." Bhavananda replies that the only mother the Santans know is the motherland because, he quotes in Sanskrit, *janani janmabhumishcha svargadapi gariyasi*—mother and motherland are greater by far than even heaven. Here is the passage translated by Sri Aurobindo in chapter 10:

'Bhavananda replied, "We recognize no other Mother. Mother and Motherland is more than heaven itself." '

I was intrigued by the half-shloka because I could not find it in any Sanskrit work readily to hand. And so began my search. My first port of call was the *Bharatiya Sanskriti Kosh* compiled painstakingly by Shri Liladhar Sharma "Parvatiya" of Lucknow. Not finding it here, I wrote to him. The octogenarian freedom fighter responded that he, too, had no idea about its origins but had heard from people that Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya might be its author! What an anachronism!

Next I turned to the internet and the search engines threw up the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan website where a message by Swami Ranganathananda for the Rama Navami number of *Bhavan's Journal* was reproduced. Here the venerable Swami exhorts: 'We in India today need to be inspired by this important utterance of Sri Rama: *Janani janmabhumishcha svargadapi gariyasi*—"Mother and Motherland are far superior to heaven".'

Eagerly I e-mailed the journal asking for chapter and verse from the Ramayana because I was unable to locate it in my edition of the epic. The reply I received was very interesting. They said that troubling the venerable Swami was out of the question and they were short-handed for scholars to hunt through the epic, but they would try. Nothing came of their efforts.

So I turned to a disciple of the Ramakrishna Mission, requesting that the Swamiji's secretary be approached. The feedback was even curiouser. They virtually disowned what the journal had published, because the material had never been cross-checked with them before publication!

Wondering what to do, I asked two scientists—a Tamil mathematician, Professor Bhanu Murthy and a Malayalee nuclear physicist Dr. A. Harindranath—who were deeply immersed in Indian scriptures. Both of them were very familiar with the entire shloka and quoted it trippingly off the tongue. Apparently, in South India this is well known to Sanskrit school-teachers, all of whom say it is from the Ramayana and spoken by Rama in response to Vibhishana's/Lakshmana's request that he should rule golden Lanka instead of returning to Ayodhya. I scoured the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, the *Yoga Vashishtha Ramayana* and enquired of the translator of the online *Ananda Ramayana*, all with no success.

Recalling that on an earlier occasion, having drawn a blank regarding the *Pancha*

Kanya shloka, I had requested the Indology Listserver on the internet for help (this is a website where Indologists post queries for eliciting information from the community of Indological scholars), I turned to it. I received a response from Professor Jan E.M. Houben of Holland who wrote, "I have the strong impression that *jananii janmabhuumishcha svargaadapi gariiyasii* was a quotation, but it seemed to me part of the novel...Note that also the idea of Indian nationalism which was instrumental for the liberation of India was newly emerging in Bankimchandra's time. Both the idea and the expression are new, that's why you don't find an earlier source. For Shankara at least *jananii* was not so sacred: *punarapi jananam, punarapi jananiijathare shayanam, iha samsaare bahudustaare kripayaa'paare paahi muraare*! An article on the emergence of Indian nationalism and Bankimchandra's role in it appeared in a book I edited (*Ideology and Status of Sanskrit*, Leiden: Brill, 1996), it was by V.A. van Bijlert. *Jananii janmabhuumishcha svargaadapi gariiyasii*, is of course half (2×8 syllables) of a shloka; even then the formulation and the idea expressed seem to be new and suiting to the specific context of Bankimchandra's." Did Bankim, then, compose this profoundly inspiring shloka as he did *Bande Mataram*?

But, if this were so, how was it so well known in the deep South and invariably attributed to Rama? Also, if Bankim had not composed it but had used something that was current in the public memory, why did it not occur anywhere in the Gaudiya recension of the Valmiki Ramayana? I checked with the Oriental Institute of Baroda, publishers of the Critical Edition of the epic. The officiating Director wrote to me, "Regarding your query…this shloka is nowhere traceable. We have seen our published three volumes of the Pada-Index of the Critical Edition of the Valmiki Ramayana in which the Index of the verses of the text, star passages and the appendices is given but this shloka is not traceable in them."

Hearing that the famous Vamadeva (David Frawley) was in India, I tried to get in touch with him through N.S. Rajaram who told me that the epics were not Frawley's forte. He added that he had memories of hearing this shloka in a Hanuman Natakam performance. I checked Camille Bulcke's monumental *Ramkatha: Utapatti aur Vikas* for this, and found no reference to the shloka in the entries on Hanuman Natakam or, for that matter, elsewhere.

In the meantime I met Professor Julius Lipner of Cambridge University, who was completing a new translation of *Ananda Math* but had not seen Sri Aurobindo's and Barindra Ghosh's translation of the novel in the early decades of the 20th century. I provided him with a copy and arranged for his visit to Lalgola in Murshidabad district to see the image of Durga-Kali that had inspired Bankim's vision of the mother-as-she-has-become. I put the problem to him, but he had not a clue. On his return to England he took the trouble of getting in touch with several scholars including Prof. J.L. Brockington of Edinburgh University who has studied the epic verse-by-verse (cf. my review of his *Epic Threads*). Professor Lipner writes, "They all say that this verse is not in any edition of the *Ramayana* known to them! Folklore." But, he added, had I noticed that the half-shloka was engraved on one of the entrances to the Dakshineshwar Kali temple? Now, that was something none of us, who visit the temple so often, have noticed. Rani Rasmoni, the

fiercely independent zamindar, had completed this temple in 1855, several years before *Ananda Math* was written. Shri Kushal Chowdhury, trustee of the temple, informed me that Bankimchandra was known to have visited the Rani and would certainly have come to see this marvellous *navaratna* temple dedicated to Mother Kali. The question he could not answer is: was it the Rani who had this half-shloka engraved? Whose idea was it and from where were the words taken?

I now turned to Professor Sushil Mittal, editor of the *International Journal of Hindu Studies* and co-author of the encyclopaedic *Hindu World* project. He circulated my query to some prominent scholars. Here is the reply he received from Robert Goldman, editor of the English translation of the critical text of the Ramayana: "As I have seen the verse, it is apparent that it is from a version of the Ramayana story. Rama, it appears, utters the verse to Lakshmana at some point, probably in the *Yuddhakanda*. The full verse runs:

Api svarnamayi lanka na me lakshmana rocate /
Janani janmabhumishcha svargadapi gariyasi //
I do not care for Lanka, Lakshmana, even though it be made of gold.
One's mother and one's native land are worth more even than heaven.

Professor Goldman added, "but I am not really sure, off the top of my head, what the exact textual source is…I would suggest checking other Sanskrit versions such as the *Ananda Ramayana*, Kshemendra's *Ramayanamanjari*, *Campuramayana,* etc." As already stated, it is not to be found in the *Ananda Ramayana*. I do not have access to the other works, but Bulcke's study does not mention the shloka occurring in any version of the epic. "Professor Jayant Bapat informed Dr. Mittal that he had located the identical shloka "in a Marathi book called *Marathi Bhashechi Sanskrit Leni* (Sanskrit Ornaments in the Marathi Language)." He adds, "The author does not specify where he got it from and says that the source is unknown."

My argument is that as neither of our epics shows evidence of any concept of a motherland, this attribution of the saying to Rama is anachronistic and apocryphal. Is it then a folk-memory of an anonymously composed masterpiece of a shloka born of patriotic fervour—something like the elusive *Pancha Kanya* shloka?

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