

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LVII

No. 11

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

Sri Aurobindo

LIFE-UNITY (Poem) ... 979

The Mother

‘THOU DOST MANIFEST THYSELF...’ ... 980

‘SIMPLICITY, SIMPLICITY!...’ ... 981

Bouquet for Amal Kiran’s Centenary

AMAL’S REMINDER ... 982

A LETTER TO THE MOTHER ... 982

A BIRTHDAY MESSAGE AND ITS ENGLISH VERSION ... 983

A BIRTHDAY CARD ... 984

BIRTHDAY BLESSINGS ... 986

PRINTED CARD ... 986

THIS ERRANT LIFE ... 987

FROM A TALK TO THE STUDENTS ... 990

AMAL KIRAN ON HIS 100TH BIRTHDAY ... 997

A LETTER FROM SRI AUROBINDO ... 998

“FREEWILL” IN SRI AUROBINDO’S VISION ... 1001

SOME DIARY NOTES ... 1007

29 MARS 1956 ... 1008

29 MARS 1956 ... 1010

1956: 29 FÉVRIER—29 MARS ... 1011

EARLIER VERSION OF MOTTOS IN *MOTHER INDIA* ... 1012

29-2-56 PENDANT LA MÉDITATION EN COMMUN... ... 1015

29 FEBRUARY 1956 ... 1017

C. C. Dutt

SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN’S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT ... 1018

Arnab B. Chowdhury

THE TOSS (Poem) ... 1021

<i>Mangesh Nadkarni</i>		
	RAMANA MAHARSHI AND SRI AUROBINDO: THE RECONCILIATION OF KAPALI SASTRY	... 1022
<i>Nolinikanto Sarkar</i>		
	BETWEEN THE ARRIVAL AND THE DEPARTURE	... 1028
<i>H. P. Shukla</i>		
	MEANING OF BIRTH AND QUEST IN SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI	... 1033
<i>Chunilal Chowdhury</i>		
	THE CALL (Poem)	... 1040
<i>Krishna Chakravarti</i>		
	SATYAKARMA—THE YOGI FROM DECCAN LAND	... 1042
<i>Maggi</i>		
	THE GREAT EVENT (Poem)	... 1045
<i>Prema Nandakumar</i>		
	THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY	... 1046
<i>Narad (Richard Eggenberger)</i>		
	GODHEAD'S SEED ONCE SOWN (Poem)	... 1054
<i>Amita Sen</i>		
	MONSIEUR AND MADAME FRANÇOIS MARTIN IN PONDICHERRY	... 1055
<i>Supriyo Bhattacharya</i>		
	TO NIROD-DA—A POEM ON YOUR BIRTHDAY	... 1059
<i>Bouquet for Amal Kiran's Centenary</i>		
<i>Ashalata Dash</i>		
	MY POETIC VENTURE UNDER A PILGRIM OF PERFECTION	... 1060
<i>Gitanjali</i>		
	EVER BELOVED AMAL	... 1069
<i>Nilima Das</i>		
	THE SYMBOL DAWN IN SAVITRI	... 1076
<i>Pradip Bhattacharya</i>		
	A CLEAR RAY AND A LAMP—AN EXCHANGE OF LIGHT	... 1084
<i>Suresh Dey</i>		
	THE GOLDEN BRIDGE TO INTEGRAL YOGA (Poem)	... 1090
<i>Mamata Dash</i>		
	TODAY (Poem)	... 1091
<i>Amal Kiran</i>		
	PRAYER FOR PERFECTION	... 1092

LIFE-UNITY

I housed within my heart the life of things,
 All hearts athrob in the world I felt as mine;
I shared the joy that in creation sings
 And drank its sorrow like a poignant wine.

I have felt the anger in another's breast,
 All passions poured through my world-self their waves;
One love I shared in a million bosoms expressed.
 I am the beast man slays, the beast he saves.

I spread life's burning wings of rapture and pain;
 Black fire and gold fire strove towards one bliss:
I rose by them towards a supernal plane
 Of power and love and deathless ecstasies.

A deep spiritual calm no touch can sway
Upholds the mystery of this Passion-play.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 135)

‘THOU DOST MANIFEST THYSELF...’

February 10, 1913

My being goes up to Thee in thanksgiving, not because Thou usest this weak and imperfect body to manifest Thyself, but because *Thou dost manifest Thyself*, and that is the Splendour of splendours, the Joy of joys, the Marvel of marvels. All who seek Thee with ardour should understand that Thou art there whenever there is need of Thee; and if they could have the supreme faith to give up seeking Thee, but rather to await Thee, at each moment putting themselves integrally at Thy service, Thou wouldst be there whenever there was need of Thee; and is there not always need of Thee with us, whatever may be the different, and often unexpected, forms of Thy manifestation?

Let Thy glory be proclaimed,
And sanctify life;
Let it transform men's hearts,
And Thy Peace reign on earth.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 16)

‘SIMPLICITY, SIMPLICITY!...’

February 12, 1913

As soon as all effort disappears from a manifestation, it becomes very simple, with the simplicity of a flower opening, manifesting its beauty and spreading its fragrance without clamour or vehement gesture. And in this simplicity lies the greatest power, the power which is least mixed and least gives rise to harmful reactions. The power of the vital should be mistrusted, it is a tempter on the path of the work, and there is always a risk of falling into its trap, for it gives you the taste of immediate results; and, in our first eagerness to do the work well, we let ourselves be carried away to make use of this power. But very soon it deflects all our action from the right course and introduces a seed of illusion and death into what we do.

Simplicity, simplicity! How sweet is the purity of Thy Presence!...

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 17)

Amal's reminder to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's reply

I hope, Mother, you have not forgotten that I was born on the 25th of November and **MUST** be re-born on the 24th.

The birth is remembered, the rebirth is in prospect

Amal
18/11/34

“The birth is remembered, the rebirth is in prospect.”

A letter to the Mother and her reply

6.11.64

Dearest Mother,

...I have just realised that we are not in October, as I was thinking, but right in November. This means November 24, the great day of your Darshan, is pretty close. It also means that November 25, the day on which the earth had the doubtful luck of having my first Darshan, is not very far away.

Amal

The Mother's reply:

On the 25th morning I am busy—but I must see you that day even if the vision is as short as a lightning!

With love

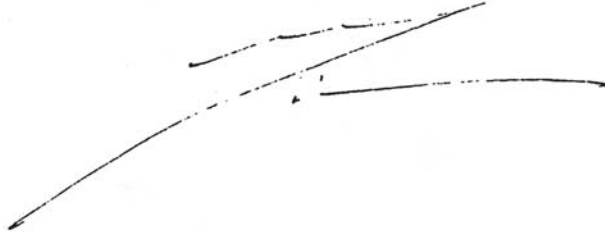
The Mother

25-11-61

à Amal
Bonne Fête!

Il faut souvent renoncer.
à comprendre pour pouvoir
s'approcher de la Vérité.

avec mes bénédictions



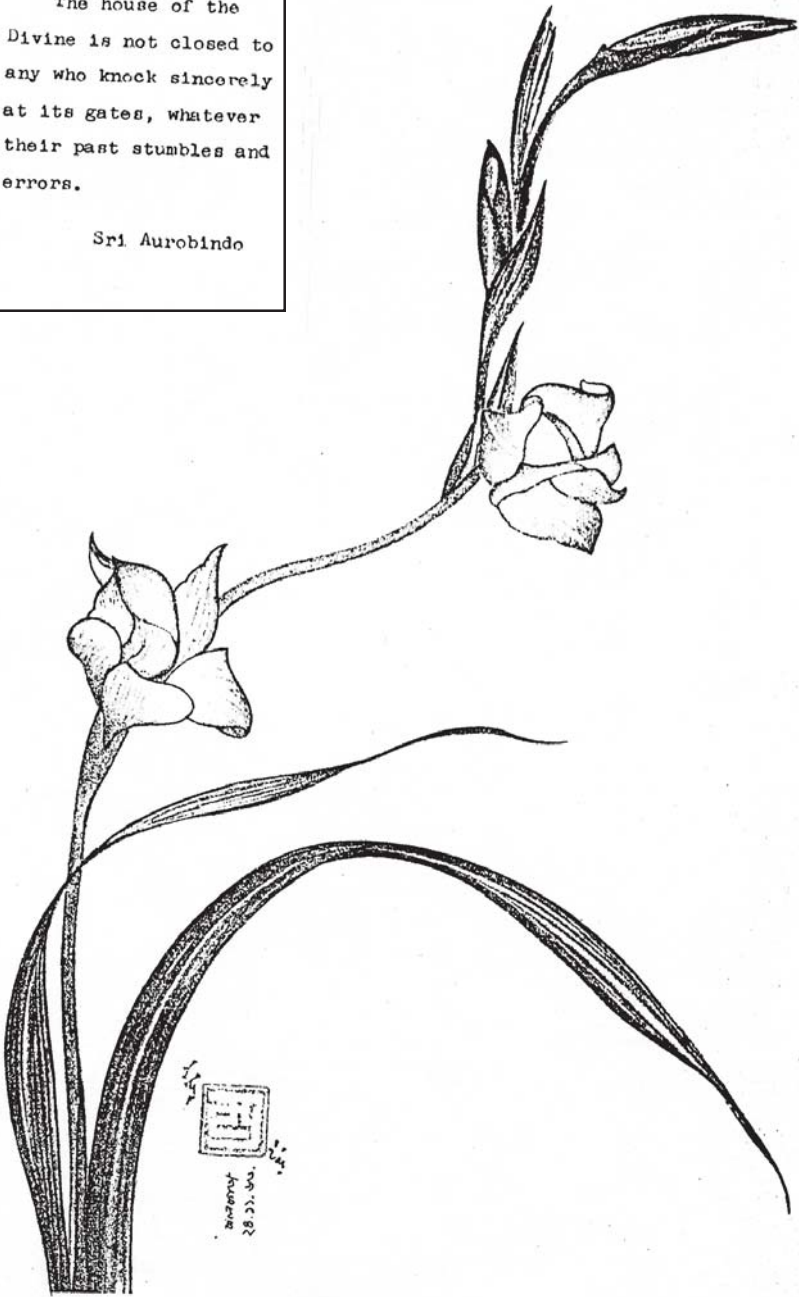
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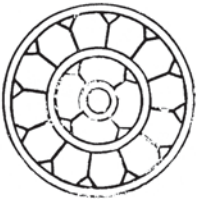
To come closer to the
Truth, you must often
accept not to understand.



The house of the
Divine is not closed to
any who knock sincerely
at its gates, whatever
their past stumbles and
errors.

Sri Aurobindo





25.11.65

Bonne Tête!

to Amal

Is it not time to knock
at the door and to
enter the House of
the Divine, this year?

With love and
blessings

Birthday Blessings

18-11-41



To Aunt
 With love and special
 blessings on the occasion of
 his birthday
 We have received the
 Rs. 50 sent by your mother.
 Will you convey to her
 my love and blessings.
 With my best wishes
 J. —————

*

Printed card with the Mother's Blessings

To Amal 25-11-54
 with blessings
 J. —————

Poets make much of death and external afflictions,
 but the only tragedies are the soul's failures and the only
 epic man's triumphant ascent towards godhead.

Arichandran

THIS ERRANT LIFE

Q: *What distinguishes in manner and quality a pure inspiration of the Illumined Mind from that which has the psychic plane for its origin?*

Sri Aurobindo's reply:

“Your question reads like a poser in an examination paper. Even if I could give a satisfactory definition Euclideanly rigid, I don't know that it would be of much use or would really help you to distinguish between the two kinds; these things have to be felt and perceived by experience. I would prefer to give examples. I suppose it would not be easy to find a more perfect example of psychic inspiration in English literature than Shelley's well-known lines,

I can give not what men call love,
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the Heavens reject not,—
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow?

—you will find there the true rhythm, expression and substance of poetry full of the psychic influence. For full examples of the poetry which comes from the Illumined Mind purely and simply and that in which the psychic and the spiritual illumination meet together, one has to go to poetry that tries to express a spiritual experience. You have yourself written things which can illustrate the difference. The lines

The longing of ecstatic tears
From infinite to infinite¹

will do very well as an instance of the pure illumination, for here what would otherwise be a description of a spiritual heart-experience, psychic therefore in its origin, is lifted up to a quite different spiritual level and expressed with the vision and language sufficiently characteristic of a spiritual-mental illumination. In another passage there is this illumination but it is captured and dominated by the inner heart and by the psychic love for the Divine incarnate.

If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow
Its mortal longings, lean down from above,

1. The last lines of the poem *Young-hearted River*.

Temper the unborn light no thought can trace,
 Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow.
 For 'tis with mouth of clay I supplicate:
 Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,
 And all Thy formless glory turn to love
 And mould Thy love into a human face.¹"

"There is... the psychic source of inspiration which can give a beautiful spiritual poetry. The psychic has two aspects—there is the soul principle itself which contains all soul possibilities and there is the psychic personality which represents whatever soul-power is developed from life to life or put forward for action in our present life-formation. The psychic being usually expresses itself through its instruments, mental, vital and physical; it tries to put as much of its own stamp on them as possible. But it can seldom put on them the full psychic stamp—unless it comes fully out from its rather secluded and overshadowed position and takes into its hands the direct government of the nature. It can then receive and express all spiritual realisations in its own way and manner. For the turn of the psychic is different from that of the overhead planes—it has less of greatness, power, wideness, more of a smaller sweetness, delicate beauty, there is an intense beauty of emotion; a fine subtlety of true perception, an intimate language. The expression 'sweetness and light' can very well be applied to the psychic as the kernel of its nature. The spiritual plane, when it takes up these things, gives them a wider utterance, a greater splendour of light, a stronger sweetness, a breath of powerful audacity, strength and space."

*

THIS ERRANT LIFE

This errant life is dear although it dies;
 And human lips are sweet though they but sing
 Of stars estranged from us; and youth's emprise
 Is wondrous yet, although an unsure thing.
 Sky-lucent Bliss untouched by earthiness!
 I fear to soar lest tender bonds decrease.
 If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow
 Its mortal longings, lean down from above,
 Temper the unborn light no thought can trace,
 Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow.
 For 'tis with mouth of clay I supplicate:
 Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,

1. From the poem quoted next.

And all Thy formless glory turn to love
And mould Thy love into a human face.

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

“A very beautiful poem, one of the very best you have written. The last six lines, one may say even the last eight, are absolutely perfect. If you could always write like that, you would take your place among English poets and no low place either. I consider they can rank—these eight lines—with the very best in English poetry.”

To Dilip Kumar Roy: “Amal’s lines are not easily translatable, least of all into Bengali. There is in them a union or rather fusion of high severity of speech with exaltation and both with a pervading intense sweetness which it is almost impossible to transfer bodily without loss into another language. There is no word in excess, none that could have been added or changed without spoiling the expression, every word just the right revelatory one—no colour, no ornamentation, but a sort of suppressed burning glow, no similes, but images which have been fused inseparably into the substance of the thought and feeling—the thought itself perfectly developed, not idea added to idea at the will of the fancy, but perfectly interrelated and linked together like the limbs of an organic body. It is high poetic style in its full perfection and nothing at all that is transferable. You have taken his last line and put in a lotus-face and made divine love bloom in it,—a pretty image, but how far from the glowing impassioned severity of the phrase: ‘And mould Thy love into a human face’!”

To the poet himself: “The quotations [AE] makes [from your poems]—

The song-impetuous mind... (*Ne Plus Ultra*)

The Eternal Beauty is a wanderer
Hungry for lips of clay— (*Sages*)

certainly deserve the praise he gives them and they are moreover of the kind AE and Yeats also, I think, would naturally like. But the poem [*This Errant Life*] I selected for special praise had no striking expressions like these standing out from the rest, just as in a Greek statue there would be no single feature standing out in a special beauty (eyes, lips, head or hands), but the whole has a harmoniously modelled grace of equal perfection everywhere as, let us say, in the perfect charm of a statue by Praxiteles. This apart from the idea and feeling, which goes psychically and emotionally much deeper than the ideas in the lines quoted by AE, which are poetically striking but have not the same subtle spiritual appeal; they touch the mind and vital strongly, but the other goes home into the soul.”

(From *The Secret Splendour—Collected Poems* of K. D. Sethna [Amal Kiran], pp. 68-72)

FROM A TALK TO THE STUDENTS OF SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION ON AUGUST 26, 1970

I MAY begin at the very beginning of the quest which has led me here. I won't go into great detail, but I may sketch a general outline. As you know... I was not by nature inclined to take to yoga. The first opening, as it were, came through a friend of mine who boasted that he had done some yogic exercises and acquired a fund of inexhaustible energy. I, as a young man, was extremely struck with this. If yoga is a way of getting inexhaustible energy it is the right thing when you are young. So I pleaded with him to let me see whatever he had read on the topic. He put into my hands a book of Vivekananda's. It was his treatment of Rajayoga, in which you have breathing exercises reduced to a minimum, but to a quite effective minimum, and several other things related to it. I tried to concentrate on merely the part dealing with a mode of harmonious breathing, which, according to my friend, could open you to a world of inexhaustible energy. But I could not stop there. I went on reading and found that there was more to Rajayoga than merely breathing exercises which make you super-young. And so I was a little intrigued. Here was talk of the mind being stilled and ultimately passing into a higher state of consciousness, as a result of which you acquired various powers, not only having inexhaustible energy but becoming larger, becoming smaller, flying about and doing a lot of amazing things. Furthermore, just to read the book didn't seem enough. I wanted somebody, some example—greater than my friend—of the results of yoga. My friend, except for his unusual ability to be energetic, was a very poor specimen of a yogi. Hence I started a search, looking out for people who might enlighten me.

The first fellow I caught hold of once when I had gone for a stroll to a fashionable place was a sanniyasi in an ochre cloth. I shadowed him and came to the house where he was staying. I went up to him. He was surprised that a man very stylishly dressed should seek out one practically in rags. I asked him: "What have you to teach me?" He said: "Come inside and I shall give you my secret." So I went into his room. Then he said: "I am a worshipper of supernatural beings—gods and goddesses. You have to invoke them, and in order to do so you have to dig a big square hole in your room and light a big fire there." This was a very tough assignment, especially as I didn't have a room of my own, and I was at the mercy of a very orthodox grandfather. I just said: "All right. I'll see what I can do."—and left.

Soon after, I read in a newspaper that a Maharashtrian yogi had come to town. His picture was very attractive. He looked remarkably proportionate as if he had done Hathayoga to perfection, and they said he had various powers: he could take away at will the light from an electric bulb and he could make his head as big as that (*gesture with two hands*) whenever he wanted—I had already a swelled head,

(*laughter*) but this kind of power would be quite welcome to impress people all the more. I sought him out at the address given. When I went to the house, I found a small crowd gathered there and he was in an inside apartment. In the anteroom was his host, a burly old man who promptly stopped me and said: “Sit here.” I inquired: “Why?” “Sit here first,” he said peremptorily. “All right,” I replied with as much dignity as I could muster, and sat down. His next order was: “Show me your right palm.” I showed it to him. He exclaimed: “Look!”—and vigorously shook his head. “No chance,” he continued. “But why?” I asked. He answered: “You have got to have six children. (*laughter*) How can you ever become a yogi now? Go back.” I was a little taken aback at first; then I said: “But these six children are in the future, I don’t have them now, there is no prospect of my having them very soon either. In the meantime please let me go in.” Then he grunted: “Very well, go in”—as if meaning “Go and be damned.”

I went in. Several people were sitting on the floor in various postures. The yogi himself was standing. He saw me and said: “Sit down.” I obeyed him. He came near me and put a finger on my head. I felt a kind of electric current go up. I said to myself, “Ah, there is something here! He has more power over electricity than merely taking off light from a bulb.” He spoke again: “I shall teach you an exercise which you must do religiously every day. Lie in your bed and try to draw up your being, your whole consciousness, from every part of your body, beginning with your toes, right up to your head.” This was very fascinating but seemed rather difficult. And I said: “Is this all that you can teach me?” He replied: “Yes, this is all. But when you sit on the top of your head you will see a circle of light above. Try to jump into that light and you will be in Samadhi.” I had read of Samadhi, the great yogic trance. I said to myself: “Very good. I must give it a trial.” So I went home and started planning. At that time my brother and my sister were sharing a room with me; and everybody would have been frightened by my lying in bed every day trying to do this fabulous exercise. There was an empty room on a higher floor. I managed to coax my grandfather into giving it to me.

Day after day, I went on practising the exercise—and, though I was in a separate room, my grandfather got wind of what was going on; and he was rather perturbed. Somebody said to him: “This fellow is trying to become a yogi.” Grandfather shouted: “Yogi? my God, that’s the worst thing possible!” (*laughter*) So he came to a certain decision, and that makes me go back to the period immediately after my B.A. When I passed my B.A. examination, I asked my grandfather to let me go to Oxford. He at once said: “Nothing doing. If you go to Oxford you will bring back an English wife.” (*laughter*) I told him: “I promise you that I will not bring back an English wife.” He smelled the rat all right and said: “No, I am sorry you can’t go to England. Stick on here and study.” Well, I had to, because I was dependent on him at that time.... Now when he heard that I was trying to do yoga he came out with an inviting proposition. He very sweetly said: “Why don’t you go to England?” (*laughter*) Evidently, in his

eyes an English wife was far preferable to the Divine Beloved! (*laughter*) Thus he went on tempting me time and again and I kept saying: “No, no, I’m not interested now. Leave me alone, leave me alone.” But the temptation was indeed great. How long would I be able to hold out? That exercise was going on every day without any result.

Then all of a sudden—I suppose because of the state of desperation, which always brings about a breakthrough—there came something. One night, as I was doing my yoga—trying to pull myself up hopelessly to the top of my head—I forgot for a single second, in the midst of my straining upward, that I was doing anything, and in a flash I found that I was hovering above my body! It was at the same time a confusing and an exhilarating experience. I could see my body lying in bed, absolutely paralysed—as if dead—and I was in a subtle form up there in the air and perfectly conscious. It wasn’t as if I were dreaming. When you dream, things happen to you, you sort of glide willy-nilly upon the stream of events. Here I was in full possession of my faculties: I could think and I could will, and when I willed to move I just went floating to one end of the room and touched the wall and from there I bounded to the other end, touching the wall there. “Hello, this is something really strange,” I told myself. Then I began to argue with myself. That is a very bad habit. Arguing with others is bad enough, arguing with oneself is much worse. Here it proved disastrous, because as soon as I started to analyse my condition—“How can I be up here when I am lying down there?”—it was immediately finished and with a rush of sudden warmth in the middle of my chest I felt I was back in my body. I opened my eyes but couldn’t move a single limb. I was still totally paralysed. Only, I could see my whole body lying like that. Then gradually the limbs came to life and I got up and said: “Now I have found something. Now in a most concrete way I know I am not merely my body. No materialist can ever argue and convince me that I am only this physical form and nothing more. There is another reality behind the whole show.” This brought a great deal of assurance that, after all, yoga was not bunk, there was genuine substance to it.

Then I commenced reading books and practising other things, going about all the time endeavouring to concentrate and lift my consciousness. But there was no repetition of that crucial experience. So I wasn’t quite ready to plunge into anything and the old temptation was still gleaming. However, one day I went to a theosophical meeting. The theosophists are supposed to be in touch with all kinds of subtle Masters. There I patiently heard what they spoke but it didn’t go home to me. Before I left, I was introduced to a South Indian who was a critic of painting. We became friends immediately and went out for a stroll. I spoke to him about myself and he kept asking me what I was looking for in life. I said: “I am interested in a host of subjects.” ...Then the art-critic remarked: “Well, for a chap like you who is quite a complexity, a knot of many strings, there is only one person who can help you and be your teacher.” I asked who, and he said: “Sri Aurobindo.” That was really revealing, coming from

a theosophist. Theosophists would want to guide me to Master Morya or Master Kuthumi or some other Master out of the group which has completely monopolised the management of the universe, leaving poor Sri Aurobindo no room at all anywhere. (*laughter*)

The name “Sri Aurobindo” remained in my mind. After some months I came across a booklet. I don’t remember whose it was, but the writer spoke about Sri Aurobindo, and two things struck me. One was that he could appear at several places at the same time (*laughter*)—and the other that he could speak half a dozen languages: Greek and Latin were at his fingertips, he was a scholar in French, he knew German and Italian and, of course, English, which went without saying. Out of the two extraordinary achievements, the second struck me more, because if a man was a yogi I thought he would naturally have a faculty like appearing at several places at the same time; but that a yogi who is usually a renouncer of the world should know so many languages and be a master in them—this impressed me as very super-yogic. (*laughter*) So I said: “Sri Aurobindo is my man.” But that was all. The seed had fallen inside and I thought now and then of him, but he was still only a name and my search still went on. It led me to diverse places.

The most unexpected was a shop! One day I went to Bombay’s popular Crawford Market to buy a pair of shoes. People tell me I need a new pair even now pretty badly, but I undoubtedly did at that time and I bought it. The shoes were put in a box, and the box wrapped in a piece of newspaper. I carried the packet home. No sooner did I come home than I unwrapped my new possessions, and the moment I did so the sheet of newspaper fell back in front of me and I saw in a big headline: “The Ashram of Aurobindo Ghose.” Somebody had been to the Ashram and written about it. At once I fell upon the article, read it most avidly and at the end of it I exclaimed: “I am going there! My mind is made up at last and I have found my goal, or at least the path to my goal.” And ultimately I came here, wearing the same shoes, which became the shoes of a real pilgrim!

Now you know how I ended up here. But I did not have much of an idea of what whole-time yoga could be like, much less that the “integral yoga” was entirely new. Though in that article some indications had been given, I couldn’t quite understand them. But I did feel that the life here was the sort of life I should like to lead—in which all the faculties were given a full flowering and a free field. They were not suppressed and you didn’t have just to shoot up into the circumambient gas!

When I arrived,¹ I first went to Purani’s room because I had written to Sri Aurobindo for permission to come and Purani had replied to me on his behalf. His field was Gujarat and I was from Bombay. Now he had sent somebody to receive me at the station: it was Pujalal. He came and met me and took me to Purani. At that time the Mother used to take a walk early in the morning on the terrace above her own

1. For accuracy’s sake I may mention that I did not arrive alone. But that part of the story would have taken me rather off the track. So I did not bring it in.

room. I had reached Purani's room just when she had come up. From a northern window, I could see her. I said: "She is very beautiful!" She was at a considerable distance and it was my first glimpse of her, but the impression of beauty was very definite. She walked for a while and went down. And I stayed on in Pondicherry.

The Mother had engaged for me a house just opposite the Ashram: it was the house on Rue François Martin, in which Vasudha has been staying for nearly four decades. I had the entire place for Rs. 12 a month! In those days the room where Kamala now stays was the Mother's store-room; and she used to come from her room every now and then to her store-room across the open passage on the first floor, and I used to see her from one of my windows. It went on like that and then I asked for an interview. She gave it to me. She sat on one side of a table and I sat on the other. She asked me: "What have you come here for?" I made a dramatic sweeping gesture with one hand and replied: "Mother, I have seen everything of life; now I want nothing except God." She said: "Oh yes? How old are you?" I said I was 23. "Oh, at 23 you have seen all of life? Don't be in such a hurry, you must take your time. Stay here, look about, see how things are, see if they suit you and then take a decision." I was much disappointed at this kind of cold water poured over my dramatic gesture. But I said: "All right." When I was talking with her I felt as if from her face and eyes some silver radiance were coming out. I am very critical and sceptical, you know, but I could not make out how this was happening—nor could I doubt that it was happening. Apart from this impression of light, there was another—of something out of ancient Egypt.

After our brief talk, the Mother got up. "I am going," she said and moved towards the door. "No, please wait," I urged. Then I started to indulge in my habit of falling. It was taking a new turn, for I was preparing to fall—as I have already told you—at her feet. She seemed a little surprised at a man clad in European clothes, with a necktie and so on, wanting to fall like that. Seeing the surprise on her face I made an explanation: "You see, Mother, we Indians always do this to our spiritual Masters." (*laughter*) I taught her what was the right thing to be done. Afterwards I learned that the Mother at that time couldn't move from one room to another without 20 people falling at her feet! (*laughter*) When she found me determined she said: "All right"—and let me go down. Then she put her hand on my head and I got up. At home I thought I had done something very important: I had asserted my Indian-ness, I had shown my Indian-ness in spite of those clothes, and I was sure the Mother must have appreciated it. It seems the Mother went and told Sri Aurobindo: "There is a young man here who came to see me and taught me how Indians do pranam!" (*laughter*) Sri Aurobindo was much amused.

Days passed in the Ashram. Every night I used to go to the pier. We had the old pier then—a long thing a quarter mile into the sea. I would go there at about 11 p.m. and sit in the dimness at the furthest end and attempt to meditate. I was hoping to see visions, but I saw nothing except when I opened my eyes at times and found hideous

faces of fishermen in front of mine, uncomfortably close. They were peering into my face, seeming to wonder who this lunatic could be, coming at so late an hour all alone, and sitting with shut eyes. I was a little frightened, but I kept my courage up and went on visiting the pier. Nothing very much happened by way of inner experience. Only once I felt as if the waves of the sea were washing into me and washing through me and out of me: I suppose it was some opening to the cosmic forces—though a poor and small opening—a very wishy-washy feeling, I may say. (*laughter*)

Then came my first Darshan Day... but no, I must tell you something else before that. I reached Pondicherry in December [1927] just before the year in which—some-where in April—I was to sit for my M.A. examination—or rather I was to submit my thesis. I had the thesis drawn up in outline—in the form of chapter-headings. Nothing had yet been written out to develop the various themes. The two years after one’s B.A. are the most enjoyable and one keeps everything troublesome to the dead last. My subject was: “The Philosophy of Art.” Now I had to decide whether or not to start writing the thesis. If I didn’t I wouldn’t have any M.A. But how after coming here could I start again going round and round in the intellectual mill? I would never be able to take advantage of whatever new consciousness was there in the Ashram, a light beyond the mind. So I decided to let my M.A. go hang.... Nor did I know how long I would be staying at the Ashram. Every minute seemed precious. Some circumstance might cut across my stay.

I had come here without telling anybody in Bombay that my destination was Pondicherry. Else I would have been hindered [...]

...my first Darshan Day was approaching—it was the 21st of February, the Mother’s birthday. People were not very encouraging at that time, they left me in doubt whether I would be able to attend the Darshan or not. Up to almost the last minute I didn’t know my fate. I had to go and scrutinise the list of names put up. At last I found my name. “Good!” I said, “I am lucky to be allowed.” Later I took my place in the queue. Of course in those days the queue was a small one: I think there were only 40 people staying in the Ashram and perhaps as many visitors.

The Darshan used to be in the long front room upstairs. I went in my turn—first, of course, to the Mother because Sri Aurobindo I didn’t know, while the Mother I had seen again and again. I knelt down at her feet, she blessed me; then I went to Sri Aurobindo’s feet and looked at him. My physical mind came right to the front: “What sort of a person is Sri Aurobindo? How does he look?” I saw him sitting very grandly, with an aquiline nose, smallish eyes, fine moustaches and a thin beard... I was examining him thoroughly. At length I made my pranam. He put both his hands on my head—that was his way—a most delightful way with his very soft palms. I took my leave, looking at him again. I observed to myself: “Quite an impressive Guru: he is very fine in appearance, very grand—I think I can accept him!” (*laughter*)

The next day I met the Mother and asked her: “Mother, did Sri Aurobindo say anything about me?” She answered: “Well, he just said that you had a good face.”

(*laughter*) Here was a piquant situation. When I was examining him, he was examining me—on the same level, it seems. (*laughter*) He had come down, as it were, to meet my physical mind. I didn't think the compliment he had paid me was very satisfying or quite sufficient. Only a good face? Then I asked myself: "What did you require of Sri Aurobindo? That he should have a good face for you to accept him. Why shouldn't he accept you for your good face if that's the sole qualification you have got?"

Round about this time I began writing to Sri Aurobindo. It was the start of a process that went on and on for years—sometimes two or three letters a day! Since he replied to everything, we never felt he had gone into retirement. You see, unfortunately a year before I reached Pondicherry he had withdrawn for concentrated work: the 24th of November 1926 was almost a year earlier. I am a pretty ancient person, you will now understand! (*laughter*) After 1926 we could come into touch with Sri Aurobindo only by writing. I wrote to him my first letter informing him of all my difficulties: I could not do this and I could not do that—how the devil was I to do his yoga? He wrote to me a long letter, very encouraging and helpful. It gave me a lot of hope that I would be able to do everything and go through if I rejected the lower forces, aspired after the light and surrendered to the Divine: a steady will to change and conquer was all he considered necessary to get me through the hard period. Strangely, he dated his letter 1998 instead of 1928! (*laughter*) I was set wondering whether it would take me so long. (*laughter*) Would all the things he spoke of happen after 1998? That letter is really unique [...] [*see pp. 998-1000*]

To come [...] to my own troubles: the intellect was a great bar. Though I put it off a little by not appearing for my M.A., I still couldn't do without it. And several times I have surprised the Mother by asking for an interview and rushing up to her with my difficulties. Once I said: "How can there be the One and at the same time the Many? Explain this to me. It's a terrible difficulty." And she said: "Read Sri Aurobindo more and more and you will find out how it is possible." Again, a very great difficulty—the supreme crisis of my mental life—came when I began to think of the problem of Freewill: have I freewill or not? I read all the philosophers; they could not enlighten me. Even in Sri Aurobindo I could not fasten upon a clear-cut solution. I tossed arguments to and fro and I got so tangled up in my mind that all the day I was debating with myself. Nothing else mattered in the world. Finally I felt my head was so full of these attacks and counter-attacks that the only way to get rid of the commotion was to knock my head against the wall and break it! In that desperate condition I asked for an interview with the Mother. As usual, she said: "Yes, come." When I went, she asked: "Now what is the trouble?" I said: "Have I got freewill or have I not?" She began to speak. I at once interrupted: "Please don't argue with me, Mother. (*laughter*) I have argued enough with myself. Don't say anything because I am sure to say something to contradict you. Just tell me whether or not my will is free, to however small an extent. Don't say anything more than 'Yes' or 'No'." (*laughter*) She said: "Yes." I said: "That's enough." And I went away. Our Gurus are

so patient with all our vagaries! I told myself: “I must not argue at all now. Once I argue I am lost. I must cling to this one word of the Mother’s—until I get some light.” And, for 12 years or so; I clung on to it. At the end of that period I felt I could see something, even in a philosophical way, and I wrote out a short essay: *Freewill in Sri Aurobindo’s Vision*. [see pp. 1001-06] I had the sense that now I had stated something philosophically cogent. I sent my compact piece to Sri Aurobindo and Nirod read it out to him. The comment simply swept me off my feet. He said—well, I should not quote it in public, but now that we are at it, now that I have talked so much of myself, I might as well put a crown to it all—he said: “The article is excellent. In fact it could not be bettered.” That set me on top of the world, of course. (*laughter*)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

(Slightly abridged from *Light and Laughter—Some Talks at Pondicherry*,
1974 ed., pp. 4-15)

Amal Kiran on his 100th Birthday

Let us grow empty of ourselves,—so that there may be room for the Divine, so that the Divine may be all in all.

We should exist because of Him and by Him.

A LETTER FROM SRI AUROBINDO

2

Kabir D. Sethna

There is no reason why you should abandon hope of success in the Yoga. The state of depression which you now feel is temporary and it comes even upon the strongest sadhakas at one time or another or even often recurs. The only thing needed is to hold firm with the awakened part of the being, to reject all contrary suggestions and wait, opening yourself as much as you can to the true Power, till the crisis or change of which this depression is a stage, is completed. The suggestions which come to your mind telling you that you are not fit and that you must go back to the ordinary life, are false tamasic promptings from a hostile source. Ideas of this kind must always be rejected as inventions of the lower nature; even if they are founded on appearances which appear convincing to the ignorant mind, they are false, because they exaggerate a passing movement and represent it as the decisive and definite truth. There is only one truth in you on which you have to lay constant hold, the truth of your divine possibilities and the call of the higher Light to your nature. If you hold to that always or, even if you are momentarily shaken from your hold, return constantly to it, it will justify itself in the end in spite of all difficulties and obstacles and stumblings. All in you that resists will disappear in time with the progressive unfolding of your spiritual nature.

The disabilities of your past character and mind and ^{vital} ^{and} ^{habits} need not discourage you. Some of them are, no doubt, serious — especially the animal sexuality of the vital parts and the support which the mind has given to it; but others have led to face obstacles as serious in themselves and have surmounted them in the purifying and liberating process of the Yoga. It may not be easy to get rid of them altogether and it may take time, but if you persist and refuse all justification and all possibility of return to those things,

you are bound in the end to conquer.

When you came, the psychic call in you was true and sincere, but in your external nature the response was confused and mixed with foreign elements of a lower kind. What has sunk in you is not the pure psychic urge, even if that is temporarily veiled, but a vital flame that was not entirely pure. It is because these foreign elements have been discouraged, that the vital nature in you feels despondent and refuses its support to the belief of the mind and to the psychic call. This often happens in the process of purification; what is needed is the conversion and surrender of the vital nature. It must learn to demand only the highest Truth and to forego all insistence on the satisfaction of its inferior impulses and desires. It is this adhesion of the vital being that brings the full satisfaction and joy of the whole nature in the spiritual life. When that is there, it will be impossible even to think of returning to the ordinary existence. Meanwhile the mental will and the psychic aspirations must be your support; if you insist, the vital will finally yield and be converted and surrender.

Fix upon your mind and heart the resolution to live for the divine Truth and for that alone; reject all that is contrary and incompatible with it and turn away from all lower desires; aspire to open yourself to the Divine Power and to no other. Do this in all sincerity and the present and living help you need will not fail you.

282.98.

For Anubinda,

To
Kekoo D. Sethna

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SRI AUROBINDO

“FREEWILL” IN SRI AUROBINDO’S VISION

SRI AUROBINDO’S views on the crucial choice that must be made of the way of living, if we are really to be fulfilled and the calls of existence truly to be answered, are clear to most of us: we sum them up as “the Integral Yoga.” But we are not equally familiar with his outlook on the power to choose. Wherever there is the activity of the will, there is the phenomenon of choosing—and yet there is no warrant in this for believing that the choice is freely made and not occasioned by subtle or unknown factors other than our will itself. How exactly does Sri Aurobindo stand with regard to the problem whether the human will is free?

A couple of points which he puts before us may appear, in isolation and at face value, to deny man freewill altogether. First, genuine freedom of will as of consciousness and delight and being can only be in a divine state, for only the Divine is genuinely free; and so long as we are in the unregenerate condition, which is subject to ego and desire and the drive of Nature, Prakriti, untransformed by the Luminous and the Eternal, we can never speak of authentic freewill. Second, once we postulate a divine Omniscience, Omnipotence and Omnipresence, we must conclude it to have originated and decreed whatever arises and acts in the universe which is its emanation. Is there then any room left in us for freewill as usually understood? If no genuine freewill can be except in the freedom of the Divine, can we be thought free even to choose that freedom or stay away from it? Again, if all things are originally decreed by the Divine, is not our feeling of being real does a delusion given us for some purpose of the Divine’s world-play? This question is akin to the time-old one: if God, having all-knowledge, has foreseen everything, have we any power to deviate from His plan, and do we not have inevitably to carry out the details of it?

Many Christian theologians have attempted to solve the dilemma: some have said that God’s knowledge is in eternity and eternity is different from time and such knowledge does not clash with free action within a different order of being; others have said, “God cannot be a true creator if He cannot create creators.” No proposition of this type is in itself satisfactory, though each may have a faint inkling of some truth which is ill-caught and ill-expressed by it. To drive a wedge between God’s knowledge in eternity and man’s actions in time is to indulge in a quibble: if by eternity is meant a status in which past and present and future are not a sequence but an all-at-once, an endless total Now, then every “now” of our ordinary life as well as of all existence is not something fixed by God from the past, but would it cease to be actuated by Him in the very present? God’s hold from the past is avoided; yet unless eternity and His all-knowledge are rendered otiose and meaningless, His hold at every present moment remains complete. In the face of this complete hold, the proposition about God being no creator unless creators are created by Him is no more than a brilliant epigram if understood in a Christian context. Christianity conceives the human soul as a creature brought into existence by God at some point

of time and existing with some resemblance to Him yet with no essential identity with Him. Such a soul cannot be a creator in any Godlike sense and must be entirely subject to God's endless total Now underlying and actuating all its "nows" or else to His foreknowledge in the past determining its career.

The primary *sine qua non* to be recognised for making any freewill valid is: God who originates and decrees everything must somehow be not different from our own souls. Without identity with God no freewill anywhere can be. This identity would be the truth behind the epigram about creators: only, that epigram does not openly put man's soul on a par with the Divine, does not conceive it as an eternal aspect of the Divine—an eternal aspect possible because the Divine would Himself be conceived as simultaneously single and multiple, unitary yet many-poised, essentially one but numerically not bound by oneness. Does Sri Aurobindo grant the identity?

It is a cardinal characteristic of his vision, bound up with God's being One-in-Many. Unless God is at the same time multiple and single, the manifold world would have no basis in God. We should have to rest with a fundamental dualism or resort to an illusionist theory of the manifold world. Even an illusion, however, must have at least a subjective existence and it can exist, be it ever so subjectively, in nothing save God if He is the Sole Reality, and to understand such an existing is as much a hurdle as to understand God's being One-in-Many. Besides, our evolution, difficult and shot with evil and suffering, out of the Inconscient, demands that God should be such: "to explain it," says Sri Aurobindo, "there must be two elements, a conscious assent by the soul to this manifestation and a reason in the All-Wisdom that makes the play significant and intelligible." The reason in the All-Wisdom is not here our direct concern, though we may mention that it is the extreme attractiveness of the strenuous joy lying in self-concealing and self-finding, the joy which would be at the utmost when the self-concealing is the awful plunge into the sheer Inconscient and the self-finding is through the absolute opposite of the Divine. What is of pertinence to the issue at stake is the soul's conscious assent. Can the assent be an explanatory feature and a meaningful fact under any circumstance other than that the soul is free to will? And can the soul be free unless it is not created at a certain point of time to be sent willy-nilly on a world-journey through imperfection but is a particular eternal aspect of the Divine, a mode of His manyness, so that the Divine's fiat and the soul's assent are automatically the same thing? Sri Aurobindo's vision, therefore, is not inimical to the primary *sine qua non* for freewill, and his pronouncement on the universe's utter dependence on God's decree is not deterministic when taken in combination with his full outlook.

But a second indispensable condition has to be satisfied for freewill's validity. It is obvious that we, as we are from day to day, cannot be described as souls that are eternal aspects of the Divine. We are too obscure and weak and perverted: we have a tremendously long way to go to realise ourselves as individualised divinities. Indivi-

dualised divinities we may be in our secret recesses: our daily surface existence is pretty far from Godliness. Hence the important query: does our souls’ assent from their God-poise to the strange cosmic play confer on what we do in even our ordinary moments a true freewill? All our actions are really of our souls carrying out the free decisions they have taken in their role of divine creators; but, on our surface, are we in any sense our own souls and do we share at least some of their freewill? No freewill can be in us if even as we are, if even in our state that is human and not ostensibly divine, we have no power, however small, to choose or not to choose. Freewill can have little relevance to us if our normal selves are wanting in some touch of identity with our souls that are essentially identical with God: to exercise any freewill our ordinary moments must be identical in some degree or other with God Himself! Does Sri Aurobindo take them to be thus identical?

Let us glance at his scheme of our selfhood, our soulhood. Above all manifestation and evolution is the Jivatman, our highest self or soul, the individualised divinity, a supreme transcendental form in the play of the One as the Many. Presiding over manifestation and evolution, the Jivatman projects a representative into the cosmic process: this representative is the Antaratman, our inmost or deepest self or soul with all the potentialities of the Divine in it, and it passes from birth to birth, making for evolutionary purposes a bright nucleus round which the duller tones of mind-stuff, vitality-stuff and matter-stuff are gathered, infusing its own sweetness and light into them stage by stage and developing them to serve as its transparent mediums. Through experience in birth after birth the nucleus too grows and will at last be able to offer to the Supreme, whence the Antaratman came, a full manifested personality—many-sided though single, individualised yet embracing all cosmos and partaking of all Transcendence beyond both individuality and cosmicity in time. But, while dealing with mind-stuff, vitality-stuff and matter-stuff, this true psyche here below makes a projection of itself into them, a projection which gets steeped in their tones. Now, all existence has a biune reality—Purusha and Prakriti, conscious being and Nature. Wherever consciousness plays, this biune reality is present in one form or another, openly concordant or apparently divided. We have thus in the realm of evolutionary existence a mental being facing mental Nature, a vital being fronting vital Nature, a physical being opposite physical Nature: these beings are experienced by us according as our consciousness assumes a mental or vital or physical poise. And all of them are representative of the true psychic Purusha. When the multi-possible Purusha of us with its centre in the psychic being stands fully back, uninvolved in Prakriti and lord of it, though not united altogether with the Jivatman above, we have a clear realisation of some measure of authentic freewill, because that uninvolved and masterful Purusha, centrally psychic, is in rapport with the totally free Jivatman. But even when the projection of the psyche into mind, vitality and matter acts as something involved in Prakriti and is the stumbling surface being of us, the self as ordinarily cognised, then also it carries a touch of freedom with it; for that involvement, that enslavement, is

freely made and there remains with us the power to withhold sanction to the current play of Nature in our members and to bring about a turn towards the Perfect, the Divine, the Un-enslaved. Precisely on that power is based Sri Aurobindo's appeal to us to lead the life divine instead of the life human.

If it is asked what becomes of Sri Aurobindo's assertion that only in a divine state there can be genuine freedom of will, the answer is: he evidently means by genuine freedom of will a quality of the full experience of being not what we apparently are at present but a luminous superhuman entity that is cosmic while being individual, and transcendental while being cosmic. Such freedom we cannot experience when we are unregenerate. In our present state, obscure and weak and perverted, we are divorced from the light and strength and beauty that we are on our ultimate heights: we have not the absolute freedom of our own hidden Infinite, nor have we the puissance and prerogative of our own psychic depths; still, a dim vestige we do possess of what we have put behind and beyond us and part of the vestige is an ability to give to Prakriti's fluctuations of inertia, vehemence and harmony a Yes or a No and gradually effect a passage from our human imperfection to a supernal splendour. No freewill other than this bare ability is ours, but it is freewill none the less. And at least a faint glimmer of freewill has indeed to be there in our surface existence if we are meant to be conscious co-operators in the work of rising from humanity to superhumanity and bringing into all our constituents what Sri Aurobindo terms the Supermind, the archetypal truth of all that we are in the evolutionary process. The free assenting highest soul of us, the Jivatman, that has been creative of the world-play from its eternal poise in the Divine, cannot but keep of its vast freewill a pin-point in conscious co-operators, in minds that discriminate and argue and weigh, in beings that have enough detachment from Nature to at least enable them to reflect on themselves and to study and judge Nature. On that pin-point the whole of mental human life is fulcrummed for activity, and the conceding of it is implied in the Aurobindonian outlook which holds our intelligent will to be a ray, deformed though it may be, of the Gnosis, the Supermind.

Two *sine qua nons* we have tabulated and both we have discovered to be granted by Sri Aurobindo. But there is a third which emerges from one special question concerning the dynamics of the world-play. Has the world-play been decreed from the past by God and is it going on inexorably since that old decree of the Eternal or does eternity connote an all-at-once, an endless total Now? If every "now" of ours were what our souls as portions of the Divine had foreseen and forefixed from the past and there were no endless total Now, there might be an experience of freewill by us since we would not be bound by any past other than that in which had acted our own divine selves with whom we would be having a pin-point contact. But an endless total Now can alone explain in entirety the sense we have of freewill in the "nows" of our common life, the sense that nothing of the past, even if the past be of our highest selves, wholly binds us and that at every moment we are creative of our actions. Of

course, creativity in full cannot be felt by us from our poor human standing-ground; nevertheless, a tiny bit of it we would intensely feel only when our own highest selves would be acting in an endless total Now and not merely from a deific past. The truth behind the idea that eternity and time are different orders and God’s foreknowledge in the former need not clash with man’s freewill in the latter seems to be just this that for an entire explanation of the real creative feeling which we have, however pin-pointish, eternity should carry time in an all-at-once constituting an endless total Now: what the idea took no account of are the two other indispensables of freewill. Sri Aurobindo does take account of them: does he also envisage the last indispensable?

In *The Life Divine* he distinguishes three statuses in God’s eternity: a timeless immobile status, supremely self-absorbed, without developments of consciousness in movement or happening—a status of simultaneous integrality of time, which is a stable whole-consciousness of the successive relations of all things manifested—a status of processive movement of consciousness and its successive working out of what has been seen in the stable vision. Statuses second and third, combined, would give us an endless total Now underlying and actuating all the “nows” of the time-movement—Omniscience, Omnipotence, Omnipresence acting everywhere and in everything and at every moment but exceeding limitation by the moments and, while it spreads out a past, present and future, embracing them also in one whole. This one whole is the deific Ever-Present, with a pin-point of which our poor human “now” coincides, acquiring thereby the fullest reality possible for its speck of freewill.

People might lift their hands in shock or protest, crying: “If all we do is, for Sri Aurobindo, traceable to the Divine’s eternal fiat, the choice in an endless total Now of our highest selves, a faint spark of whom abides in the Tom, Dick and Harry that we are, what is there to make us choose good and reject evil? If we cannot have freewill of any kind unless the Divine be taken as somehow acting in us, would anything we freely do be bad or blamable?”

The first answer is: there is a sense in which nothing is wrong, for spiritual realisation actually testifies that in a certain state of experience everything is perfect, Brahman is all and all is Brahman—but that sense is truly attained by an experience of the All-Brahman, not by a mere idea of Him, and so long as the experience is lacking we cannot speak, with living conviction or direct right, of everything being equally good. What is more, to have that very experience we have at each moment to stand away from egoistic desire which is the arch-vice, the subtle root of iniquity. To realise that all is Brahman we have to reject something as not Brahman! This paradox has to be accepted and it provides a hint that the cry of shock or protest is irrational. The irrationality resides in that the fact of Brahman being all and all being Brahman is considered not only without spiritual experience but also without another side of the divine reality. Brahman has projected in His infinity a negation of the essentially divine and an emergence of divine values from the Inconscient. According to this

arrangement by Brahman there is a constant and persistent and ubiquitous fight between the Divine and the undivine, between good and evil. Of course by “good” we must not mean always what puritanism or prudery or pacifism or any rigid rule or code sets up for our guidance: we must mean some profound urge towards surpassing our ignorance, meanness, cruelty, incapacity, ugliness and becoming like Zoroaster, like Christ, like Buddha, like Sri Krishna or, best of all, like Sri Aurobindo. There is an incumbence on us to follow this urge, since the entire evolutionary process of the hidden and negated God holds it as its secret law and it is precisely because the attainment of the All-Brahman is also an evolutionary step, a finding of a certain side of divine reality which too was concealed, that paradoxically we have in even this attainment to follow that urge and choose good and reject evil. In man the mental being, the conscious self-evolver, the urge is an unavoidable open ingredient of his constitution and cannot help being insistent and deeply desirable. We may tend to justify the non-following of it by arguing from one half of God’s truth: the vision of Pantheos. But when both halves are taken together and we do not overlook God from above calling to God from below to rise and evolve in the *milieu* of God that is all, then the urge to choose good and reject evil is found to be a decree the soul in us has passed from the supramental identity-in-difference it enjoys within the multiple yet single Divine.

Surely this decree is not the only one and even its overruling at times may be deemed after the event a valid soul-act subserving God’s purpose, since in God’s subtle play real good may come out of seeming evil; but before an act has happened and while alternatives are still felt as possible this decree is logically the most valid, the most to be regarded, in an evolutionary scheme of Upward no less than Onward. The overruling of it may, on a back-look, prove itself justified in God’s complex economy, but the overruling can never be justifiable in the moment of action. If it can, the process of upward evolution by us would lose support altogether and could never be a plan of the supreme Creative Consciousness for our freewill to carry out.

1947

K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

(The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo [1968 ed.], pp. 91-98)

* * *

There is no such thing as “free” will, but there is the power of the Purusha to say “yes” or “no” to any particular pressure of Prakriti and there is the power of the mind, vital etc. to echo feebly or strongly the Purusha’s “yes” or “no” or to resist it. A constant (not a momentary) Yes or No has its effect in the play of the forces and the selection by the Something.

Sri Aurobindo

(Nirodbaran’s Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, 1995 Ed., Vol. 1, p. 270)

SOME DIARY NOTES

March 26, 1956

YESTERDAY morning I wrote to Mother, asking what had happened on February 29. I opined that it was something connected with the Supermind's gripping the physical vital.

In the evening after tennis Mother passed by, smiling—and said: "You are behind by a century."

I gave her a note at the time of groundnut-distribution: "From what you said after tennis, I feel sure that the whole blooming thing has come down. Hurrah! And now there is hope for such as I."

She read the note and laughed and said: "Years ago I had told you that I would call you from wherever you would be when the Supermind came. So I did call you. But you didn't understand."

I replied: "Mother, I returned from Bombay as soon as I could. And on the very day of the descent—February 29—I saw you standing in the railway compartment of the Bombay Mail in which I had left Madras."

"Oh it was the same day? It is very good that you saw me."

I may record that in 1938, before I left for Bombay at the end of February, Mother promised to call me back if the Supermind came down. She was expecting the descent some time in May. I, however, got no telegram—and Sri Aurobindo's letter to me said that the event expected had not happened.

I learnt many years later that the Supermind had come but could not be fixed here.

Now, on February 29 this year, late in the evening, it came for good! What Sri Aurobindo and Mother had worked for during 30 years happened at last.

I wonder when the world will realise that in 1956 the greatest event in its history took place. Of course the detailed working out of the Supermind upon earth and even in Mother's body will take long, but the full general presence of it in her is there now and also its general working on ourselves and the world.

There is now hope for the weakest amongst us, for the Supermind is above the universe's laws and brings sheer omnipotence to our aid.

It seems that three immediate effects are possible. One is a sudden and radical clearing of difficulties. Another is a slow but quite perceptibly sure clearing. Still another is a final gathering up of difficulties prior to their clearance: difficulties may appear to increase, but really what will take place is like one's sweeping together the dust of a room before throwing it out. One must have no fear but face everything with faith and certitude.

I find examples of all these effects here. I myself feel the second effect.

I can hardly contain myself with joy at Mother's victory. May all our hearts belong to her!

March 29, 1956

This morning Mother distributed at Pranam time the printed copy of a painting by Krishnalal, “The Golden Purusha”, with a quotation in French and English from an old “Prayer and Meditation” of her own, dated September 25, 1914 and beginning “O divine adorable Mère”—“O divine and adorable Mother”. [*see p. 1008*] The English version ran:

The Lord has willed and Thou dost execute:
A new light shall break upon the earth,
A new world shall be born,
And the things that were promised shall be fulfilled.

After the Pranam Mother went up. Those who daily met her on the first floor gathered there as usual. She sat in her chair to hear, as she did every day, the reports from various departments. But before starting the work she asked from each one present the copy of the message. In her own hand she scratched out certain words in the French original and substituted others. [*see p. 1010*] When she came to the English version she consulted her disciples about the right turns of expression for the change needed. I was sitting at the door of Sri Aurobindo’s room, from where Mother at work with the department-representatives could be seen. She called me and I contributed my bit to the suggestions given. The English message now read in its altered form:

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

The transformation of the future tense into the present marked Mother’s first open disclosure of what had taken place on February 29. But we were asked not to broadcast the disclosure. She particularly told me that the changes done in the texts were not for general circulation yet. As the editor of *Mother India* I must have been suspected of the journalist’s itch for a “scoop”. I promised to keep the “secret”. It was understood that on April 24 she would make an announcement and permit the changes to be made widely known. However, the same evening I was cross-questioned by a friend about them. News had leaked out that something very interesting and significant had been done upstairs after the Pranam, and people were curious to learn what it had been. I had a hard time of it to evade giving a straight answer and yet not tell a lie.

So far *Mother India* has carried the old version as its second motto, the first being Sri Aurobindo’s famous two-paragraphed “The Supramental is a truth...” [*see p. 1012*] From the issue of April 24, it has been resolved, the new version alone will appear as our motto.

Seigneur, Tu as voulu,
et je réalise,
une lumière nouvelle point
sur la terre
Un monde nouveau
est né,
Et les choses promises
sont accomplies

29.3-56.

*

1956

29 février - 29 mars

Seigneur, Tu as voulu et je réalise
Une lumière nouvelle point sur la terre,
Un monde nouveau est né,
Et les choses promises sont accomplies.

29 February - 29 March

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

Earlier version of mottos in Mother India



The Supramental is a truth and its advent is in the very nature of things inevitable...

I believe the descent of this Truth opening the way to a development of divine consciousness here to be the final sense of the earth evolution.

SRI AUROBINDO

*

*A new Light shall break upon the earth,
a new world shall be born: the things that
were promised shall be fulfilled.*

Sri Aurobindo

*Translated from the Mother's
"Prayers and Meditations"*

April 5, 1956

I asked Mother to tell me more precisely about the Great Event of February 29. I said I had to write about it in *Mother India*. “Has the whole Supermind descended?” Mother answered:

“The Supramental Light, Consciousness and Force have come. But the Supramental Ananda has not yet come. You speak of a descent. But I speak of a manifestation. Descent is something that occurs in relation to an individual with the kind of psychological structure he has. You can refer to planes below and planes above in reference to this structure. Where the universe is concerned, there is no meaning in the term ‘descent’. There is only manifestation.”

I understood that we individuals have various levels connected with our bodies. The vital plane is connected with our abdominal region. The heart region has to do with the emotional being, the head with the mind plane. And above the head there are the spiritual ranges and on top of them the Supermind. Our consciousness can ascend and the Supermind can descend. Such a system of levels does not hold for the universe. However, I could not help asking: “Mother, is not the Supermind superior to our universe? From where has it manifested?”

“There is no ‘where’. It just manifested. You are using your mind too much in regard to these more-than-mental realities.”

As Mother seemed impatient with my attitude I did not press my investigation further. I only inquired: “Does the manifestation imply that the Supermind involved within matter has emerged?”

“I know that you have this impression, but that is not the fact. The involved Supermind has not emerged. But now its emergence is not a problem at all. It is inevitable as the result of the manifestation of the free Supermind in what I call the earth’s subtle atmosphere. It is merely a matter of time.”

May 24, 1956

I wrote to Mother: “Ever since I came back from Bombay I have been constantly feeling supported by the New Power that has come into the earth’s subtle atmosphere. I have been feeling that all difficulties belong to an old world that is really dead. But, although the sense of being a part of your life and of your work is often strong, I seem to be lingering just within the borders of the new world instead of penetrating right to its centre. I want so much to be wholly yours. Won’t you do something to absorb me into yourself? What should I do on my side?”

I kept my note on a table near the place where Mother took her lunch with Pranab. As usual I sat in the space outside her bathroom. When she finished her lunch she took my note and went into the bathroom by its inner door. Having read the note she came out through the outer door. I was on my knees to receive her. She said: “Ça viendra” (“It will come”). I asked her: “When?” She replied: “Surely you

don't want me to mention the date?" Then I said: "No—but please make it come soon." She smiled.

May 30, 1956

I wrote to Mother: "Is it true that you have said the following or something like it?—'Only four people realised the fact of the Supramental Manifestation—one in the Ashram and three outside.' I can very well believe that there was only one person in the Ashram—namely, yourself! But the three outsiders puzzle me. How did they manage to do what hundreds here didn't?"

Mother told me after her post-lunch visit to her bathroom: "What I said was not that four people knew it was the Supramental Manifestation, but that when the manifestation took place they had some unusual experience because of it even if they did not understand why. I at first thought there was only one person in the Ashram to whom an unusual experience had happened, but afterwards I found there had been two. Among those outside, I counted you."

I was surprised to hear this. Mother continued: "You wrote to me—didn't you?—that on the night of the 29th February I was with you. I had promised you, long ago when you had gone from here, that I would inform you at once if the Supermind manifested. I never forgot this. And when the Supermind did manifest, I went out to tell you."

"You did do that, Mother?" I said, hardly believing my ears. She answered: "Yes."

I feel unspeakably grateful to find that she thinks me so connected with her work.

November 25, 1956

In the morning Mother said: "On this birthday I am not giving you any books because you have all of them." I replied: "Not all. I don't have *On the Veda* and *Poems from Bengali*." She asked Champaklal to pick them out for me.

When she went for lunch I kept a note ready for her: "The books you will be giving me are certainly welcome, but what I would most like to read today is something else. You once told me that you would show it to me one day—but I think you said you would do so when I would be more worthy. If greater worthiness is the standard, I feel sure I shall not be shown what I want. But one can always hope for grace. I am referring to what you wrote on February 29, just after the Supramental Manifestation."

On finishing her lunch Mother stopped at the table where I had placed my note. Usually she takes these notes to the bathroom and reads them there. But this one she read, standing by the table. Then she came to me. I had kept ready the flower whose significance is "Prayer". On taking it from me she said: "I have read your prayer. If



29.2.56

Pendant la méditation ou communion
du Mercredi

Le soir, la Présence Divine était là,
présente parmi vous, conciliante et
matérielle. J'avais une force
d'or vivant, aussi grande que
l'univers, et je me trouvais devant
une immense porte d'or massif -
la porte qui séparait le monde
du Divin.

Regardant la porte, j'ai vu et
voulu, sans un unique mouvement
de conscience, que le temps est venu
(the time has come); et soulevant un
énorme marteau d'or que je tenais
à deux mains, j'en ai asséné un
coup, un seul, sur la porte et la porte
a été mise en miettes.

Alors la lumière, la force et la
conscience suprasensibles se
répandaient en flots ininterrompus
sur la terre.

I can find the paper on which I have written, I shall bring it for you in the evening during the interview. If I have to search for it for an hour I shan't be able to show it to you."

In the evening, when I went into her room at the Playground, I saw that she had brought the paper with her. She said: "You won't understand what I have written, but try to keep your mind absolutely quiet and receive it." I said: "Perhaps it is not meant to be understood." She laughed and said: "Probably." Then she explained the background of the writing: "The whole thing is not so much a vision or an experience as something done by me. I went up into the Supermind and did what was to be done. There was no need for any verbal formulation as far as I was concerned, but in order to put it into words for others I wrote the thing down. Always, in writing, a realisation, a state of consciousness, gets somewhat limited: the very act of expression narrows the reality to some extent. Well, here is what I wrote."

Then Mother read out the French. It began with the words: "La Présence divine est là parmi nous." She was as if addressing all of us. The next sentence, as far as I remember, was: "J'avais une forme d'or plus immense que tout l'univers." Then she went on to say that she found herself in front of a massive door on whose other side was the world. And she heard the words: "The time has come." She heard them in English and not in French. Then she lifted up with her hands a huge hammer of gold and struck one blow upon the door. The door crumbled down. A tremendous flood of light poured out and swept all over the universe.

When Mother had finished reading, I asked to take the paper into my hands and to read it myself so that I might catch better the French. She hesitated just a bit and said, a little shyly and doubtfully: "You'll give it back to me?" "Of course," I replied, laughing. After I returned the paper she remarked: "When I came back from the Supermind, I thought that with so stupendous an outpouring of light everybody would be lying flat. But when I opened my eyes I found everybody sitting quietly and perfectly unconscious of what had happened."

I thanked Mother very much for the act of Grace in her showing me the precious document.¹

K. D. SETHNA
(AMAL KIRAN)

(An Extract from *The Mother: Past-Present-Future* [1977 ed.], pp. 82-88)

1. I did not know at the time what a rare privilege it was to have seen what Mother made public only after four years had passed. The account of her experience was given to the sadhaks on February 29, 1960. As I had understood that she had shown me her account in private, I never breathed a word about it to anybody. I have reason to believe that one or two others had also been told by her of what she had done.

29 FEBRUARY 1956

(During the common meditation on Wednesday)

THIS evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you. I had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine.

As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that “*the time has come*”, and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces.

Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.¹

(CWM, Vol. 15, p. 102)

1. Written in the leap year 1956, this statement was first publicly distributed as the message for 29 February 1960, the first “anniversary” of the Supramental Manifestation upon earth.

SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from the issue of October 2004)

Now, let us see how far anarchism founded on brotherhood can help man along towards his goal. Individualistic democracy laid too much stress on the egoism of the vital and mental man, and socialism was necessary to correct this mistake and bring forward the principle of essential oneness. But it swung round to the other extreme, overstressed the collective ego and sought to sacrifice the individual at the altar of the group. Anarchism lays emphasis on brotherhood and declares all government by man to be an evil. There is a gross violent form of anarchism to which we need not pay any attention here. But philosophic anarchism is gaining strength every day. The human mind is turning towards a free and equal fraternity. The thinker of this school believes that all State government, all social regimentation crushes down the natural good in man. But as long as man needs rigid laws and a controlling authority, there can be no anarchism. As man proceeds towards his goal, an inner law takes the place of outside control. When he arrives at the summit of his climb, there will be no need for State control, man to man will be a brother and all will live in peace and amity. Some say that this is an unattainable ideal. But why should we admit that there is a limit to man's upward trend, why should man stop at the rational intellect? We are assured that a faculty higher than his reason is bound to descend and transform his whole life. But in the meantime we are not to sit idle; we should by our rational effort climb higher and higher towards the hill-top. Philosophic anarchism depends on two ideas—respect for one another's freedom and brotherhood of man. The first is based on reason. But mere regard for the rights of others is not enough. "I shall not interfere with others" is a negative attitude, which cannot solve our difficulty. What is necessary is a positive feeling of love, brotherhood, a readiness to co-operate actively. But how to bring about this state without use of force? For, if there is an appeal to force, total confusion might ensue, destroying society altogether or there might come a retrogression to a rigid socialism. The brotherhood that anarchism calls for is not a rational state. It must be ushered in by a subtle faculty higher than reason. Spiritual anarchism seems to be an immediate panacea for our ills. But its form is as yet vague. About some of its aspects we should be on our guard. It seems to lay stress on asceticism and to belittle early life. We who follow Sri Aurobindo are not to think of destroying our vital force; we seek to destroy nothing, but to divinise every part of ourselves. Our ultimate end is to go up to the spiritual and supra-rational plane, spiritual anarchism seems to give us a glimpse of the bright existence of that plane. Regarding the necessity of this spiritual transformation we have no doubt whatsoever. But we must know what conditions must be fulfilled before it can come about and we must understand the nature of the advent and progress of the spiritual

age. Sri Aurobindo has gone over these points fully in the last three chapters of the book.

Two complementary powers govern our normal life, both individual and social. They are—an implicit central will and a modifying power coming from the idea in mind. Thus the urge of the life force gets a conscious orientation and a conscious method from the mind. Right at the bottom of the climb the direction comes from an automatic and instinctive urge. Higher up, on the mental plane a feeling of discontent and futility led some men to talk of regulating life according to Nature, to put an end to all our ills. The most notable attempt in this direction was that of Nietzsche. His conception of the vital superman suffered from this great defect that it failed to grasp the true law of man's being. Deep down in his nature man is a spiritual being. It is his spirit which, seated in the "lotus" of his heart, has led him through the various stages of evolution from the inconscient beginning to his present plane of rational intelligence. If man is not satisfied with the limitations of his mental state, he has to push forward to the supra-rational plane and not step down to the vital. The true superman is not a vital "asuric" being but a supramental God-man. When Nietzsche says, "We have to become ourselves" or "We have to exceed ourselves," it seems a perfectly sound teaching; but the question is, what is our true self? Again and again has Sri Aurobindo replied that it is our spirit, our soul. When we speak of the superman we do not mean anything abnormal, anything repugnant to our normal manhood. But normal manhood itself is not a thing fixed and rigid. It is only a stage in man's progress. Regarding the superman, Sri Aurobindo says, "the object of a true supermanhood is not exceeding and domination for its own sake but precisely the opening of our normal humanity to something now beyond itself that is yet its own destined perfection." Imperfection is not a thing to be regretted; it is a door to self-exceeding. "Man at his highest is a half-god who has risen up out of the animal Nature... he has started out to be, the whole god." Man seems to us to be a double nature—an animal nature, and along with it a semi-divine nature. The aim of the animal part is to increase vital possession and enjoyment; the aim of the other part is "also to grow, possess and enjoy, but first to possess and enjoy intelligently" by the powers of the mind, and secondly to possess and enjoy not so much vitally and physically, to grow not so much in the outward life as in the true, the good and the beautiful.

A new power of existence, a new soul-power has arisen in man and he is bound to force his whole being to obey it and to reshape his entire life in its mould. This is the true law of his being and he has failed to satisfy it. Consequently the transformation of his life into the Supreme Truth, Good and Beauty is yet far off. Indeed rational man has so far failed to arrive at any decisive turning-point in his progress. The root cause of this failure is that man's implicit central will still resides in his vital, he has not been able to lift it to a higher plane. The higher life is still a thing superimposed on our normal existence—an intruder. The two elements live together but without any understanding, "made perpetually uneasy, uncomfortable and ineffectual by each

other, somewhat like an ill-assorted wife and husband". Man's failure to solve the difficulty of his double nature is largely at the root of his unhappiness. Individuals have attempted compromise and come to a working arrangement by an impoverishment of their vital and physical life. But Sri Aurobindo is emphatic that this sort of make-shift is not transformation. The transformation that is required cannot be brought about by the mind. Life will never submit entirely to the dictates of the intellect be they moral or aesthetic, philosophic or scientific. Life may be repressed for a while, but it is bound to assert itself again. So much so that at times the intellect, giving up all efforts to subdue the vital, enters its service in despair. Some such thing happened in the recent Materialistic Age. Man directed his intellect wholly to the study of Life and Matter, acknowledged that his mind was only an instrument of the other two principles and employed knowledge to bring about their expansion and efficiency. As a result of this, civilised nations busied themselves in a plethoric extension of commerce and a gigantic expansion of factories and armaments. For the indispensable purging of humanity had to come with its terrible orgy of destruction from 1914 to 1918, there was no normal life for man. It was "Kill, Kill" everywhere. Fatigue came but no change of heart, the next two decades passed practically in preparing for a new war; no doubt there was a certain amount of lip-talk but no one believed it. The next world-war arrived in a more ghastly form than the first. Now, at least, has an awakening come? [The article first appeared in *Mother India* in 1951]

The U.N.O. is just now at work trying to tackle a very dangerous situation. The threatened storm may blow over. But real success will depend not on clever manoeuvring, but on our invoking the Highest Truth to our aid. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "We have then to return to the pursuit of an ancient secret... the ideal of the kingdom of God, the secret of the reign of the Spirit over mind, life and body." He attributes the survival of the older Asiatic nations to the fact that they never quite lost hold of this secret. But survival merely to grovel in the dust is no real living. Asia must stir herself. She did not fail in worldly life because she followed a spiritual ideal; she failed because she did not follow it sufficiently, because she did not learn how to make it the master of life. To rest is perilous, we must follow to the end, when the Spirit calls. At the present juncture tinkering is not likely to be helpful. Humanity must try whole-heartedly to rise to a law "that is now abnormal to it until its whole life has been elevated into spirituality". Our centre of living has got to be lifted up to a higher consciousness. The central will implicit in life must be the spiritual will. Therein lies the secret of divine transformation. Hitherto our efforts have been half-hearted under the guidance of our rational mind. To achieve success we must transcend it and become supramental. Man cannot attain perfection by pursuing the round of his physical life, nor can he find it in the wider rounds of his mental life, his perfection lies in the manifestation of his ever-perfect spirit. Sri Aurobindo's words are explicit: "Man's road to spiritual supermanhood will be open when he declares boldly that all he has yet developed, including the intellect... are now no longer sufficient for him,

and that to... set free this greater Light within shall be henceforward his pervading preoccupation." A transformation of this kind from the vital and mental to the spiritual order of life must be achieved in one or many individuals before it can seize effectively the community. The mind of the community grasps things subconsciously at first, or in a confused manner. It is, therefore, only through the individual that the group can arrive at a clear knowledge and formulation. It can, of course, be urged that what emerges in the individual must have existed already in the universal Mind, but he is an indispensable instrument. It is in him, therefore, that all great changes find their first clear effective power. The mass follows but in a very confused fashion. Otherwise mankind would have made a more rapid progress. For a spiritual change, therefore, two conditions have to be fulfilled. There must be one or more individuals able to develop and re-create themselves in the image of the Spirit and to communicate their idea and its power to the mass. And there must be a group mind capable of receiving and assimilating that idea and its power. This combination has not yet happened but is sure to do so some day. So far, some progress, here and there, some important change, has been effected but the decisive change, which alone can re-create man in a diviner image, has not yet been accomplished.

(To be continued)

C. C. DUTT

THE TOSS

You snap a coin into the air
 The Optimist hopes for heads
 The Pessimist votes for tails
 The Cognizant stands afar smiling within,
 Always the winner.

It's only a game
 Every day, each day
 Each moment—a dualistic choice.

ARNAB B. CHOWDHURY

RAMANA MAHARSHI AND SRI AUROBINDO: THE RECONCILIATION OF KAPALI SASTRY

(Continued from the issue of October 2004)

Part Ib

BEFORE we proceed further, we should take a brief look at Sastriar's early background to see how it was but natural that he should feel attracted to Sri Aurobindo's yogic ideals. Sastriar had a strong Tantric background, and he considered himself a Tantric through and through. At the age of five, his father initiated him into Sri Vidya, the purest form of the worship of the Divine Mother. At the age of twenty, he met his first Guru, Kavya Kantha Ganapati Muni, who besides being a scholar, poet, and *ashtavadhani*, was also a Sri Vidya Upasaka and a Mantra Siddha, and under Ganapati Muni's tutelage Sastriar became an adept in Tantra sadhana. Thus he delved very deep into the Tantric lore. His *Sidelights on the Tantra*, first published in 1971, is one of the most valuable studies ever written on the subject.¹

One of the strong attractions for Sastriar was that Sri Aurobindo incorporated in his yoga the truth of Vedanta as also the truth of Tantra with its emphasis on Shakti. Vedanta deals more with the principles and essentials of the divine knowledge; these have been taken bodily in Sri Aurobindo's teachings. Tantra deals more with forms and processes and organised powers, and some of these are also taken up in his yoga in modified forms. Tantra, for example, has the notion of the ascent of the consciousness through the inner and subtler centres of the body; Sri Aurobindo has incorporated this process in its essentials in his concept of trans-formation. Likewise, the truth that nothing can be done except through the force of the Mother is common to Tantra and to Sri Aurobindo's yoga. Finally, Tantra specifies the objects of its spiritual discipline somewhat differently from those specified by the Vedantic yogas—a point we will consider presently in this paper.

Another factor which attracted Sastriar to Sri Aurobindo was the former's interest in the Veda, which dated from his childhood. His association with Vasishtha Ganapati Muni had aroused in him a keen interest in the spiritual, occult and yogic teachings of the Veda behind its ritualistic exterior. Then as he started reading in the pages of the *Arya* the illuminating writings of Sri Aurobindo on the Veda, he was spellbound by them. Sastriar had several questions about the Vedic mantras for which he had not yet found satisfactory answers either in the traditional Indian lore nor in Western scholarship. Sri Aurobindo's writings in the *Arya* contained many clues to these mantras and they also convinced him that Sri Aurobindo could not have written them without a direct experience of these Vedic truths. Sastriar's *magnum opus*, *Siddhanjana*, a commentary on the First Ashtaka of the Rig Veda, follows Sri Aurobindo's lead and explores the psychological and spiritual sides of this ancient body of hymns.

In his Foreword to *Rig Veda Bhashya, Siddhanjana*, we get an interesting insight

into how Sastriar was able to wholeheartedly accept Sri Aurobindo's approach to the Veda without rejecting Vasishtha Muni's method. He mentions that Vasishtha Muni took up stray hymns on various occasions, explained them to his disciples, and taught them to appreciate their grandeur, beauty and wealth. He was very impressed with the Muni's original thinking but the Muni did not write a commentary on even an *aṅuvāka* or a small portion of the Rig Veda. Both Sri Aurobindo and Vasishtha Muni came to extraordinary conclusions about the Vedic Gods and the central Vedic Secret independently, without one knowing the other. But from 1914, when the *Arya* began to appear, Sastriar closely followed Sri Aurobindo's approach to the study of the Rig Veda and wholeheartedly accepted it. He adds, "It is not that I rejected Vasishtha Muni's method in order to accept Sri Aurobindo's."

It would seem that a certain easy accommodation of right with rival right is possible for people like him. He did not accept Sri Aurobindo's approach to the Veda because he thought that Kavya Kantha's was wrong just as he did not accept Sri Aurobindo's spiritual ideal because he thought that the Maharshi's was wrong.

As we have seen already, it was Kavya Kantha who took Sastriar to Ramana Maharshi. Kavya Kantha was himself a Tantric and a *mantrapāsaka*. He was Rishilike in his life and was cast more in the mould of Sri Aurobindo than in that of the Maharshi. What must have attracted him to the Maharshi was that he was such a superlative, living example of Jivanmukti. Sastriar has hinted at this in a passage we have already quoted above. He says that the "personal attraction" of the Maharshi "was irresistible". But he found the Maharshi's teaching too direct, immediate, seemingly simple, and went on to add that he felt that "it was not practicable" to people circumstanced like him. In another place, he says he had an initial hesitation about the Maharshi because he feared "the advice of renunciation", and so he met the Maharshi after "repeated hints from Nayana [Vasishtha Muni] for four years". But the impact of the presence of the Maharshi on him was very profound. "The very first day," Sastriar has said, "wrought a remarkable change in my being and no amount of *tapas* or *japa* could have given me an indubitable knowledge of the truth of spiritual life that the Maharshi gave me." In fact, in the same passage Sastriar makes a statement that shows why there was no conflict in him between the ideals of the Maharshi and Sri Aurobindo. For him the reconciliation of the two ideals lay in his own personal realisation expressed in these words: "In fact, I could not have come to Sri Aurobindo, if I had not got the faith awakened in the spiritual life which I got after seeing the Maharshi."²²

Now let us return to the question of how Sastriar reconciled the two different teachings in intellectual terms. It is obvious that the Maharshi and Sri Aurobindo began their spiritual quest from different starting points. For the Maharshi, it was finding freedom from the fear of death. As he has told us, when he was about sixteen years of age, one day the fear of death possessed him, driving him desperately to seek refuge somewhere. In this crisis he realised as if in a flash that when the body perishes the "I" does not perish with it. He went on looking deeper and deeper into

himself seeking the source of this sense of “I” which was fear-stricken. Soon he found that his “I” was drawn in by something tremendous, like a mountain of magnet attracting to itself a piece of steel. This surface “I” was soon lost but there arose another “I”, the Parent Self, the original Being, the source and support of the surface man. Since then, it was this supreme and real Self that took charge of his personal self and outer being, his mental activities and his very bodily movements. Maharshi used to say that his sadhana was finished in twenty minutes, in less than half an hour. After this, there was no more sadhana for him. It took him a period of 8 to 10 years to get established in this state at all times and under all circumstances.

Sri Aurobindo was an indifferent agnostic in his youth in England and his early life in Baroda. Then he became interested in India’s cultural and spiritual tradition. But his primary interest was always the freedom struggle; his country, its freedom and the recovery of its ancient greatness was the one passion that consumed him. He took to yoga for a most practical reason. “I wanted Yoga,” he said, “to help me in my political work, for inspiration and power and capacity.”³ As he proceeded with his yoga, the scope of his work widened; it was, he wrote, “...for the country, for the world, finally for the Divine”.⁴ As early as 1915, in a letter written to the Mother, he declared the great aim of his spiritual endeavour: “Heaven we have possessed, but not the earth; but the fullness of the Yoga is to make, in the formula of the Veda, ‘Heaven and Earth equal and one’.”⁵ This emphasis on earth and bringing perfection to life on earth always remained the goal of his yoga. In a statement made in 1935, he said:

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

At this point, it is necessary to examine briefly how the objectives of his yoga changed as Sri Aurobindo progressed in his own yoga, although its central focus remained the same.

The common purpose of all yoga is Mukti, the liberation of the soul of man from its present natural ignorance and limitation, and its union with the highest self and Divinity. For most yogas this is the whole and final object. The Tantric system goes beyond liberation and includes the full perfection and enjoyment of spiritual power as part of its aim. Even that which the Gita enjoins all seekers to reject, *bhoga*, or enjoyment, the Tantra does not reject. After all, as Sastriar notes, the world exists for the *bhoga* of the Ishwara or the Ishwari and man at his highest, representing as he does an effective portion of Him or Her, must enjoy the *bhoga*, conscious of his part as the vehicle and centre of the Enjoyer. It means a tremendous labour of discipline and self-exceeding, in one’s own personal and inner life, and in the outer and collective

life—a continuous action, *tantra*, on so many planes.⁷

It should be noted that although Sri Aurobindo recognises *bhoga* as one of the aims of his yoga, he is not referring to ordinary worldly enjoyment but to the essential Ananda of existence.

One of the clearest formulations of the objects of Sri Aurobindo's yoga is the *sañsiddhi catuṣṭaya*, one of the seven quaternaries⁸ (*sapta catuṣṭaya*) of Sri Aurobindo's own spiritual practice. These quaternaries or tetrads were given to him soon after he arrived in Pondicherry, and they formed the framework of his yogic sadhana until about 1926, the year of one of his major siddhis. The *sañsiddhi catuṣṭaya* reads: *śuddhir, muktir, bhuktiḥ, siddhir iti yoga catuṣṭayam*.⁹ Shuddhi is purification, Mukti is liberation, Bhukti is enjoyment, and Siddhi is perfection. These four perfections constitute the outline around which the first three chapters of "The Yoga of Self-Perfection", part four of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, are organised.

Sri Aurobindo puts this succinctly as follows:

The human soul's individual liberation and enjoyment of union with the Divine in spiritual being, consciousness and delight must always be the first object of the Yoga; its free enjoyment of the cosmic unity of the Divine becomes a second object; but out of that a third appears, the effectuation of the meaning of the divine unity with all beings by a sympathy and participation in the spiritual purpose of the Divine in humanity. The individual Yoga then turns from its separateness and becomes a part of the collective Yoga of the divine Nature in the human race. The liberated individual being, united with the Divine in self and spirit, becomes in his natural being a self-perfecting instrument for the perfect outflowing of the Divine in humanity.¹⁰

Thus for Sri Aurobindo the individual yoga turns from its separate personal achievement and becomes part of the "collective yoga of the divine Nature in the human race".

As Richard Hartz and others have noted, we find a distinct change in the formulation of the aims of Sri Aurobindo's yoga after the siddhi of 24th November 1926. Until 1926, Sri Aurobindo had not made a clear distinction between the Supermind and the Overmind. Once this distinction was made, he placed great importance on the Supermind and what its descent would achieve for mankind. Therefore in his later writings we see a different formulation of the objects of his yoga.

Sri Aurobindo realised that in the terrestrial evolution the Overmind descent by itself would not be able to transform wholly the Inconscience; the light and power of the Overmind were not unitary, plenary or potent enough. Only the Supramental consciousness is entirely free from the Ignorance which is the foundation of our present evolutionary existence. Only the Supermind has the power to transform the Inconscient and create the new world, the Supramental world in its integrality. After this was realised, the efforts of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were focussed

on bringing down this higher spiritual power into the world. The descent of the Supermind not only into mind and life, but even into Matter, into the body, began to be emphasised in subsequent formulations of the objects of yoga.

The Maharshi's yoga, as we have seen, addresses the problem of the individual while Sri Aurobindo's yoga addresses the problem of man in his total being and of the meaning of his existence on earth. For the individual, problems arise because the ego in him has separated itself from the Supreme and Real Self within, and the sadhana addresses this problem. Liberation, Mukti, lies in the loss of the ego. Thus the Jivanmukta has solved his individual problem, the problem of Ignorance.

For Sri Aurobindo, liberation from the bonds of ignorance and ego is only the first stage of the Siddhi of the yoga he pursued. The central problem he grappled with concerns earth-existence and earth-delight. It is related to man because man is a part of earth-life's product, part and parcel of the consciousness evolving on earth.

If Brahman is Sachchidananda, why is it that this earth-existence which is in the Brahman is yet a home of darkness and ignorance and struggle and suffering? Why is it not ever-blissful and perfect? This is the main problem to be tackled here. Getting rid of the bonds of ego and realising the supreme Truth here in embodied life solves only part of the problem envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. The problem of darkness, ignorance and suffering for earth does not disappear just because you have found a solution for it in your individual life. Sastriar has explained this problem in his writings and provided the necessary Vedantic background following Sri Aurobindo's lead.¹¹

The suffering and darkness on earth can only be a temporary phase in the vastness of the Divine Existence, because in its present condition, it cannot be co-existent with Brahman for all time. Although man is now earth's product at its highest, he is the end product of a long process during which various potentialities locked up in Matter were gradually released. This gradual release is generally called evolution. Life evolved out of Matter, and Mind evolved out of Life, and Mind is not the last term of evolution, there is in man the urge to evolve to a still higher principle. This higher principle, which Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind, will represent a more powerful action of the Divine on earth and establish here peace, power, light and love. In other words, the Supermind will manifest the Divine's perfection here to a fuller degree than at present by bringing about a total transformation of the various elements that constitute our limited egoistic individual being.

What is the source of this urge in man to evolve to a higher principle? The earth-spirit is something from the Divine which has entered the earth-nature, with all its potential. As Sri Aurobindo puts it in *Savitri*:

Our life is a holocaust of the Supreme.
The great World-Mother by her sacrifice
Has made her soul the body of our state;
Accepting sorrow and unconsciousness

Divinity's lapse from its own splendours wove
The many-patterned ground of all we are.¹²

This explains the incessant urge in the earth-nature to bring out elements which are latent in her. This is how Life evolved out of Matter and Mind out of Life. Since the Mind is not the last term of her growth, there is the urge in man to evolve a still higher principle. This higher principle of consciousness will be a spiritual consciousness that is divine in its nature and functioning.

As I have mentioned above—which of these two ideals, Sri Aurobindo's or the Maharshi's, has a greater appeal to an aspirant, depends on the inner call an aspirant has. In Sastriar's own life there was a reconciliation of these two ideals, although his inner being seemed to have a natural bent towards Sri Aurobindo's ideal. As V. S. Sethuraman¹³ has pointed out, Sastriar was one of the Vibhuti born to spread Sri Aurobindo's message and insights by relating them to our tradition. The true reconciliation of such seemingly different spiritual goals can be made only on the basis of spiritual experience. But Sastriar had no difficulty in reconciling them even on the level of a purely intellectual understanding. He was primarily a spiritual sadhak with his life devoted to sadhana of various kinds from Sri Vidya upasana to yoga practised under the direct guidance first of the Maharshi and then of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It was this background of spiritual living and experience that enabled him to be a such a staunch follower and exponent of Sri Aurobindo's teachings and yoga without being disloyal to the Maharshi.

(To be continued)

MANGESH NADKARNI

Notes and References

1. Now included in *The Book of Lights-1*, Volume 1 of Collected Works of T. V. Kapali Sastry.
2. *The Book of Lights-3*, Collected Works of T. V. Kapali Sastry, Vol. 3, p. 242.
3. *Talks with Sri Aurobindo-IV* (recorded by Nirodbaran), p. 277.
4. Sri Aurobindo: *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 53.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 424-25.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-45.
7. *The Book of Lights-1*, Collected Works of T. V. Kapali Sastry, Vol. 1, pp. 289-90.
8. Sri Aurobindo: *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 10, p. 23.
9. The full explanation of this tetrad is not found in any of the versions of the seven tetrads. There is a scribal version of these tetrads in which we have some explanation of a part of this tetrad but there again only Shuddhi and Mukti are explained briefly but not the latter two, namely, Bhukti and Siddhi.
10. Sri Aurobindo: *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, pp. 613-14.
11. See "Jivanmukta and the Superman" in *The Book of Lights-2*, Collected Works of T. V. Kapali Sastry, Vol. 2.
12. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 28, p. 99.
13. V. S. Sethuraman: "A Vibhuti" in *Versatile Genius* (Commemoration Volume on the occasion of the Birth Centenary of Sri T. V. Kapali Sastriar), 1986, p. 200.

BETWEEN THE ARRIVAL AND THE DEPARTURE

(Continued from the issue of October 2004)

(Volume II)

FROM its very first issue, the *Bijali* became a very popular magazine. We sold out two thousand copies in just two days. The public demand for the *Bijali* kept increasing which was a good omen. But it was not long before we were faced with a serious problem. Some members of the Congress party showed their displeasure in a concrete manner. The orthodox Gandhi-ites purchased some fifty copies of the *Bijali* from the hawkers and made a bonfire near Goldighi. This was because almost all the issues of the *Bijali* carried criticisms of the Non-violent Non-cooperation Policy of Gandhi-ji. Most damning were the biting satires dressed in the inimitable sweet and sour language which Upendranath Bandopadhyay dished out regularly in his column *Unapanchashi*. In his essay, "The Authentic Ramayan", he wrote that after the abduction of Sita, when Hanuman threatened to tear off Ravana's ten heads, Sri Ramachandra, deeply disturbed, said, "Hanuman, I have no objection to your verbal duel with Ravana. I may even permit you to brandish your tail. But I draw the line at your idea of tearing off Ravana's heads in a non-sattwic manner. For your edification, I shall now show you how I rescue Sita with the help of my soul-force." Saying this Sri Ramachandra had his ablution in the sacred Godavari, then putting on pure white khaddar, he sat facing the South and determined to make Ravana repent his evil deeds and restore Sita, he started uttering mantras.... Much time passed. Fasting took its toll on Rama's face and body but still he continued to pray. Hanuman became impatient and persuaded Lakshmana to tie a bundle of straw to his tail and light it. He then set Lanka on fire and rescued Sita. When Sita stood before Rama with a glass of lemon juice, he opened his lotus eyes and, smiling, told Hanuman, "Do you now see the power of the soul-force!"... Secretly Hanuman warned Lakshmana not to breathe a word to Rama about how Sita was actually rescued, for, said he, "If my Lord learns that his soul-force has been adulterated with violence, he may declare this rescue unethical and order me to take her back to Lanka!"

*

One morning the famous journalist, Amal Home, paid us a visit with a message from Rabindranath Tagore. The poet read the *Narayan* and the *Bijali* regularly and now he was eager to meet Upendranath Bandopadhyay in person. Upen-da was very reluctant to meet such a great man, but after much coaxing he agreed and accompanied Amal Home to Tagore's house in Jorasanko. Although he would not say much about the meeting, some time later he received a letter from Rabindranath Tagore himself,

which told us everything. It was customary for the well-known publishers, such as Arya Publishing House, to send complimentary copies of all their publications to Rabindranath Tagore. The poet had enjoyed Upen-da's *Sinn Fein*, *Autobiography of an Exile*, *The Current Problems* and *The Letters of Anantananda*. He wrote to Upen-da:

Shantiniketan

Aum

I have read many of your books and articles—I have liked them all. It gives me great joy that I hold the same opinion as you. But what is more important is that you are a powerful writer. Your emergence in the Literature of Bengal fills me with new hope. The courage of your thought and the power of your pen make your work memorable.

I am grateful to the management of Arya Publishing House for sending me all these books.... Here I would like to tell you that Aurobindo's *Letter from Pondicherry* has been of great help to me.

Shri Rabindranath Tagore
2nd Ashwin 1328 (1921)

*

Barin-da had gone to Pondicherry in the month of January 1921 and had not yet come back. Both Upen-da and Abinash-da had also visited Pondicherry. At the beginning of February, Hrishi-da (Hrishikesh Kanjilal) asked me if I would like to go to Pondicherry. I don't have to tell you that I was very eager. But at that time Upen-da and I were doing all the editorial work of the two magazines—*Bijali* and *Narayan*. Preparing the matter for the press, proof-reading etc. were our responsibility. Sometimes I had even to go and work in the press. Hrishi-da kept the accounts and Bibhuti Sarkar looked after the advertisements.

When Upen-da heard about our plan, he told me, “Barin is in Pondicherry. Now if you too go away, who will run the magazines?”

I said, “I'll be gone only for a month. Please manage it somehow.”

Upen-da was really annoyed, “You and I are the main writers. Just explain to me how I shall manage all by myself.”

I could not gainsay the logic of his argument. Feeling greatly disappointed I told Hrishi-da why I could not go with him. Hrishi-da assured me that he would get Upen-da to let me go for a month. They were intimate friends and Upen-da could not refuse him.

Finally Upen-da agreed to give me a month's leave but he repeated again and again, “Remember, not one day more than a month.” I now wrote to Pondicherry,

asking for Sri Aurobindo's permission to visit him. Barin-da replied to my letter to the effect that he had obtained Sej-da's (that was how Barin-da called him, Sri Aurobindo being his third eldest brother) permission and that I could come to Pondicherry. Hrishi-da and I now purchased our railway tickets and informed Barin-da of our expected time of arrival.

It was a long journey, over a thousand miles by train. On the one hand I was tremendously excited to meet Sri Aurobindo but on the other there was much trepidation in my heart—such a great man, so far beyond my reach! How shall I stand before him? What shall I say to him?

On the morning of the third day our train stopped at the Madras Central station, bringing our long journey to its end. As we alighted from our compartment, laden with our bag and baggage, a gentleman greeted us in English, "Are you coming from Calcutta and going to Pondicherry?"

When we answered in the affirmative, he said, "I've received a letter from Pondicherry. Come with me to my house, for now. You must be very tired after your long journey. Your train to Pondicherry will leave only at night. After you have had a good rest at my place, I myself shall take you to the Egmore station and put you on the train."

He was Mr. Nambiar, a pleader of the Madras High Court. He told us that every week, on Saturday he accompanied the famous Madras High Court barrister, Mr. Duraiswamy Iyengar to Pondicherry and after spending Sunday with Sri Aurobindo, returned to Madras on Monday morning to attend court.

Mr. Nambiar's hospitality extended to total strangers both charmed and surprised us and made us aware of the magic spell cast by the name of Sri Aurobindo. After our refreshing bath, food and rest, we saw Mr. Duraiswamy in the afternoon. A tall, well-built gentleman, with a broad forehead shining with intelligence, Mr. Duraiswamy had left court early specially to meet us. His words, gestures, sense of humour, everything indicated that he was an extraordinary person.

While introducing Mr. Duraiswamy to us, Mr. Nambiar said that among his many talents, Mr. Duraiswamy had a trained singing voice. He was an exponent of Carnatic music. Pointing at me Hrishi-da said, "Our Nolini too is a singer." At once Duraiswamy requested me to sing. I tried to get out of it by saying that I sang only Bengali songs.

Mr. Duraiswamy asked me, "Do you know Rabindranath Tagore's *Jana gana mana adhinayaka*? I can follow that song."

Although at that time it was not that well-known, I knew the song and sang it.

In the course of our conversation, Mr. Duraiswamy told us that he too had joined the nationalist movement. The young men of Madras were all inspired by the speeches of Shri Bepin Chandra Pal. "Nobody could speak like him," said Mr. Duraiswamy. "His powerful words played on our heart strings." When they heard from me that Hrishi-da was one of the accused in the Alipore Bomb Case and that during the trial

he had spent one year in prison with Sri Aurobindo, before being exiled in the Andamans, both Mr. Doraiswamy and Mr. Nambiar became very curious to know all about his experiences in the Alipore Jail as well as in the Cellular Jail in Port Blair. We spent a very pleasant evening reliving those eventful days. After giving us a sumptuous dinner, they took us to the Egmore station and saw us off.

Pondicherry was a French possession in those days. The last station of British India was Chinnabahusamudram, where the British government maintained a Customs Office. Here all Third Class passengers had to get down from the train with their luggage and were thoroughly searched for any contraband. But the passengers travelling in Second or First Class were spared this indignity. They could remain in the train. The customs officers themselves came to their compartments and conducted the search. On the return journey too the same procedure was followed, only this time it was to prevent the smuggling of foreign goods into British India. Since Pondicherry was a free port, foreign goods were duty-free and consequently, inexpensive and freely available here.

To save our precious resources, we had journeyed from Howrah to Madras in Third Class. But now, we travelled in Second Class to avoid the harassment of being put in a pound like cattle. We reached Pondicherry safely the next morning and found that there were only two modes of transport available to take us to our destination, 41, Rue François Martin: the rickshaw, drawn by a man or the Push-push, pushed by a man. We had never seen the Push-push before in our life. Hungry for a new experience, we chose the Push-push. It was a wheeled carriage, pushed from behind by a man or men, but the steering was left to the passenger. For this purpose an iron rod with a grip was provided. It was connected to the axle and rose from the floor of the carriage to the level of the passenger enabling him to guide the vehicle, left or right. I held the rudder and without any mishap reached Sri Aurobindo's house. On entering we found Sri Aurobindo and Barin-da before us standing in the courtyard. We bent down and touched Sri Aurobindo's feet. The way Sri Aurobindo greeted Hrishi-da, dispelled all my nervousness at one stroke. It was the intimate light-hearted banter that friends use to address one another. The reason for this familiarity was not far to seek. Hrishi-da had spent one whole year with Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Jail, and so they knew each other very well. I knew Hrishi-da had a good sense of humour, but this kind of witticism from Sri Aurobindo was beyond my dreams.

The first impression I had of Sri Aurobindo was of a very simple man, a little dark, of medium build, with long hair, beard and moustache. He had a very calm, soothing expression on his face and his great, bright eyes always seemed to look into the beyond. He was simply dressed in a clean, white dhoti and wore a pair of chappals.

N^o 41, Rue François Martin was a two-storeyed building and housed, apart from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, only eight or ten people. They were: Nolini Kanto Gupta, Suresh Chandra Chakraborty, Amrita, Saurin Basu, Satyen (Bindhyeshwari Prasad), Arun Chandra Dutta, Barin-da and two ladies, the Mother's English com-

panion Miss Hodgson who later came to be known as Datta and Nolini Kanto Gupta's newly wedded wife, Indulekha Devi. Hrishi-da and I were given a room on the ground floor.

Here I must mention that at that time Sri Aurobindo did not use the word "Sri" before his name. He was just Aurobindo Ghose and the Mother, Madame Mirra Richard.

Soon it was time for the midday meal. The dishes were both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. We sat down in two rows with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and had our lunch. Only, the Mother and Miss Hodgson sat a little apart because they were vegetarian. Naturally I was a little surprised because I thought that in Europe everybody ate meat. But then I learnt that even when she was in France, the Mother did not touch meat or fish.

After lunch I rested for a while. But all the time I felt the presence of Sri Aurobindo in my heart like an indwelling god. It was a most wonderful experience. Thoughts of all kinds, many questions rose in my mind. Various chapters of the history of my life appeared there as on a cinema screen: the backward village where I was born and where I grew up, my involvement in the national movement, my coming in contact with Barin-da. It was as though an unseen power was constantly at work to bring me finally to the feet of Sri Aurobindo. My heart sang: *Who knows where, along which path, your compassion leads us? I open my eyes and find that you have brought me to your own door.*

Every afternoon tea was served at four o'clock. Sri Aurobindo then met the disciples on the first floor verandah and talked to them for some time. He sat on a chair on one side of a table and the disciples sat facing him, also on chairs. Only the Mother sat on the floor at his feet. On that very first day, he asked me a few questions about ordinary, personal matters, but I felt as though he had accepted me.

In these afternoon sessions all sorts of subjects were discussed: religion, politics, social affairs, literature, aesthetics etc. In those days Gandhi-ji's pet idea of non-violent non-cooperation was very much in the news. The Mahatma had given his assurance that if he got one crore of rupees, within a year he would usher in self-government in India. The Tilak Swaraj Fund had been launched. One of us asked Sri Aurobindo what he thought of this assurance. Sri Aurobindo laughed and said, "It is sheer madness to even think that at the price of a mere ten million rupees India's freedom can be gained in just one year. The usefulness of Gandhi's movement is to awaken the feeling of nationalism in the masses."

(To be continued)

NOLINIKANTO SARKAR

(Translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original Bengali, *Asa Jaoar Majhkhane.*)

MEANING OF BIRTH AND QUEST IN SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of October 2004)

III

The Quest

IN its shortness, structural simplicity and bareness of details, Canto Three bears an innocuously deceptive appearance. The reader is often tempted to move over hurriedly to the richly laid out grandeur of the next canto. But a patient pause here in the simple undulating terrains of the Call can be unexpectedly rewarding. This canto puts forward an unobtrusive recapitulation of facts that make Savitri's descent possible. It is of significant note that it is Aswapati who receives the Call first and transmits it on to Savitri. The father is also the guru. It is in response to Aswapati's long and arduous *tapasya* for progeny that Savitri is born to him. *Savitri*, likewise, came to Sri Aurobindo as the boon-key to the riddle of human existence that had kept him much preoccupied in his earlier poems and plays: "But like a shining answer from the gods / Approached through sun-bright spaces Savitri."¹

Aswapati's childlessness symbolises the failure of the human race to bring forth the Real, to fructify in any meaningful manner. It is earth's anguish and pain at the failure of her imperfect sons that become articulate in Aswapati's aspiration and call forth the divine intervention of Savitri's birth—"A world's desire compelled her mortal birth."² She comes to confront Death, to bring to earth her absolute and final deliverance from mortality and ignorance. She is the incarnation of love, but a love that comes armed with divine strength and wisdom. Therefore she needs no help, as did her predecessors, Pururavus and Ruru, from various gods and goddesses: these divine beings are her own emanations.

As a solitary coil sings untired of its one love-note on a fateful morn that seemed to come burdened with life's riches, earth's longings become in-gathered and find speech in a Voice from higher spheres. The transcendent and the cosmic are one: "What is there is also here; what is not here is also not there," says the Upanishad. Released from a sense-mind entrapped in the incessant demands of daily cares and mundane matters, Aswapati can lend a ear to the mutterings of the earth, the source of universal Sorrow and the root of our existential angst. This is the first Awareness, the base of all others, the first of the Gita's eighteen-rung-ladder of Yoga, the *Vishada-Yoga*: "Where but to think is to be full of sorrow." But the awareness of sorrow brings also the concomitant birth of Compassion, the finger pointing a way out.

The Voice that speaks to Aswapati is akin to the voice that Moses heard on the

Mount of Sinai, the voice that ever speaks to man in the silences of his being exhorting him to rise above his limited self and be the ungarbed entity within. It begins by shaking man from his torpor:

O petty adventurers in an infinite world
 And prisoners of a dwarf humanity,
 How long will you tread the circling tracks of mind
 Around your little self and petty things?³

First the whip of chastisement to wake him from “the Inconscient’s night”, then the exhortation urging him to see deep within his secret Truth:

A Seer, a strong Creator, is within,
 The immaculate Grandeur broods upon your days,
 Almighty powers are shut in Nature’s cells.⁴

But to scale those unreachd heights, to bring forth his potentials, man must first understand the nature of his present existence. His glimmering torch of mind is less than a half awakening from the torpor of inconscience. The world he watches through this mind’s lens is a fiction, an entrapment of illusion: he looks “at images and not at Truth”, “The great Illusion wraps him in its veils”. But Sri Aurobindo is a poet of hope, not of despair. His is a vision that pierces the darkness and sees beyond. The evolution of man into a higher being, his golden future, is inevitable, assured, a thing decreed. The Voice embodying an utter certitude shall speak, therefore:

Yet shall the godhead grow within your hearts,
 You shall awake into the spirit’s air
 And feel the breaking walls of mortal mind...
 And blow your conch-shells at the Eternal’s gate.⁵

But in the meanwhile, man—the transitional being, the author “of earth’s high change”, has to bear the daunting task of crossing “the dangerous spaces of the soul”. It is not a gift to be given lightly: the child must grow into man and win it the hard way. None of our defences are admissible. Our glorious achievements are false counters that will not carry us a step forward. Our glorification of history, our religious adoration of great men is nothing but our refusal to see the Fire that burns untended in the heart within. No, a Dhritarashtra will not do! One must rise to the awareness that what is out there is also here. Speaking in a different context, Blake said: All scriptures and all great poetry have been written by one person—the Holy Ghost.

But dim in human hearts the ascending fire,
 The invisible Grandeur sits unworshipped there;
 Man sees the Highest in a limiting form
 Or looks upon a Person, hears a Name.⁶

Not just this; no less stand condemned all our poetry, philosophy, wisdom and passion to ephemeral insignificance: "The sages ponder in unsubstantial light, / The poets lend their voice to outward dreams."

But as the Voice finishes on a rather lamenting note, "The gods are still too few in mortal frames", there approaches Savitri "like a shining answer from the gods". She is the answer to earth's aspiration, she is the vessel that the heavens need. Aswapati looks at his daughter and knows that she alone can change man's destiny. In that ingathered state he can descry the occult truth of his daughter:

This wonder of the divine Artist's make
 Carved like a nectar-cup for thirsty gods,
 This breathing Scripture of the Eternal's joy,...
 Under that moon-gold forehead's dreaming breadth
 Were seas of love and thought that held the world...⁷

She is the Creatrix herself who has projected the universe in her heart of love. As if this epiphany is not enough, a further revelation points out that what he watches is not a human face of his daughter but "large and brooding depths whence Love / Regarded him across the straits of mind..."⁸

Aswapati, aware of that which is hidden to Savitri herself, enunciates her mission and her need of a companion soul who will bring fruition to that mission. The beloved remains incomplete and inarticulate without the lover who completes and fulfils her. Savitri needs Satyavan, the son of God by the body of earth, the ground on which to fight man's battle, the perfected material embodiment in which to actualise her dreams of divine magnificence. Aswapati, therefore, asks Savitri to go out and find her own mate: "Depart where love and destiny call your charm." This is the word that awakens her to the meaning and purpose of her life. She has strength enough in herself and is amply protected by Powers from behind to go alone on her search. Aswapati's words act as mantra and Savitri immediately realises her potential and her mission. The royal palace awakes next morning to find her gone on her search.

A quest is not always a going after the Holy Grail. It is something woven in the essence of our existential matrix. Whatever be man's chosen field, it implies a choice of that which he deems his best or the one that brings him his highest fulfilment. If it be petty, the chicken can't be blamed for not soaring higher! But "If all time is eternally present," to quote Eliot, then all time, the whole of history, needs to be explored and tested before one can find the crux of one's Issue. Savitri's quest takes her through villages, cities, and monasteries nestling in the vast tracts of Nature: a more precise

geography of the history of human endeavour is not possible.

But before setting out on life's quest, one needs to become familiar with his travelling gear: the universality of self, the unbroken karmic chain, the guardian powers that are also the keepers of law and unerring accountants of karmas. Canto Four brings a larger initiation to Savitri and plunges straight into the wide sweep of an all-engulfing conscious search: "The world-ways opened before Savitri." The student must leave school and test his learning in the concrete actualities of life. "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy." Savitri leaves the sanctuary of her royal palace to "confront Heaven's question, life".

The next morning as she sets out on her quest, "A deeper consciousness welled up in her: / [...] Till the whole destiny of mankind was hers." Thou art man, and for man thou seekest. The game runs through many lives, through the whole of human history. The little self does not matter, a personal salvation is not important. The first lesson that life teaches Savitri is that she is not here on earth for the first time. She has been here before: the whole wide world is a remembered scene—"A citizen of many scenes and climes, / Each soil and country it has made its home..." The psychic being is individual as well as universal. Each birth is a continuation of a journey left incomplete. Though everything seems strange, nothing is alien. Much later, in Book VII, when Savitri asks bewildered a host of gods and goddesses the way to her soul, pat comes the answer: "O Savitri, from thy hidden soul we come."⁹ From the soul has this wide world emanated: the world of mind, no less the world of matter. It is thy own image thou watchest! She looks at faces and stars and sky and a memory of many past lives wells up in her:

She seemed to her remembering witness soul
To trace again a journey often made.¹⁰

Man does not walk alone on this earth. The universe is a single whole: the separation of the walls of body, or of nations and races, is neither valid nor tenable. One is the Real and Many his infinite faces; the division is false and unreal. Each man wears a different face of Man, and Man himself another face of God.

Man brings with him at his birth not only a load of accumulated karmas, a storyline woven through many forgotten selves, but also the guardian powers that guard and guide his growth. If "even in his casual steps they intervene", what is there for him to worry about and be afraid of? There is nothing in life without a meaning and purpose, but all together merge to lead to a many-coloured symphony. Of course, this is no mere determinism:

Upon her silent heights she was aware
Of a calm Presence throned above her brows
Who saw the goal and chose each fateful curve...¹¹

The godhead sitting at the height of our being and calmly watching this varied phenomenon is our own true self in its purity and splendour. It is us and no other who intervenes and acts from behind and cancels or suffers the many turbid longings and pursuits of our phenomenal being trapped or wallowing in the mire. Man is not his body alone, nor alone a phenomenal being. He is Spirit writing with life a creative history of great significance: "Nothing we think or do is void or vain."

Thus everything, our birth and purpose and destiny, is "prefigured" and part of "a foreseen design". Our various destinies are the variegated ways in which the Divine tests his issues with his shadow, Death. Savitri is the ultimate test that He has put forth to confront fate and death, a determinism challenging another determinism. It sounds like a paradox, but paradox is sometimes the only key to a mystical utterance.

Savitri's quest takes her through the whole gamut of human existence. She passes through cities, the signposts of civilisation in its full glory, and hamlets and villages, the crude early foundations of that great achievement. The coarse, half-evolved rustic nature as well as the pompous vanity of urban life is summarily dismissed as being nowhere near an authentic seeking. She moves on to sojourn a greater length of time in the virgin silences of the primordial earth, the beautiful, vast tracts of Nature bringing to birth the stirrings of bliss and light. The pattern of lines given to each—cities, 17; villages, 6; Nature, 168—is in itself a telling commentary.

The royal palaces, symbolic of an urban way of life, are seen slumbering between banks of sleep where only dimly can creep in the psychic light. To see that light burning bright in her home of truth one must move away from "this thinking creature's burdened hours" and his pompous insignificance to "free and griefless spaces... not yet perturbed by human joys and fears". Long back, in 1908-09, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Not in the petty circle of cities
 Cramped by your doors and your walls I dwell;
 Over me God is blue in the welkin,
 Against me the wind and the storm rebel.¹²

Once again he invites us to join him "in wind-stirred grass-lands" and "rough-browed hills" to meet the chariot of the golden bride. Here time stands still and one awakens into a realm of light, of silences behind life. Released from the strife of division, mind falls quiet and feels a presence and power that nurses all forms of life. In this immortal world of spirit which is at once a heaven somewhere on this earth, one can meet king-sages and seers, hermits and poets, their grave disciples and seekers, and also the king-children who are here to receive their god-like stamp and to mature as future leaders of humanity. This is the world where various arts of authentic living are mastered and taught: the art of loosening the knots of imprisoning mind, of communion with Eternity and oneness with the Divine, of a life drenched in bliss and open to promptings of the Word:

Carrying the splendour that has lit the suns,
 They sang Infinity's names and deathless powers
 In metres that reflect the moving worlds,
 Sigh's sound-waves breaking from the soul's great deeps.¹³

The poem in treating at some length the highest planes reached by man in his mystical-aesthetic communion with Nature gives indeed a place of honour to these planes but finds them also too short of its desired mark. In this self-wrapt blissful eternity of Being, misperceived sometimes by the earthly nature as a land of Lotos-Eaters, the earth and the whole material universe appear no more than the flutterings of an unnecessary bad dream in a tiny corner of its eternal Vast.

Savitri moved among these "meditation's seats" and partook of the joy and bliss which the greatest of ascetics, seers and sages poured on the toiling world. But she fails to meet her mate in these world-denying silences. Sri Aurobindo's is a vision of world-affirmation and Savitri is here to transform this world into the image of its own inherent truth-light and not to shun and leave it unredeemed. Accordingly, her mate must be the one who is at once a king, a world-ruler and a seer of Truth, in short, a "communicant and prophet and lover and king". Savitri must leave behind both cities and ashrams, must go beyond the two negations: the materialist's denial and the refusal of the ascetic, go beyond all one-sided approaches to life and discover a greater and larger synthesis.

Both Aswapati and Savitri in their inseparable unity with the anguish and aspiration of the earth seek something other than the all-blissful land of an eternal Vrindavan. Others, seeing a victorious predominance of Falsehood in the dynamics of earth-nature, prefer to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Savitri refuses to concede victory to ignorance, falsehood and death. She is here to battle out earth's deliverance, not shun her. It is irrelevant to discuss whether Aswapati and Savitri are greater than those that came before them, but they certainly are different and new.

Savitri's quest demands a further search for a Truth not yet realised on this earth. She must leave this land of historical truth and venture into unknown fields. Passing through mountains, plains, deserts and rare human habitats Savitri travels on:

Still unaccomplished was the fateful quest;
 Still she found not the one predestined face
 For which she sought amid the sons of men.¹⁴

The key to Savitri's quest will have to wait till her finding of Satyavan in the next Book.

Savitri, according to Professor Nadkarni, “was born out of Sri Aurobindo’s concern for mankind and its future; it delineates the precise nature of the crisis mankind is facing and shows the way to resolve it.”¹⁵ If “The Book of Birth and Quest” can rouse in us the certitude of our possibilities for such a birth and make us even dimly aware of the nature of the quest ahead, our labour of reading this Book will stand amply rewarded. But a reading of text can never be a substitute for the text. At best, it can be a goading or a charmed invitation by the critic to lead his readers to the real thing. He is counting his catch and showing you his jewels. But you must not stop at the finger; go for the moon, for the treasure itself, and find your own catch!

All can be done if the God-touch is there.¹⁶

(Concluded)

H. P. SHUKLA

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 370.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 371.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 372.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 373.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 501.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 377.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 378.
12. Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 39.
13. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p. 383.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 385.
15. Mangesh Nadkarni, “Aswapati in Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*”, *Mother India*, Feb-March 1999, p. 252.
16. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p. 3.

Savitri represents the Mother’s Consciousness, doesn’t she?

Yes.

The Mother

(*Questions and Answers*, CWM, Vol. 5, p. 391)

THE CALL

1

I HEAR the call of the boundless and fathomless,
Of heaven, earth and the nether region—
Dark, dumb and immobile,
Yet with a yearning for life, light and union!

2

I hear the songs of the Rishis of yore
And the epic Songs of ancient Sages,
The deeds of the incarnate Divine
To uphold Dharma against unrighteous races!

3

I hear the call of the immortal stones,
Kailash, Kanyakumari, holy shrines,
Symbols of devotion by anonymous hands,
Adepts chronicling in artistic lines!

4

Beckon me as well the modern sciences—
Researches, discoveries, voyage to Mars!
Electrons, microbes, rockets and computers,
But alas, a great threat unless the heart alters...

5

Thus come divers calls and they depart
Infusing in me hope, anguish and yearning—
Helpless, I brood: where to go and how?
And stay rooted at the place of my mooring...

6

Only at night am I free, in dreams
 To visit places of mystery and wonder!
 And at daybreak the fantasy fades—
 Motionless on my bed I lie, the same as ever!

7

I hear the call of crimson dawn,
 Of blooming flowers and chirping birds...
 On a sudden comes the call of the Truth of truths
 From the luminous core of the secret heart!

8

O the deep blue Beauty, the cosmic Lover,
 Thy nectar-breath blows into the human flute
 And Thy fingers' touch on the centres of being
 Produces symphonies yet unheard on earthly lute!

9

Land, water and sky are vibrant now
 With the ecstasy of Thy mystic rhyme
 To announce the advent of an Era new,
 Suffused with the gold light of a wondrous Time!

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

Erratum

In the September 2004 issue, on page 873, the line, “ Part I consisting of the first twenty-four Cantos and an epilogue was published...” should be read as, “Part I consisting of the first twenty-four Cantos was published...”

SATYAKARMA—THE YOGI FROM DECCAN LAND

VENKATARAMA REDDY was born on 24-11-1904 in a village near Nellore, in Andhra Pradesh where the two holy rivers, Krishna and Godavari flow and fertilise the basin. The richness of the land also gives richness to its people. And Venkatarama Reddy was born with a silver spoon in his mouth in a family where richness and affluence flowed as the waters of Godavari. His father died at the age of thirty-six and the property and the mango groves were taken care of by an uncle. But before dying, his father wanted to see the new-born daughter of his sister and requested that she be his daughter in law—the wife of his only son. Thus Venkatarama Reddy grew up in affluence, studied at Nellore, married his first cousin, Krishnamma and settled down to look after the property left by his father. The freedom of India was a vision for most young men of that time and he joined the freedom movement inspired by Gandhi.

And vaguely through the forms of earth there looked
Something that life is not and yet must be.

For Venkatarama there was an urge, an inner need that yearned to be satisfied. He became a frequent visitor to Sri Ramana Maharshi's Ashram. Often he had to go to Madras to consult the famous barrister, Duraiswamy, in connection with problems regarding his vast property. There, for the first time, he heard the name of Sri Aurobindo. Duraiswamy, who was aware of the young man's urge asked him to visit Pondicherry. So Venkatarama Reddy, at the age of twenty-two, visited the Ashram and had the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo for the first time in 1926. He asked Sri Aurobindo many questions and Sri Aurobindo replied. During the conversation the Mother also came and sat down. After a while, she left and Sri Aurobindo told him, "She is the Mother."

He visited Pondicherry in 1930 with his wife, leaving behind his son—Dayakar—then two and a half years old, as children were not allowed in the Ashram at that time. They went back, but that was to sell the property before settling down in the Ashram. In 1933, the family settled down in Pondicherry. His mother was unhappy as Venkatarama was the only son and her only daughter was already married. She pleaded with Krishnamma to stay back, "Let him go if he wants to, but you can stay back here." But the typically Hindu wife replied, "My place is by his side, I will go wherever my husband goes." Dayakar, their only son, happened to be the first child to be admitted in the Ashram. It opened the door for other families from Andhra—Narayan Reddy, Subramanian Pantulu also settled down with their families. The Ashram was vibrant with boisterous children.

Venkatarama Reddy and his family stayed in a house near the Ashram. He was given work with Chandulal. In 1936 Venkatarama Reddy was given a room in the Ashram main building, a new name "Satyakarma" and a new work—the Cashier of

the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. From then onwards he was known only as Satyakarma. What immense treasure he must have gained at their feet—the richness he was born to, the family bond and love were all negligible compared to the tiny room he spent his life in; half of it was used for his office work too. For he was the Cashier of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, their treasurer, not only of money but also of their trust and faith in him. His life was an example of the name given to him. He passed away on 31st December 1970.

He strictly followed the routine of the Ashram. He had all the three meals in the Dining Room and would not touch any other item. Much later, he started taking food in his own room. Once his mother had come and wanted him to partake of some dishes cooked by her. He refused. Krishnamma reported the incident to the Mother as his mother was greatly perturbed. The Mother asked Krishnamma to learn from Tripura-di, sister of Duraiswamy, the preparation of a sweet which Sri Aurobindo liked very much. She asked them to prepare that sweet every Monday and bring it for Sri Aurobindo. After Sri Aurobindo had tasted it, the sweets were given to Satyakarma as Prasad and he could not refuse. His mother was satisfied and Krishnamma got the opportunity to cook for Sri Aurobindo, every Monday, a sweet that he liked.

The Mother appointed him a trustee of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust when it was formed in 1955. Till the end he remained a Trustee and the Cashier of the Ashram.

I had the opportunity of working under him just for a few months when his assistant, Manibhai, was unwell. But those few months tied a bond so strong and deep that though he is gone some thirty-four years back, it continues through his wife Krishnamma—the loving and affectionate Amma.

The first impression I had was that of a Rishi of a bygone era. The austerity and intensity of the Sadhana was reflected in his entire body. He was of medium height, of medium complexion, his body was thin but strong as he was in the habit of doing exercises early in the morning in front of his room in the courtyard. He would always be clad in a white dhoti, the upper body mostly bare, or occasionally he had a shirt on. His entire body shone with a light, his face had a serious look but his smile (which was rare) expressed an inner bliss. His tiny room was supposed to have been a room for keeping the rickshaw. There was a cot, a wall-cupboard where he kept his clothes and a big table which served him as his cashier's table. He sat on one side on a chair, on the opposite side there was a chair for his assistant; a big safe behind him, another safe at the entrance—a movable counter, from where Ashramites took their money. The assistant and he himself had to crouch down below the counter to go out or come inside for work. The counter would be removed after working hours and there would then be space for moving freely. The only luxury he had was a small basin near the only window. He would have his meals sitting on the cot. That was Satyakarma-ji's world—he who was the Jagirdar from Nellore. I had no idea of his antecedents when I worked with him until one day he gave me some cash to count. I was fumbling while counting. So he asked if I had not counted cash before. I replied

frankly that there was no question of counting, as I had never seen so much cash before. He looked all surprised and said, “Oh, from my very young age I used to count much more cash than this.” Now was the time for me to look at him in surprise! This man with a cot, an almirah and a table was so rich before coming here! How wonderfully he had adjusted to the situation the new life offered. No sign of regret, let alone any kind of discomfort in the life he led. Like the Buddha he shunned the riches but gained the inner treasure which would remain ever in his soul.

The hardest challenge was his work. Born in a family where money flowed in abundance,—to face scarcity was daunting indeed. He would go to the Mother everyday. She would simply replace the money he had spent that day in the morning. But when She had no money to give or gave less than required, how did he face the challenge? He did face it and carried on his thin but strong shoulders the burden of running the Ashram on nil balance.

In the difficult periods of the Ashram’s finance his faith and trust in the Master and the Mother helped us sail through the turbulent waters—the Ashramites knowing nothing, feeling no crunch. He and others like him were the torchbearers of the Ashram and no amount of remembrance or homage would suffice to acknowledge the burden they carried to build this Ashram with their sacrifice, love, devotion, and commitment to the Gurus. His daily notations in his diary which used to be sent to the Mother, Sri Aurobindo’s replies, and the Mother’s letters to him are still unpublished. What best way to describe Satyakarma—the yogi from Deccan Land—than what the Mother wrote in a bold hand after his passing:

I TRUSTED HIM VERY MUCH.

KRISHNA CHAKRAVARTI

One man who earnestly pursues the yoga is of more value than a thousand well-known men.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 855)

THE GREAT EVENT

THERE is a silent beam of light within the mind
That shines down into depths of deepest wells.
It has the recall of a kind
That knows the secret of our cells.
It runs upon the waters of their codes
And penetrates their interstices.

Angels with furlèd wings swim through
To waken dormant scenes of the Descent
“Awake. Awake. Remember.”
The Time has come for the great Event.
The Mother rises now through fathoms beckoned by the moon.
Shiva in a golden chariot rides forth to wake her from her swoon.
Destruction is no longer in their dance.
They move in an ecstatic trance
Their feet spin forth a shining golden stuff
Of Life. The world has waited long enough.
And taking up this yarn immortal
It draws it from the seizure of Death’s portal.

Angels unfold their wings and take their bugles out
Flourish them aloft then blow them in one loud victorious shout
Announcing of wondrous things the day:
NOTHING BARS THE WAY
NO THING BARS THE WAY.

MAGGI

THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of October 2004)

12. Rishabha the Renunciate

It is not the variety of India's Puranic literature that boggles the mind. The manner in which the entire religious and spiritual history has been tied up in an inextricable manner is daunting to the common man as well as the scholar in search of the roots. But the roots are almost hopelessly tangled, though it is a fascinating tangle, that one simply cannot leave in despair. We must needs draw closer to it, touch it, revere it and draw a steady stream of wisdom from its varied knots that glow brilliant under the Indian sun. In India, religion is not a bundle of myths and legends. Religion is a continuing spiritual experience, a living force in the life of the common man, a moral teacher all the time.

Among the innumerable incarnations of Narayana, Rishabha is cast in the mould of a renunciate. The fifth Skandha of the *Bhagavata* brings us Rishabha's life in four cantos. The story is briefly told. King Nabhi along with his wife Merudevi, performed a sacrifice invoking Narayana to grant him a son. Sri Shuka makes a very interesting point here:

“Though the Lord is unattainable by any of the elaborate requisites of the Yajna, like ingredients, proper time and place, Mantras, sacrificial priests, sacrificial gifts, correct procedures of rituals etc., He none the less revealed Himself out of His parental love for devotees, while the rite called Pravrgya was being performed.”

The Upanishads have assured us that the Supreme is not reached by knowledge or dialectics or charity or dharma. Yet He is never far away from us. How can this be? How is He then a *Sulabha*? The Divine, in the Indian conception, has definitely a sublime sense of humour! Or you could call it compassion. He is everything. He is the creator of all, He is the Word. Yet this vast network of rituals and the rest have been created by Him to make man feel that he can attain the Lord by his own endeavour. Meditating on this aspect, the well-known Tamil writer and translator of yesteryears, Kumudini, explains it beautifully:

“Bhakti, even a little of it, even if pretended, to start with, shows benefits. ‘Ask and it shall be given to you’ has been tested again and again by devotees great and small and found true. What we offer is always unrelated to what we expect. While offering a plateful of sweets and fruits to the deity, the expectation is wealth, power, and glory. God in His compassion does not laugh but always gives more than what the devotee gives or deserves. That is His greatness.”¹

Mahavishnu decided to give King Nabhi more than what he had asked for. Nabhi had desired a son (*apatya kāmah*), and no more. The Lord now revealed Himself in His all-auspicious Form, according to Suta who gives an inspired description. The

assembled priests hymn the Lord's greatness. It is one of those beautiful passages which have been gifted to us by this Purana. In the course of their address, the rishis say that the king would like to have a son equal to the Lord in all respects. Narayana tells the sages that this is not possible as He is One without a second, and yet the blessings of the masters of Veda should not go in vain. Hence to satisfy the king, He would incarnate as Nabhi's son. And so is the Lord born to Nabhi and Merudevi, and Suta also points out the reason for the incarnation:

"Thus propitiated in the Yajna by the Rishis, the Lord, in order to bless Nabhi, was born of Merudevi in the inner apartment of the king's palace with a form that was constituted of pure Sattva. The object of His incarnation was to make known to the world the ways of life of ascetics who are celibates for life (*Nityabrahmacharins*) and who wear no cloth except the quarters (*Digambaras*)."

Each of the avatars of the Lord has something special, unusual about it. The Rishabha incarnation is unusual because it teaches renunciation. It is of course not an anti-life renunciation but a renunciation of attachment that would lead to a transformation of one's life on earth. Rishabha's personality was many-splendoured with virtues including strength, heroism, peace and non-attachment. This made him a *Mahavibhuti*. This is how when Indra stopped the rains from his land, Rishabha turned to yoga and the rains were compelled to stream on the earth. He then married Indra's daughter Jayanti and had one hundred sons of whom Bharata was the eldest. All his sons became kings or devotees who spread the fame of Narayana or brahmanas who excelled in Vedic ritualism. Rishabha was an ideal householder and performed many Yajnas. The *Bhagavata* records one of his sermons delivered to a holy assemblage.

Speaking on the need for great self-discipline in one's life, Rishabha said that giving way to the sensual in life would make one spiritually lethargic, and lead to future sufferings in this birth as well as in the births following. Having come up the evolutionary ladder and endowed with a mind, man must enquire about the Spirit within, "For what use the purposeless repetition of karmas and lives?" Man would do well to turn towards Vasudeva, that is Rishabha, in this incarnation. One must give up the I-sense. It is possible to be released from the ego by undertaking any or all or certain austerities listed by him. The passages sound like the *Gita*:

"Dedication of works to Me; hearing the recitals of My divine actions every day... The knowledge and insight to see My presence in everything; practice of Samadhi; cultivation of equanimity; firmness, perseverance and discrimination. By practising all these, an earnest aspirant can get over the knot of the I-sense."

Reading the sermon of Rishabha again and again and meditating upon it is a sure way to gain universal consciousness. He concludes:

"The true meaning of all that man does by mind, speech, sight and his other instruments of knowledge and actions is only My adoration. Without this kind of worship of Me, man will not be able to rid himself from the noose of Yama, which

consists in the great infatuation of looking upon the body as the spirit.”

In essence, this means going beyond one’s mental consciousness to become a part of the universal consciousness. If it is myself I see wherever I turn, it would indeed be the entry into the strength of the spirit. Sri Aurobindo has a remarkable passage describing this movement in *Savitri*. Savitri has engaged herself in yoga and then comes the moment when she enters the cosmic consciousness:

What seemed herself was an image of the Whole.
She was a subconscious life of tree and flower,
The outbreak of the honied buds of spring;
She burned in the passion and splendour of the rose,
She was the red heart of the passion-flower,
The dream-white of the lotus in its pool.²

Not only did Rishabha speak of non-attachment but presently he became a renunciate, an *avadhuta*. He gave up his rituals and all his possessions. Taking with him nothing, not even a loin cloth, Rishabha wandered away, walked through cities and villages, forests and hermitages, uttering no words. Taken for a madman, he was persecuted by evil men who tortured him in many ways and even desecrated his body. He had been handsome, ever-smiling, his lotus-like eyes had shed compassion bringing relief to people in distress. Now Rishabha appeared like a ghoul and desiring to escape human beings and their persecution, he remained in one place, and ate whatever came to him as food. By his intense sadhana he mastered several siddhis but had no use for them and so rejected them all. Rishabha’s end came in a forest fire.

So, what was the significance of this avatara? The Purana describes the doings of Rishabha after his renunciation as Shramanic atheism. Trying to reconcile the two Rishabhas—the ideal king-householder and the *avadhuta*, Suta says:

“The purpose of Rishabha’s incarnation was to show people dominated by Rajas that ritualism for enjoyment here and hereafter is not the primary teaching of the Veda, but that it consists in renunciation, knowledge and devotion which bring enlightenment to the spirit.”

Among the innumerable conundrums of India’s cultural past, Rishabha is one. If Rishabha is among the greatest of the Lord’s incarnations, a Mahavibhuti hailed by the Vedic stream, Rishabha also happens to be worshipped as the founder of non-Vedic Jainism. Though the religion has no founder as such, it is said the Tirthankara Rishabhadeva was the one who gave it a form and so is known as Adinatha, the first Tirthankara. The last of the Tirthankaras—the twenty-fourth—was Vardhamana Mahavira.

It is quite possible that the followers of King Rishabha when he became a renunciate formed the core group of Jainism which lays great stress on rigorous self-

discipline. Or, it could have been the other way round. The Vedic stream might have absorbed the Rishabha phenomenon in its spiritual world. For the Rishabha legend of Jainism is also very ancient.

The Jain hagiology refers to Rishabha as the son of King Nabhi and Merudevi of Ayodhya. When he grew up, he realised that the land and the people needed to be improved in many ways. Recognising the importance of education and vocational training, he invented numbers and letters and educated the people. He gave a fillip to farming, trade and horticulture. Indeed he transformed this land into a *Karma bhumi*.³

Rishabha propagated the need to lead the life of a householder and a renunciate in an ideal manner. Much taken up with the cause of non-injury, he placed his son Bharata on the throne and himself retired to the forest, as an *avadhuta* sannyasi. In his last days he wandered in the Himalayas and attained Mukti on the night of Shivaratri. Though the Jains worship Rishabha as the founder who raised their status in life, they do not consider him as an incarnation for the religion does not believe in the existence of god.

As with many such personalities, Rishabha has also been absorbed in the Indian culture in such a way that we see him very much as part of the Vedic heritage. The 14th century Tamil poem on Rishabha, *Adinathar Pillai Tamizh* imagines the birth and childhood of Rishabha. In the opening verses, the anonymous poet calls upon various Vedic gods to protect the new-born babe. But then, the Shramanic religion does not consider Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and the rest as Vedic and looks upon them as different aspects which make creation possible. According to Jainism, Brahma is the spiritual transformation in one's life, Vishnu is the Dharma guarded by the soul and Shiva happens to be attachment which is destroyed by the soul. The *Bhagavata* says that after Rishabha's renunciation some evil-minded followers set up their own rules of a renunciate's discipline, an obvious reference to the Jain discipline:

“Hearing the preaching of this king (Rishabha), evil-minded men of the Kali age, would abandon the rules of conduct laid down in the Vedas for the purification of the body and mind; transgress the Deities presented in the Vedas; prefer mean forms of worship concocted by their evil brains; give up purificatory rites like bath, Achamana etc.; adopt the practice of plucking the hairs on the head; and refuse to accept the Veda, the custodians of the Veda and the God that the Veda reveals.”

The Jains, however, take a contrary position. Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu are all the Arhat. Those who belong to the Vedic stream are actually deluded by a set of concocted myths and legends. It is tapasya that leads to self-transformation and the transformation of the environment. The *Adinathar Pillai Tamizh* speaks of how Rishabha's tapasya eliminated mutual enmity among sentient beings and the enrichment of nature.

Perhaps there is an important reason for both the Vedic and Shramanic streams claiming Rishabha for their pantheon. Both the religions claim that Rishabha had a son called Bharata after whom this land came to be known as Bharatavarsha. Hence, somewhere the two religions and Indian history criss-cross to produce lasting icons

for worship by the common man. The Jain hagiology says Rishabha Deva's son by Yashaswati was Bharateswara Chakravarti after whom the land came to be known as Bharata Khanda.

The *Bhagavata* has a similar but colourful tale about Bharata, son of Rishabha. The Purana states clearly that the land got its name from this Bharata. "It was from the time of Bharata's rule that the land, known till then as Ajanabhavarsha, came to be called Bharatavarsha." In the list of Tirthankaras, Rishabha is followed by Ajita who became the king of Ayodhya. The Kannada poet (12th century) has written a short but striking poem on the Tirthankara, titled *Ajita Purana*.

In the *Bhagavata* we follow Bharata as the son of Rishabha. In what may be seen as an interesting reversal of a tale, Bharata is shown as one who slipped away from non-attachment and meditation, all because of a deer! After succeeding Rishabha and ruling over the land for one crore of years, Bharata retires to the forest and engages himself in meditation. When bathing alone in a forest stream he happens to save a new-born deer as the mother dies when frightened by a lion's roar. The Purana shows how easily one can slip into worldly attachments. As the anxious foster-father, Bharata could not brook even a short separation from the deer.

"As it plays about and I sit there with my eyes half-closed in fake Samadhi, it approaches me in a mood of love-quarrel for not participating in its play, and in order to know whether I am really in Samadhi, prods me with the tip of his horn soft like water, with a show of great hesitation and fright."

It is actually a very charming scene that comes before us, where universal love has taken a human image and has bound itself to an animal with hoops of gold. At the same time, it is an image of what happens to us in everyday life, how slowly and surely we are drawn away from our ideals and aspirations by the multifoliate *Yogamaya* around us, Nature in all her glory, sentient and non-sentient as well. This too is a lesson, just as Rishabha's renunciation carries a lesson for us. The Puranic author drives home the lesson by the power of his imagination, which contains the truth about things. A stranger now to his yogic practices and the worship of the Lord, he drew close to his last days, absorbed in protecting and feeding and playing with the fawn:

"Even at the moment of death, he was looking at the fawn by his side, as if it were a son in mourning sitting beside him, and he left his body and the deer behind, with his mind firmly fixed on the latter. Though his old body was dead, his consciousness of the experiences of that birth was not lost. Following the fate of an ordinary man under such circumstances, he was born as a deer in the next life; but he retained the memory of the past birth."

Thus do we shackle ourselves through aeons, caught in the Mahamaya of Nature. Fortunately for Bharata, as he retained his memory, he was full of remorse. As a deer he went to the secluded forest-hermitage of Pulastya and Pulaha and meditated in quiet and cast away his body and was born again for the last time as a brahmana of

Angirasa gotra. Remembering his past, he now acted as a mentally unsteady person, to keep people away from pestering him with worldly affairs. He had no thought about what he did or what he ate. Resting in the illumed Atman within, he had absolutely no care for honour and dishonour or pleasure and pain. As his father had been when he roamed the land giving up his throne, Bharata too went around as one lost to all sense of shame and comfort.

The Puranic story keeps moving. Jada Bharata (The Inert Bharata) was seized and taken as the sacrificial victim of an Abhichara sacrifice to Bhadrakali. However, such was his brahma-tej that this illumination pouring from him began to burn up Bhadrakali herself. Incensed, she revealed herself and destroyed the miscreants and danced on their bodies while an unperturbed Bharata looked upon the scene. Bharata's story is continued with his lecture to the Sindhu king, Rahugana, reminiscent of Rishabha's final sermon before he took to renunciation. The proud Rahugana had a lesson in humility when he discovered that his palanquin bearer was a realised soul. Quickly he descended from the palanquin and prostrated himself before the brahmin palanquin bearer. In the ensuing dialogue, Bharata taught him about the nature of the mind that gives rise to this vast tangle of earthly life impelled by the Lord's Maya. A recurring aspect in this dialogue is the personification of familiar qualities by Bharata:

“Just like merchants who out of greed for wealth sometimes enter into forests, so the *jiva* enters into this forest of *samsara* in quest of happiness, but he obtains none. O King! In this forest a band of six brigands, the five organs of knowledge headed by an extremely evil-minded leader, the corrupted intellect, attack these travellers and rob them of their possessions.... With the mind naturally set on house, property, wealth etc., the *jiva* wanders in this forest of *samsara*.”

While the Rahugana episode ends with the king understanding the value of love and compassion in this world, we are pulled back to the original scene where King Parikshit is listening to the *Bhagavata* from Shuka. Parikshit speaks highly of the allegorical representation of *samsara* by Shuka but wants to have it elaborated further. As a result we gain some of the most interesting, instructive and moving passages in the Purana. The incarnation of Rishabha had been posited for teaching mankind the importance of renunciation. But it is not easy for the common man to renounce this life which is full of temptations. The Pauranika now comments upon what constitutes this terrestrial life, and the real nature of family, attachments, wealth, friendship and pleasure and brings the narration to the glory of renunciation again.

The description of *samsara* by Shuka has been a continuous inspiration for many writers. Vedanta Desika (13th century), for instance, has used an extended allegory on these lines in his Sanskrit drama, *Sankalpa Suryodaya*. The soul is caught in *samsara* and is imprisoned by Mahamoha (Great Delusion) who has Durmati (Perversity of Understanding) as his wife and innumerable assistants like Boastfulness, Pride, Lust and Anger. The Jivatma is helped to reach Narayana by King Viveka (Wisdom) and his queen Sumati (Right Understanding) and helpers like Tarka, Karuna,

Maitri and Vishnu-Bhakti. The Prologue opens with a prayer:

“May Shriman Narayana be pleased to convey me over all the ills of life—Narayana whose Will like Sunrise dispels at once the night of *samsara*, Who is capable of being seen by the *jiva* when its deep devotion has attained to the state of the dawn of day—Narayana Whose supremacy is self-dependent and eternal, arising, as it does, from His missiles and ornaments which are symbolic of the various *tattvas* of the Universe!”⁴

This is typical of the inspirations of the Jada Bharata story for the Vedic stream. Ramalinga Adikal (19th century), the Tamil poet and spiritual seeker, has written a remarkable allegory called *Kudumba Ghoram* which also reminds one of the Jada Bharata *upākhyāna* in the Purana. Man’s first wife is Ego that gives birth to Ignorance. His second wife is Illusion which gives birth to Mind, Intelligence, Consciousness and Pride. There is also a third wife, Lust. Through her man begets Rajas, Tamas, Sattva. This type of allegory has been one of the educative tools of our teachers since the age of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The tradition has found rich recordation in vibrant English in *Savitri* as well.

The legend of Savitri and Satyavan itself is a magnificent symbol to delineate the contours of the Aurobindonian yoga. Within the poem, one comes across passages that keep up our interest, while painlessly we imbibe some needed medicines lest our personality is torn asunder by our own myopic wanderings in the forest of earthly life. Sri Shuka’s description of the way in which people lived in this *samsara* can be seen reflected in a brief, deadly capsule by Sri Aurobindo:

Beings were there who wore a human form;
Absorbed they lived in the passion of the scene,
But knew not who they were or why they lived:
Content to breathe, to feel, to sense, to act,
Life had for them no aim save Nature’s joy
And the stimulus and delight of outer things;
Identified with the spirit’s outward shell,
They worked for the body’s wants, they craved no more.⁵

Further on, Sri Aurobindo refers to “a drove of captives led to lifelong woe”. The manner in which Sri Shuka describes the brigands in the forest of *samsara*, the jackals that carry away young kids from flocks of sheep, the rats and thieves that deprive man of his wealth, the hoots of owls and screeches of crickets that threaten him all the time comes to us in the Aurobindonian style when Aswapati descends into Night:

The world’s shrines they have occupied, usurped its thrones.
In scorn of the dwindling chances of the Gods

They claim creation as their conquered fief
 And crown themselves the iron Lords of Time.
 Adepts of the illusion and the mask,
 The artificers of Nature's fall and pain
 Have built their altars of triumphant Night
 In the clay temple of terrestrial life.⁶

So how can we turn away from our Puranas and think they are but a bunch of old wives' tales? It was our good fortune that just when the Indian remained dozing in his Anglicised Valhalla, Sri Aurobindo took up his pen and wrote about the immense good the Puranas did by synthesising the elements of Indian culture:

"It is to be observed that the Puranas and Tantras contain in themselves the highest spiritual and philosophical truths, not broken up and expressed in opposition to each other as in the debates of the thinkers, but synthetised by a fusion, relation or grouping in the way most congenial to the catholicity of the Indian mind and spirit."⁷

So very true of Rishabha and Jada Bharata. Vedic or Shramanic, they teach us beautifully how to walk through the night of the *samsara* in the twenty-first century.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

References

1. *Sacred Sayings of Nammalvar* (1984), p. iii.
2. Book VII, canto vii.
3. For a detailed account, see *Bhagavan Mahaveerar Vazkkai Varalaru* (1968), pp. 10-15.
4. Translated by M. R. Rajagopala Iyengar.
5. Book II, canto iv.
6. Book II, canto viii.
7. *The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 374.

The external renunciation is not the essential, but even that is necessary for a time, indispensable in many things and sometimes useful in all; we may even say that a complete external renunciation is a stage through which the soul must pass at some period of its progress,—though always it should be without those self-willed violences and fierce self-torturings which are an offence to the Divine seated within us.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 333)

GODHEAD'S SEED ONCE SOWN

OUT of the soul's deep slumber
I woke in vision to see
Star-fields appear without number
On the cloak of eternity.

I asked for a star or two
And She gave me a galaxy
Of children singing the new
Songs of destiny.

In a blaze of white sun-flares
I saw Her feet descend
Down the golden stairs
Signalling the end

Of spirit's long travail
In a house of flesh and bone.
Her creation will not fail,
Godhead's seed once sown.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

MONSIEUR AND MADAME FRANÇOIS MARTIN IN PONDICHERRY

(Continued from the issue of October 2004)

VI

THE LAST YEARS OF HER LIFE

MADAME MARTIN had just one more job left in the Governor's residence; to open the safe in which all the notes taken by Martin had been locked up. This was formally done in front of the five eyewitnesses; one of them was de Livier, the acting Governor at the time. So, on the 21st of March 1707, about a year after his death, Martin's in-most thoughts and his actual work as a Governor were revealed to others in all their minutest details.

This extraordinary collection turned out to be bundles and bundles of well-classified papers, containing notes on all types of subjects:

1. Everything concerning the Company arranged year-wise. From the simplest transaction with individuals to copies of treaties signed by different governments concerning the Company's dealings with them.
2. Official and other letters from China or Tranquebar.
3. Records and observations regarding all his travels overland or by sea.

All these were perused very carefully and kept in the government premises, only the empty chest was returned to Madame Martin. She would surely have recalled the work he had done in Chandernagore, classifying all these notes for the two books he intended to write—one on 'The Dutch in India' and the other on 'The religious missions in India'. Both would have amply justified the reputation he enjoyed during his lifetime, when he was considered an authority on the safer routes to be taken in South India and the favourable positions for France here—revealing his political acumen and insight. It is important to note here that in 1931 these personal and other papers were published in three volumes by a French historian, A. Martineau, entitled *Memoirs of François Martin*, where his clear observations reveal the complex influences that were constantly about him. Especially interesting are his comments on himself which show how conscious he was in all his undertakings. It is only a very long experience in dealing with the people of this place that taught him, he says, a type of phlegmatic attitude towards their unending debates and arguments. That alone gave him the strength to stand up for his own purpose against all odds.

The interim Governor, de Livier, and his wife were a very kind-hearted couple. They requested Madame Martin to stay on in an unused portion the house and she

was grateful not to have to break away from all that had held for her cherished memories of the past. It was also comforting to be close to the Church where she had worked out every detail with Father Felix during its construction. Now she went there everyday to pray at the tomb of her husband and was happy with the arrangement.

There was also the small garden within the fort premises specially designed for her where in a tiled hutment she often received in the afternoons those who came to see her. It was a comfortable place with a kitchen and a washing room. There people could enjoy the fresh breeze of the evening and have tea in her pleasant company.

In mid-July, the new Governor, Chevalier Hebert, arrived with his son. They were very keen on doing their job well. The first thing they did was to ask Madame Martin to vacate the rooms she occupied. She was justly shocked at the decision, for she did not come in the way of the functioning of the place. Perhaps they were afraid of her wanting to run the house again, as she was someone who knew the Governor's residence better than anyone else.

By the end of 1707, she settled in a small house. Dr. Albert, who used to treat her, lived right across the street. He always made it a point to visit her at the end of the day. She had a garden and a salon where she could receive people without their encroaching on the privacy of her own rooms. Two of her earlier attendants who were not only familiar with her personal needs but were very devoted to her looked after her household. The interior still reflected good taste and her former connections as 'Madame la Générale'. As for her family origin in France, many have said that she was part of the 17th century merchant-class; but the quality of a person depends on what he or she becomes. And Louis XIV *had* conferred on Martin the title of a French noble under his wing. A nobleman could be petty and cowardly in life, whatever his titles. "All nobility in its beginnings is somebody's natural superiority," says Emerson in one of his essays. This superior maturity in living, an attitude of sweetness and awareness, had been achieved by her, she who had been advised at her departure from Paris that in India, for the sake of the king's prestige in France, she would have to behave like a true princess. But Madame Martin was not an imitation. Hers was an inborn dignity and goodwill for all, which could be felt also in the small house she occupied.

There was a big lacquered table in the salon and a few pieces from Bengal; some of the services and the china she had used at the Governor's house were still with her; but none of the silverware she had been so fond of,—these were kept in the fort to be used by Martin's successors. She was known by then as the dowager. But while getting adjusted to this new phase of life, she had been quietly preparing herself for the time when she would be called away from the world to be once again at her husband's side. Her will had already been made and most of her jewellery had been sold or sent away to the family in France or elsewhere. Those who kept in touch with her constantly showered their affection and goodwill on her just as she had done for them all through her life. On observing her constant preoccupation and regrets, her

grandchildren forced her to write a letter to the Minister asking for a small place within the fort.

The 25th of February 1709 turned out to be an unusual day for her, as one of her slave girls was found dead. As she suspected an unnatural cause, she sent for Dr. Albert to do a post-mortem, since she wanted to be sure of what had happened. After all that she had to face, here in Pondicherry, from the local inhabitants as well as foreigners, a range of human responses—from total loyalty and friendship to anger and self-defence in fear of punishment. She could face all this in a manner befitting her position.

The letter had to be sent, and in the midst of all this disturbance she wrote, “I take the liberty, Monseigneur, to write in full confidence to you drawing the attention of your highness to the lack of respect with which the good services of my late husband have been treated after his death. For, as soon as Chevalier Hebert arrived, I was forced to leave the fort. I had prayed to be allowed to stay on in the rooms which nobody uses, without being a burden to the Company. My only intention is to be personally close to the Church and end my days near my late husband’s tomb. I do not know why I was denied this grace. It is very hard on a woman like me, Monseigneur, at my age to be treated in this way.” The letter shows a dignified outrage at the injustice done to the dedication with which they had worked for Pondicherry.

Very officiously, the Governor sent this letter to France by boat. Knowing what the intentions were, she revised her will on September 6th, 1709. Her property was again divided among her children and grandchildren. She gave full liberty to her slave girls. To both Orders of the Church, Jesuits and Capuchins, she donated suitable sums of money according to her means, remembering the work done during the governorship of her husband, their positions and function in the life here. But the most outstanding act of wisdom and inner intuition was seen when on the 7th of November 1710, she sent for the secretary of the Company and the sum of 300 pagodas which she had donated for building a mausoleum on her husband’s tomb, was transferred for distribution as alms in the parish where her sons-in-law had lived in France. With this, her last act of faith in right action in life was done.

No one can imagine the care and thoughtfulness she bestowed on all those who looked after her personally. Everyone received a gift as a last memento, no one was forgotten, not even the lawyer who had come to seal the last and final correction in her will. When slowly the flame died out, using to the maximum the outer frame, which the others were taking care of, no one knew what her inmost thoughts could have been.

Dr. Albert’s records show how particular he was about the treatment to be given to all his patients, rich or poor, but in this case he was not just her doctor but her well-wisher and neighbour. Every now and then, a potion used to be sent from his house to restore her strength and ease her suffering as best as possible. In the evening, after his daily duties were over, when he called on her, a little girl came with him

sometimes, his four-year-old daughter. She used to stand there looking at the lady with the awe-struck eyes of a child, wondering perhaps how one could grow so old, why her father treated this patient of his with so much special care, how beautiful and big everything was in this house.... Who knew at that time that this child, in the very same town, was going to become one day the great 'Johanna Begum', wife of the famous General of 18th century French India, known to us more commonly as Jeanne Dupleix.

On February 3, 1711, Madame Martin's mortal remains were buried beside her husband's, in the Church she had so lovingly helped to develop. And the land to which they had so wholeheartedly dedicated their life did not forget them either. For, it is said that the two tombs were protected and went untouched when the English soldiers under Munro razed the whole fort to the ground in the year 1778, sixty-seven years after she had been buried.

(To be continued)

AMITA SEN

*Objects are his letters, forces are his words,
Events are the crowded history of his life,
And sea and land are the pages for his tale.*

Sri Aurobindo

(Savitri—A Legend and a Symbol, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 680)

TO NIROD-DA—A POEM ON YOUR BIRTHDAY

You seem to me
The boy with the flute
Who stood across
The continents
And played on
His music
In his own way.

Days went by
And your life became
A perpetual song,
And an ever-flowing stream.

You gathered pebbles
Of all shapes and hues,
Sometimes of filth,
Sometimes of beauty,
Sometimes of mirth,
Sometimes of sorrow,
But touched them all
With sweetness and light
Piercing through the clouds,
And went on to the boundless
Yet intimate sea,
Who is your Lord.

Years passed,
And your life became simpler,
And less full of thorns,
And more full of
The perfume of the Earth.

You became a poet
Without books,
Who took in all
From the deep,
Far-away heavens,
The sky, the earth and the stars,

And also the warmth
Of the grass and men,
But above all,
The softness in you
That blossomed in silence
With Her touch.

Today
Would be a crowded day:
Friends have come
To see you
And renew their bond
With you.

I remain far away,
Yet see in silence
That you remain
A boy at heart
Who still smiles at the sun,
As he did as a child
Unknown,
In a far away corner
Of the earth.

17 November, 2003

Yours ever,
SUPRIYO BHATTACHARYA

MY POETIC VENTURE UNDER A PILGRIM OF PERFECTION

“It is not merely first-rate poetry I yearn to produce..., but it is my constant aspiration to manifest a particular kind of rhythm, a particular soul-vibration—spiritually the highest which I can recognise now that Sri Aurobindo has shown me the path of inwardness”¹, advocates Amal-Kiran, the esteemed centenarian. To explore the world of this multifaceted genius-cum-Aurobindonian yogi is like exploring an ocean. It is no doubt a hard task at hand to fathom the depth of this oceanic personality and harder still is it to chart his poetic flight. In my attempt to write about him, every expression I use, falls short of the contours of reality. After a number of flickering inspirations that eluded me before they could be caught, came the present one: an attempt to map out my poetic progress under the tutorship of an Aurobindonian Poet, Amal-Kiran. Adopting his own words about the Aurobindonian Poet, it would be quite appropriate to ascribe the same to him: “A pilgrim of perfection, he belongs... ‘to the noons of the future’ He is a striver after *incarnation*, both in life and in Art, of the Word that was in the Beginning...”² His poetry “is written as if by a fiery pencil of rays from an occult Consciousness...”³

It was not until 1992 that, oscillating between the binary pulls of ‘dread and dare’ I approached Amal-Kiran, even though I had earlier attended his illuminating talk full of light and delight in the Youth-camp in 1971. Dread and dare, indeed—for it was both my plight and privilege to come close to him by and by through poetry.

You are an ocean,
I dread to fathom.
Yet I dare to step upon
Your shore and ahead
Also to share with you
The zeal and joy of total loss
And the rapture of re-discovery.

“Dread and Dare”

When I met Amal-Kiran at his flat on 22nd September, 1992, he introduced me to Dr. P. Raja with this glowing remark, “She is a prolific poetess.” By that time he had already perused seventy-seven of my poems through correspondence—enriching them with his honest critical comments, both heart-breaking and heart-swelling: “No genuine poetry here”, “Commonplace”, “No poetic breath flows here through these lines” as well as “Well-written”, “Very fine”, “It is a well-worded, well-sustained piece of colloquial free verse”, “Fine throughout”, etc. At the same time, whenever he found any mixed stuff in my poetry, he frankly pointed it out by remarking: “A

mixture of hovering on the verge of some depth and then becoming commonplace”, “The idea has some depth but the verbal working out is not always happy”, “It begins well but the last six lines are a fall from the opening flight”. Besides, whenever he found any deterioration in the quality, he did not hesitate to point it out, “Of late there has been a watering down of quality. What is happening?”, “Certainly you are capable of better things”. The aforesaid comments came to me as serious pointers in my life and poetry. My recurrent probings, “What is poetry and how to transform poetry into Mantra?” along with my aspiration to belong to the future poetry have provided a leverage to hew out poetry from the semi-barren soil. He patiently handled my numerous queries in many sittings and by his magnetic touch scrupulously guarded my poetry from the trap of verse-making, i.e., “...to write with striking phrases and euphony and effective metre without any inner word-life and rhythm-movement getting expressed...”⁴

Let me recount my poetic encounter with Amal-Kiran. Actually I had scribbled some verses for the monthly magazine, *Awakening*. Its editor, Sushilaben, appreciated them but suggested that those pieces required Amal-Kiran’s perusal. I felt extremely nervous to face this great poet, one for whom, as he himself expressed it, “Poetry can descend into us from a level where the spiritual light does not merely carry us into the midst of the deific but makes us one with it.”⁵ However those poems were sent for his perusal and he remarked on 6.4.1992: “These are exercises in verse, not in poetry. Each verse is not always fluent, except at the beginning of the first piece:

Herewith I have made a pact with death:
We would play hide-and-seek till the last breath.

He further observed, “A touch of poetry is achieved in the lines”:

Love lost, forsaken, again gets restored:
Life transformed, moves in truth,
Surely it would entice eternal youth.

“A Pact”

These remarks left me completely nonplussed as my friends had flattered me for my past dabbling in poetry. Yet, after a few days, the irresistible poetic impulse impelled me to send a second lot of poems for his Aurobindonian microscopic observation. His remarks on them were encouraging and confidence-building: “Some expressiveness here”, “There is something attractive here in a half-childlike, half-childish way”, and “A good piece” about “Words” which opened,

Words, words bewilder me;
Weaken my thoughts,

Ideas get crippled,
Imaginations wingless.

Amal-Kiran underlined “Imaginations wingless” with his remark, “This is a fine phrase in which imagination has wings, indeed!”

No doubt, after a few days I sent my succeeding lot of poems which secured mostly his good remarks: “An interesting parable”, “A cute piece, good enough as free verse”, “It is well-done throughout”, “Good—especially in the first half where the rhythmic sense is more perceptible”, etc. As regards the rhythm, he has declared, “...rhythm is not just a play of ordered sound; it is the thrill of the consciousness translating itself into sound-vibration. That thrill gives us more than the mood: it gives too the psychological level on which the mood arises.”⁶

Gradually Amal-Kiran’s criticism of my poetry became an invaluable treasure for me and was treated by me as his benign act of utmost concern to intensify my inspiration and to guide me along the correct path of poetic creation. So, having mustered sufficient courage to go ahead in the pursuit of poetry under his guidance, I wrote to him on 17.6.1992:

“Respected Amal-Kiranji,

“My sincerest indebtedness rises to you for your patient observation, encouragement and re-doing of my poems wherever necessary. I hope this will never go in vain. Your gracious glances at them will lead me gradually to the brink of poetry and poetic delight. I pray to the Divine Mother to make me worthy of such a guide....”

His kind reply on the body of my letter dipped me into a profound felicity and prompted me to adhere sincerely to his guidance:

“Dear Asha,

“I’m glad you trust my guidance. My aim is always to draw the best out of you and when you bring forth your best I feel happy. —Amal Kiran” (6.7.1992)

By and by he took a more active interest in my poetry and perused more than two hundred poems of mine over the years. This is how, every time there was a tendency in me to take refuge in silence, he encouraged me to dare ‘uttering the Unutterable’. Those were the days when I enjoyed the frequent visit of the Muse and felt something very special as if indulging in Infinity’s romance. My contact with Sri Aurobindo was unusually and unexpectedly deepened. Amal-Kiran’s remarks on my poetry: “Keenly felt and nicely uttered”, “Well-sustained from A to Z”, “A poem with many turns of imaginative colour culminating in a definite vision”, etc., kept me in the stream of poetry. The lingering question, “What is poetry, how to differentiate poetry from verse? and am I a poet?” haunted me throughout those days. He tried to

give me a keen sense of poetry by differentiating construction from creation, marking the lines of my poetry as verse or as poetry. He said that one can distinguish poetry from verse by one’s aesthetic sense. The spirit of poetry is inspiration’s thrill and without that inner unity, high sounding words are mere verse. He once explained to me what verse was *vis-à-vis* poetry through a ready demonstration with a play on my name:

“Asha is very good, / She eats good food.”—This is a metrical verse without imagination.

But “Asha is an angel in disguise, / She has come from far skies.”—is poetry.

Step by step I could pick up from his guidance that genuine inspiration or naturalness is not immediate fluency which I had been mistaking as a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”. On my rudimentary understanding of inspiration he said, “Wordsworth, the propounder of this romantic theory was not averse to correction, chiselling and recasting. Spontaneity, for him, did not consist in just the first draft of a poem, neither did it lie in an uncontrolled and unselected expression. His feverish exertion to hit upon a revealing adjective for the cuckoo is an eye-opener.” To my further query regarding Keats’s view, “If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all,”—his reply, so apt and witty, continued, “A tree does not put forth its leaves all at once or in a full-grown condition—shape by shape and by various stages ‘the limpid glory’ is born. So this is not applicable to imaginative creators, however slow and piecemeal their labours. Had it been like that, Keats would not have agreed to revise his first version of the opening line in ‘Endymion’, ‘A thing of beauty is a constant joy’ to his famous quotable line, ‘A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.’”

He focussed my attention on the Aurobindonian secret of genuine poetry: “Intensity of vision, intensity of word, intensity of rhythm and the capacity of making a harmonious whole with a natural freshness and finish. One fourth of inspiration accompanied by three fourths of perspiration is the fate of genuine poetry. Inspiration hardly comes in torrents but in a few drops and the poet has to be very keenly alert and transparent to receive those heaven-sent moments and afterwards weave them out together in such a way to give an impression of the whole with a ring of spontaneity and an air of immediate creativity. Because in poetry the quality of the end-product alone counts. It does not matter how that quality is reached—at first blush or after labour.”

It would be quite appropriate to cite an instance in connection with his perusal, in my presence, of a three-stanzaed poem of mine, “Shower of Grace”. His remarks for the stanzas: “Good, Tolerably good, Gone out of hand. The tongue now got loose here” (indicating the last two lines). So he advised me to incorporate one clinching line into the last stanza for its unifying effect.

That poem had a very sensitive source and I immediately reacted, “But my cry is here.” He retorted, “But it must be a poetic cry. Excuse me, I cannot compromise

with poetry.” To satisfy my inquisitiveness, he further said, “God is joy and art too is joy, but God’s joy becomes art’s only when the fashioner of perfect form is the medium. But by perfect form we must not understand exclusively the turn of phrase and the movement of rhythm. I mean an outward technical perfection which is an embodiment of the living thrill of the inward afflatus.” Another day he perused my poem, “The Reserved Drops”, where he corrected my use of ‘tamed tears’ to ‘tender tears’. I did not accept the correction and argued that ‘tamed tears’ meant very restrained tears which certainly intensified the sensitive moment referred to. The way he accepted my point and reversed his correction was an occasion to witness his humility, open-mindedness and greatness. He used to encourage and defend some of my verbal coinages such as ‘hale heart’, ‘babyship’, ‘tamed tears’, ‘hewn hearts’, ‘embellished emptiness’, ‘illustrated illusion’ etc. to preserve my originality.

Being interested in his poetry and his poetic theory I purchased his books, *Talks on Poetry, Inspiration and Effort, The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*, and also *Poems by Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran with Sri Aurobindo’s Comments*. The poem, “Appeal” captured me at once and windowed to me his world. The lines,

My feet are sore, Beloved,
With agelong quest for Thee;
...Though void, a fullness richens
The heart I give to Thee—
For, what more can I offer
Than all my penury?⁷

had a strong impact on my poetic sensibility. When I expressed my keen feeling, his advice was, “Write a poem on it.” After a few days the poem, “The Purest Gift” took shape in the train in an unprepared moment which opened,

I have preserved my poetic penury
For your fond touch to fill it
With riches in variety,...

My faith and absolute trust in his penetrating sight and intuitive insight along with his realisation-packed words became more firm in a particular instance. I was once very upset when I learnt that Amal-Kiran had lost a bunch of four poems of mine sent for his perusal. He at once sensed it and with a choked voice apologised to me. But he did not desist from asking me, “Can you not revive them from your memory?” I was stunned to hear it and replied to him straightaway, “No. How could I as they were written some months back and at present I’m occupied with my Oriya poetry?” He asked me to translate my Oriya poems into English which was far more difficult than reviving the original English poems from my memory. But on reaching

home I was musing over our colloquy and the words, “Can you not revive them from your memory?” rang in my ears very powerfully. Fully convinced of the poverty of my memory I brushed aside that idea. But to my utter surprise, all those poems revisited me the same evening on the beach road during my walk to the Ashram. The way they revisited me one by one in a more harmonious tone and temper was an undeserved phenomenon that I will always preserve in my heart. I immediately jotted them down and was very eager to meet this ‘seer’ as soon as possible. The same evening, after a few hours, I met him and apprised him of the fact which seemed so impossible to me. He was overwhelmed and said, “You are receptive.” The next day I translated my Oriya poems into English which also secured his good remarks. This incident enhanced our mutual trust and led us to vibrate with an unknown thrill. Afterwards whenever I visited him, even in the midst of his busy schedule, he asked for my poems, if any, and graciously glanced at the rough ones noted down in a hurried handwriting. This is the greatest act of his generous concern for the poet in me.

Besides, it is noteworthy to recollect here my intense feeling when for the first time I went through Amal-Kiran’s collected poems, *The Secret Splendour*, after borrowing the book from him for a night. Earlier, to appreciate his poetry was to me a herculean task. Such is the case with many of his poems for many people, a fact which can be confirmed from Sri Aurobindo’s reply to Amal-Kiran: “It is precisely because what you put in is not intellectualism or a product of mental imagination that your poetry is difficult to those who are accustomed to a predominantly mental strain in poetry. One can grasp fully if one has some clue to what you put in, either the clue of personal experience or the clue of a sympathetic insight.”⁸. But the same night I was so overwhelmingly engrossed in his poetry that I could not but copy out some of his poems in my diary. His poems “Earth-Heaven”, “Sky-Rims”, “The Real You” struck me and I was humming some of the lines therein. My heart was drawn to the poem, “This Errant Life”, followed by Sri Aurobindo’s comment, “...If you could always write like that, you would take your place among English poets and no low place either...”⁹

The whole night I was musing over these lines though I could not grasp them properly; rather, I would say that they captured me at once. The words, the imaginative elevation and the turn of phrase with suggestive thrills, disclosure of the ‘divine discontent’ therein made me spell-bound. Only now could I really appreciate T. S. Eliot saying, “Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood.” Certainly they communicated something very deep and high though elusive to my mental understanding. The Divine-intoxicated depth of his poetry, the unfathomable canvas of his mindscape from earth to heaven, from the human to the Divine, appealed to my poetic mode and aesthetic sympathy. I was brooding over this “drunkard of Infinity” who forgot all earth-relish “in far intoxicance of thought”, though he sought earth’s lake of love a while ago. His transcendence of earthly trappings through his

poetic flight, “There is no end to God-horizonry” brought an affinity with my inner urge. But his well-formed lines quite revealing of his inmost quest and realisation left me in a quandary. They plunged me in a Hamletian dilemma—whether to continue with my old stuff or abandon the field of writing poetry for ever. The next day while returning the book, *The Secret Splendour*, I expressed my dilemma to him. He said, “You are soliloquising like Hamlet. Write a poem on it.” I parleyed with my muse and instantaneously composed a poem in his presence:

To write or not to write
Is a problem and a pleasure
With me, while you reveal
To me, your Secret splendour.

By the ocean of your poetry,
Mine is a ripple or a whirlpool
At best, to lure you
To my sandy shore;
Chisel the pebbles
Of my scattered verse
And remould them
In your creative core.

“On First Looking into Amal-Kiran’s *The Secret Splendour*”

Witnessing my instant composition of the poem he remarked, “You are a born poet.” That was on the 1st March of 1995 and that very day I composed four poems at short intervals though I had decided not to write poems any more. I felt something unknown entering me which culminated on 13.03.1995 in the morning when Amal-Kiran presented to me his book, *The Secret Splendour*, with his autograph—“To precious Asha, with a lot of love from Amal Kiran.” That was the most auspicious and promising day in my poetical diary-calendar. His very remarks, “You are a born poet” and “precious Asha” ignited in me a continual flame of aspiration to be in the perpetual stream of poetry and to be worthy of his expectations.

Regarding my born-poethood I expressed my doubt to him since I could not always write poems fluently from beginning to end, nor did I begin this practice from a tender age. He replied, “It is not true that born poets do not encounter difficulties. A born poet may remain silent for a long time also. To build a connection between the inner and the outer, the man and muse is the crux of the matter. My poems commence almost anywhere; that is, I do not begin at the beginning and reach gradually the close. Stanzas spurt up haphazardly: usually I have the ending first and then perhaps the opening or part of the middle.” On my grievance against my capricious and unpre-dictable Muse and her visit during unprepared moments, he threw the light that such is the predicament of every poet including himself. In this connection

he recounted the composition of his poem, “God’s Steep”: “While coming from Madras to Pondicherry by the night-train I had a dream in which I was climbing a hill with great difficulty, raising myself up, hand over hand. On waking up the poem took its shape in my mind. Without disturbing my co-passenger I used my torch to scribble it with a pencil on a piece of toilet paper, both of which I had kept in my coat-pocket.”

This confirmed my own poetic experience and the initial feeling of dread was replaced by a perfect trust in him which can be judged from my poem, “Trustworthy”:

You are a trustworthy ocean,
 Where I can joyously sail
 My tattered boat sans tremor;
 And set my earnest voyage
 To unexplored regions
 With rhythmic raptures,
 Despite the rough winds
 And my novice rowings.

He remarked:—“Expression adequate to the inner feeling and movement.” He further remarked that it is a very original poem as nobody in literature has ever spoken of the ocean as trustworthy. Besides, his overall observation on my poetry is: “Lively in an original way,—the psychic and the vital are equally voiced.” He sometimes noticed some shades of Emily Dickinson’s reflection on my poetic utterance.

My venture in writing poetry is an excuse to obtain an access to Amal-Kiran’s world. His critical dissection of my poetry is never murderous; rather, it is rejuvenating. It is poetry that bridged the big hiatus between a celebrated poet and a novice. Gradually its magnetic current aroused in me a sense of my being a kindred soul—though he was a vast ocean and I a mere drop. His presence always evokes poetry and creates an aura of poetic delight and poetic elevation. His words as well as his silent influence instil mystic moods in me and whenever anything sublime visits me in his presence, I take it as his gift to me. When he touches the depths of my poetry, I feel that some undisclosed genuine regions of my heart come out to the surface with utmost ease. Not only in his poetry but in his life and reality he is a ‘pilgrim of perfection’ and yoga is the natural outcome of his personality. No wonder, his influence and guidance as well as his encouragement to ‘dare the impossible’ make me feel that I am a drinker of a few distilled drops of poetry if not a full jar or cup.

His Faustian grasp of all knowledge accompanied by his inner psychic illumination makes him an Aurobindonian poet-yogi and an ‘adventurer of the Apocalypse’. The poet’s apocalyptic vision stretches still to utter,

The dawn is the ten-petalled flower

Of your holy feet...
 All time is the shine of your shape,
 All space is the stretch of your soul;
 When the truths of your silence undrape,
 The rhythms of Creation roll!¹⁰

In response to his young days' supplication, the Divine seems to have 'turned His formless glory to love' and 'moulded His love into a human face' for him. Therefore this centenarian's world is a warm, sunlit, elevating and delightful world where one can enjoy "God's plenty" and where he serves as a veritable doorway to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. From that vantage-ground he sincerely advises all poets and poetry-lovers, "If our emotions could stand the impact of high heaven and resound to it instead of answering to rhythms that are commonplace, there would be more poetry in this world."¹¹

ASHALATA DASH

References

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2. *Mother India*, Feb. 2001, p. 100.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
4. K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran): *Inspiration and Effort*, p. 33.
5. K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran): *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 86.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
7. *Poems by Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran*, p. 5.
8. K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran): *The Secret Splendour*, p. 91.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
11. K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran): *The Thinking Corner*, p. 35.

For me poetry is beyond philosophy and explanation.

The Mother

(More Answers from the Mother, CWM, Vol. 17, p. 342)

EVER BELOVED AMAL

ONE of the finest gifts life has given me is Amal. We are exactly seven decades apart, but Amal's childlikeness and timelessness dissolve these decades instantly. His ability to relate to one and all, from his sun-suffused heights to the depths of our souls, transforms these decades from being frightening pointers of fleeting life to happy milestones of everlasting growth.

At the age of 10—when I first read *Glimpses of World History*, I used to envy Indira Gandhi. I also wanted to have a father who would write such lovely letters to me. Exactly 8 years later, I was given a great grand-father—a father who is great and grand (this usage has been plagiarised from Amal himself who always introduces me as “Meet Gitanjali, my great grand-daughter—a daughter who is great and grand”) and if I may add without demeaning Nehru in any way—greater and grander than Indira's father, who may not have given me glimpses of world history, but has in immeasurable quantity given me peeps into his own heart—a heart constantly yearning for that supernal presence in a gesture of worship, a heart always aflame with the golden remembrance of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, a heart, if I could use Sri Aurobindo's words in *Savitri*, forever rapt in

with
that
A poised serenity of tranquil strength
A wide unshaken look on Time's unrest
Faced all experience with an unaltered peace.

Amal's letters have been so precious to me that I have always felt that, God forbid, if my house ever caught fire, the only thing I would rush to save is this treasure—totally 19 in number—13 typed ones, and the other 6 beautifully hand written “letterettes” if I may call them so. I have preserved along with these letters, the envelopes with hand written addresses, lovingly directing the letters to reach me.

There is one letter which is particularly dear to me*. It is about the effect of different moods of the day on Amal. After writing this letter, Amal wondered who to send it to—someone who would empathise with its contents and appreciate it with the same feelings with which it was written. And he sent it to me, with a note which read, “My ever-remembered Gitanjali, This is a letter which just flowed out. It has no response to anything in particular except the fact of you being you.” I was moved beyond words that he had chosen me to share his thoughts and feelings with. To live up to this honour, which he bestowed upon me, I have to fulfil the responsibility of always remaining at a certain height of my consciousness throughout my life.

* Letter appended after this article.

It was not so long ago, in 1991, that I had written a few snatches of poetry, and someone had suggested that I show them to Amal. I had not yet met him then, nor seen him nor knew where he lived. The day I came to know that Amal was in the Nursing Home, I rushed there, ran up the stairs and barged into his room. The atmosphere of joy, calm and peace in Amal's room was so palpable and overwhelming that I felt like a restless brook that had just found its vaster and truer self by losing itself in some oceanic immensity. I sat next to his bed and we spent about two hours together—sometimes chatting and sometimes allowing the silences to extend into an endless future; and at the end of it all I had found my best friend. I pointed out to him the bunch of leaves that were swaying gently in the breeze outside the window of his room. Looking at them Amal remarked, "They are softly whispering because they do not want to disturb the silence of the night." He returned to his "digs" after his recovery, and it is there that I went to see him whenever I visited Pondicherry from then on. On the reverse of a photograph that I had taken of him in the Nursing Home, he wrote, "The thrice-blessed place where unforgettable Gitu was first found."

I used to sign off my letters to him as, "With tons of love, Gitu" and he would reply, "As a poet to a poet with (Mil)tons of love, Amal." Though I had written a few poems, which Amal had seen and appreciated, I said that I did not deserve his conferring the title "Poet" on me, to which Amal replied, "It is not by writing great poetry alone that one becomes a poet. Even if one is moved by great poetry, one is a poet." Moreover, he said that I had the potential to be a poet and one day it would be realised. The next instant, he asked me to get his personal copy of "Talks on Poetry" from his library, and gifted it to me, adding a beautiful note.

Amal used to go to the Samadhi every evening between 4.30 p.m. and 5.30 p.m. I used to try to grab the chance to get him into his evening clothes and wheel him to the Samadhi. Amal would look forward to this pilgrimage everyday, and his joy on these occasions would rival the joy of schoolchildren who have been allowed to go out and play after long hours at school. On his way to the Samadhi he would greet and be greeted by his friends, look up and admire the flush of crimson across the sky, remember Dr. Agarwal and do sun-exercises by closing his eyes whenever the western sun playfully caught him between two buildings to shine on him as if to smile on an intimate friend. At the Samadhi I have seen Amal lose himself completely in the in-drawing atmosphere there. At the same time on seeing grim-faced devotees offering pranam, he would jestfully remark, "I don't understand why people are so serious when they come to the Samadhi; it is so much fun being with the Divine." One such evening, I was running a fever. Amal decided to cancel his trip to the Samadhi and spend the evening with me. I protested and told him that since he had been going to the Samadhi every evening for years, he should not miss it. Amal replied, "What is the point of my going to the Samadhi everyday, if I cannot bring the Samadhi to myself once in a while!" And he stayed back. All his friends who visited him at the Samadhi like Nirod-da, Dr. Palande, Nilima-di got worried and rushed to his flat to

see if everything was fine. Amal received them happily and answered matter-of-factly, “Gitanjali was not well, so I decided to stay back and look after her.” I learnt what being humane, genuine, loving and caring is all about. Many times I have seen Amal wheel himself away from his typewriter to smilingly acknowledge the arrival of guests, sometimes without even any prior appointment, and never for a moment resent the intrusion on the flow of thought. His consideration for people was borne out of a deep respect for them.

The word “psychic” was very dear to me. Whenever I used to come across it in the Mother’s or Sri Aurobindo’s works something in me used to cry out for it. Once when I met Amal, I asked him, “Amal, how do I find my psychic being?” Amal said, “You already have a twinge of it in your personality which shows itself distinctively at times, though you may not be aware of it.” On another occasion he said, “You have come from the Psychic world.” I said, “All of us do,” to which he answered, “Yes, but not so markedly.” His statements made me happy and alert at the same time. It felt like being in possession of that precious Kohinoor which one has not only to be constantly aware of, but also carefully preserve from the cataclysmic winds of the world. And from then on began a series of tests. Every time I met Amal, I would ask him about the state of my psychic being, and his reply would be a proof of how I had lived my life in the gaps of time away from Pondicherry. Sometimes he would say, “It is peeping out from the window,” or “You are about to reach Home,” or “Very Good” and sometimes he would say, “So, So,” or “Going on, not very extraordinary.” His comments would help me in my journey to the “Pink Space”. While his positive feedback would help me consolidate and intensify my efforts, his seemingly negative remarks would force me to introspect on my inner attitude and bring me back on track.

Most of us, especially the “Jack of all Trades” types like me, go through the painful process of deciding what to be in life, which career to choose, what kind of a life to lead and so on. I asked Amal when I was doing my MBA, “Amal, should I take up a career in Marketing or Finance or Human Resource Development or something which is my hobby, like Dance or Writing—what is my true inclination?” Amal replied with an insight characteristically Amalian, “Your true inclination is inclination towards the Mother.” I was not completely convinced then as a 20-year-old, as I had expected Amal to echo my grand ambition of heading a big business empire or something similar. But as the years rolled by, I realised that no matter what I am engaged in, it is remembering the Mother in my heart that gives me the true joy of fulfilment and growth, and in times of activity, as also in meditation it is this sense of the Beyond that sustains me. Amal knew more about me than I knew about myself and has at every step tried in his sweet but firm way to turn my attention inward!

I asked Amal once about what he wanted me to be in my lifetime and he gave me the following list, extempore:

- Versatile
- Profound
- Amiable
- Never subservient to superiors
- Never supercilious to inferiors
- All things to all persons without losing my individuality
- Keep my heart's core only for the Divine
- Learn to forget myself as much as I can
- Treat all persons as equal without losing sight of each one's distinctive quality
- Remember that there is a beyond to everything
- Never lose the artistic touch no matter how humdrum the occupation or the object
- Keep my mind untouched by anything except God's feet

In addition to the above he asked me to always follow the two mantras for psychic opening: Equanimity and "Remember and Offer".

I have ever since tried to follow this super-abridged version of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, though to what extent I cannot say.

As a teenager, when I was going through the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's works, it was a period of intense introspection. I had many doubts to clear, many questions to ask, and I would note them all in my diary, to ask Amal. But on reaching Amal's flat, I would experience such an all-encompassing wideness, infinite peace, and contagious joy that all my questions would either get answered by themselves or would lose their relevance. And I would find myself frolicking about happily around Amal (to which once he remarked "You are like an angel hovering about my flat and making me happy."), reading poetry from Sri Aurobindo, Shakespeare, Shelley and Keats, and clarifying nuances of English grammar. I would spend the whole day with him, starting from breakfast in the morning till our return from the Samadhi in the evening. And it is then that I saw a yogi at work. I have seen Amal reading newspapers (his favourite is the *Times Literary Supplement*) and books, watching movies on television (his favourites are *Casablanca*, *Titanic* [the old one], *Billy Budd*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, to name a few), editing *Mother India*, proof-reading material from the press with a scrutiny no error can escape, correcting poems of aspiring poets, receiving friends, typing letters, taking phone calls, having his meals, joking, meditating, resting —and all from an in-drawn repose and poise. His outer actions are always statements of that constant inner connection.

As an adolescent, though an intense person, I was shy. I could not reach out to people. Even if I felt a strong emotion in my heart, I was too timid to express it. I always used to hold myself back. Perhaps I took myself a bit too seriously. Amal noticed this and felt that this opening of my heart centre would go a long way in my relationship with the Mother. And with his love and care and attention and affection

spanning many years he helped me to feel and express love. And the result was marvellous. I started to feel love welling up in my heart and flowing towards the Mother which was earlier a mental yearning, for India, for my friends, my teachers, the person on the street, animals, trees, objects,—for just about everything. When I used to walk back from Amal’s flat after spending time with him, I would feel the surroundings dance with me. It was an experience of joy and identification. Amal teaches not by saying but by being. His very presence transmutes!

I have loved and enjoyed reading Amal’s articles, poems and books. In fact I have grown up on them. His writings, a happy blend of the Intellect and the Heart are brilliant and touching, inspiring and soothing at the same time. Once, when I wanted to renew my subscription for *Mother India*, Amal said that I need not do it as he would like to gift it to me. And amidst all his pre-occupations, he remembered to send me copies of *Mother India* for one full year. And what an awesome gift it was—for over and above being a treat to the mind and the soul it came month after month with a personal note by Amal on the first page, sometimes saying, “To unforgettable GITU, with love Amal”, and sometimes “To little flower, from Amal”. These notes were dearer to me than the articles therein!

This article cannot be complete without a mention of Amal’s humour. His humour always has a depth, there is always “Light” in his “Laughter”. When I wrote to him once that his statement about me, “Amalian—like myself, one who is drunk like me with celestial light, she who is my very own and whose very own is Amal!” brought unstoppable tears to my eyes for hours, he replied, “It hurts me to read of your tears. I know these are tears of joy—joy at being wrapped in a huge embrace that seems as if it would never let go—but still I would like those pellucid eyes to be windows always of a smiling soul. And though I appreciate the tribute of happy tears to the ardour of my letter, I don’t like the sequel to crying: the rush of the handkerchief to the nose and the blowing of that tiny trumpet. Eyes turning watery may be bearable but a nose growing liquid scares the aesthete in me!” I sometimes had the audacity to disagree with Amal over the meaning of some word or its pronunciation. Amal would never claim to be the last word in English Language, his mastery over it notwithstanding. He would say with his self-effacing humour, “God may not have given us the brains but he has certainly given us a dictionary. Let us look it up.” Amal has improved my vocabulary and pronunciation, corrected the “Indianisms” with the patience and guidance no teacher can rival.

Friend, Teacher, Guide, Philosopher, Great Grand-Father, Role Model—Amal is all of these to me and more.

I cherish Amal’s friendship and offer it with hands of prayer and extreme care to the Supreme. In his company, the soul experiences rapt inwardness, its reveries trying to seek their realisation, aspiration rises up like a spire and the entire being aches for something “afar from the sphere of our sorrow” like the “desire of the moth for the star” as Shelley puts it. I once wrote to Amal, “Whenever I am with you I feel

that there is something to be realised, something so beautiful, so nice, the wait for which seems very long.” He replied, “There is a God-shaped hollow in our hearts. We try in vain to cram it with earthly things. Nothing will ever fit it in full. Love of the good, the beautiful, and the true brings us some approximation. Certain visionary souls shadow forth a semblance of what we ache after and it is in their company that we feel near this mystery which haunts that glowing gap within us.” With Amal I always feel close to this mystery because his sweetness and strength, while bearing some reflection of this mystery, point always beyond himself.

Joyous, Wide, Brilliant, Deep, Understanding, Full of Humility—the list to describe Amal is as endless as the person himself—ageless and forever carrying in him the

Sky-lucent Bliss untouched by earthiness!

and “suffusing a familiar glow” in the hearts of all who love him and whom he loves. I am fortunate indeed, to be one of them.

GITANJALI

Appendix

4.7.93

My ever-remembered Gitanjali,

It is afternoon now—3.17 p.m.—and there is utter quiet in my room as I sit at my typewriter and every now and then look up a little and watch through my window the big bunch of leaves just outside it, either hanging entirely still or very softly moving to the most secret whisper possible of what I may call the dazed air—the air through which the high glow of the sun passes with its full gold to me like a warm blessing from a love intense yet gently modulated to my little human heart. And this heart responds as if in a half-drowse, unquestioning, totally confident that I shall be taken care of to the minutest need of the soul.

The mystic mood is always the same but the mode of its experience varies with the time of the day. In the morning its response is a happy crescendo. A silent self-dedication keeps rising from the eyes as they resume their intimacy with the surrounding scene and then grow into a pair of exploring wings on which the soul lifts itself up into the wide disclosure of the sky through my window. First there is a pale shine, next a faint pink gleam which lays a carpet, as it were, over which a World-Mother’s presence sweeps royally towards me to raise me into my highest possibility of inner and outer godhead. My visionary up-soar feels harmonious with what Coleridge in a familiar strain calls the birds’ “sweet jargoning” and Meredith in an insightful accent hails as

A voice seraphically free
Of taint of personality.

Going backward, how shall I catch in words the mystic mood at night? It is summed up in that line of Wordsworth:

The silence that is in the starry sky.

There is the feeling of an immense height and this height is seen as communicating with us by means of innumerable vibrating spots of light but everything is filled with an absolute unbreakable silence, at the same time aloof from us and brooding over the little lives that come and go, unlike its own everlasting scintillations. The mystic in me, responding to a distant yet ever-watchful divinity, feels more and more in-drawn as if to get attuned to that godlike farness without by some superhuman farness within until all my heartbeats seem to count the star-thrilled moments of an endless inexpressible Mystery.

Preceding the Yoga of night is the evening’s Yoga evoked by the subtle universal Power of which again Wordsworth speaks, the Presence who is interfused with all things but whose interfusion is brought home to us most profoundly by the poet when he particularises it by speaking of the secret Being

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.

One may ask: “Why did the poet refer to setting and not rising suns when the hidden Power is everywhere?” It must be a deep instinct in Wordsworth that made the choice, for here the passage of light is from splendour into secrecy, the bright visible is the guide to the fathomless invisible which is to Wordsworth the trance-goal of all conscious seeking for the divinity pervading the world of the senses. My Yoga at the time of the day’s departure is a kind of meditative suspension between the waking state and a state of drowse. Facing a glory-burst before a final fading away I am apt to experience a vivid summons from the Supreme to feel intensely His presence and then pursue it gradually into a recess of inmost self while still carrying in my eyes a clinging worship of Sri Aurobindo’s resplendence and the Divine Mother’s radiance.

Please excuse this prolonged discourse on my mysticism in relation to the passage of the hours in their daily cycle. I just got swept away by the theme of the afternoon’s special effect on the mystic in me fused with the poet.... I must end here, with the love that is never forgotten in poetry.

Amal Kiran

THE SYMBOL DAWN IN SAVITRI

(In the light of K. D. Sethna's explanation)

SRI AUROBINDO made a number of recasts before the final form was arrived at. The recasts were made in Pondicherry. An earlier one has the subtitle: *A Tale and a Vision*; a later subtitle was *A Legend and a Symbol*. It was after several recasts that the present opening line was struck upon:

It was the hour before the Gods awake.

A transcript was published in the article "Sri Aurobindo's First Fair Copy of His Earliest Version of *Savitri*" in *Mother India*, August 1981, p. 421. The Editor, K. D. Sethna wrote in his Editorial Introduction: "Towards the end of 1968 Nirodbaran put into my hands two old exercise-books he had found among Sri Aurobindo's papers...."

"The very first version I had known was that which Sri Aurobindo used to send me privately in small consecutive instalments day after day in 1936 and from which the final one grew to its enormous length by 1950. This version was 'A Legend and a Symbol'. As I discovered with Nirodbaran's help in the period after Sri Aurobindo had left his body, its predecessor had been called *Sāvithrī: A Tale and a Vision*. Here not only the name of the heroine from the Mahabharata-story but also those of the two other leading characters (the heroine's father and her elected bridegroom) were spelled differently from their forms in 1936. Instead of Aswapathy and Satyavan, they read Uswapathy and Suthyavân. The copy which I saw was in two sections. The first bore the general title Earth and was divided into four Books captioned respectively Quest, Love, Fate, Death. The second section was concerned with Beyond and consisted of parts entitled Night, Twilight, Day, Epilogue—the last relating the Return to Earth of Sāvithrī with the revived Suthyavân.

"The poem opened:

The boundless spirit of Night, dreamless, alone
In the unlit temple of immensity
Waiting upon the marge of Silence sat
Mute with the expectation of her change,
An hour was near of the transfiguring gods.

Obviously, here, in a broad sense, is 'the expectation' of the draft disclosed to me in 1936 and opening:

It was the hour before the Gods awake.
Across the path of the divine Event

The huge unslumbering spirit of Night, alone
 In the unlit temple of immensity,
 Lay stretched immobile upon Silence’ marge
 Mute with the unplumbed prevision of her change.

This later draft is itself a ‘prevision’ of the final form which omits the last line and modifies lines 3 and 4 thus:

The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone
 In her unlit temple of eternity...

“The contents of that pair of exercise-books on which Nirodbaran had lighted was the starting point of several recensions to which Sri Aurobindo seems to allude collectively in a letter of 1931 to me: ‘There is a previous draft, the result of the many retouchings of which somebody told you; but in that form it would not have been a “magnum opus” at all. Besides, it would have been a legend and not a symbol. I therefore started recasting the whole thing; only the best passages and lines of the old draft will remain, altered so as to fit into the new frame.’

“...Sri Aurobindo as my Master in poetry-writing no less than as the Guru of my Yoga, [...] had accepted many modern modes of expression. On the long labour between the old and the new inspira-tions in the spiritual domain Sri Aurobindo commented in 1936: ‘There have been made several successive revisions, each trying to lift the general level, higher and higher towards a possible Overmind poetry.’ In the same letter we read: ‘The poem was originally written from a lower level, a mixture perhaps of the inner mind, psychic, poetic intelligence, sublimised vital, afterwards with the Higher Mind, often illumined and intuitivised, intervening.’”¹

Richard Hartz comments in his essay “The Genesis of *Savitri*”: “The opening pages of the earliest known manuscript of *Savitri* are dated August 8-9th 1916. In November 1950, the month before his passing, Sri Aurobindo dictated the last passages to be added to the work. Between 1916 and 1950 *Savitri* grew from a medium-length narrative poem, consisting of about eight hundred lines in the first draft, to an epic of thirty times that length, all-embracing in its scope and inexhaustible in its significance.”²

Amal Kiran writes, “Since the time of Nirodbaran’s discovery other drafts of the same version have surfaced. One of them mostly precedes the matter in the exercise-books, occupies a large portion of a small notebook and bears at its beginning the date ‘August 8th–9th/1916’ and towards its end ‘Nov. 9’. The exercise-books carry a fair copy of the contents of the notebook. Work in them was begun even before work in the latter was completed. Dates in one of them range between 1 November and 16 November. The year is not given just as it is not given at the end of the notebook—and apparently for the same reason: namely, that it is the very year in

which the notebook commenced.

“This dating provides a definitive gloss on Sri Aurobindo’s statement on October 31, 1936: ‘*Savitri* was originally written many years ago before the Mother came, as a narrative poem in two parts.’ His explanation, in the same letter, of the two parts evidently refers to ‘A Tale and a Vision’ which has that very division as well as a scheme of Books with identical names. And as *Savitri* (or rather *Sāvithrī*) in this form is subsequent to that in the exercise-books, this form must fall in a period later than 1916. If so, its precedence of the Mother’s coming to Pondicherry proves that Sri Aurobindo had in mind not her first arrival on 29 March 1914 which was followed nearly a year later by her departure for quite a while, but her final settlement for good from 24 April 1920 onward. But how can any draft of ‘A Tale and a Vision’ be regarded as the original *Savitri* when we are positive about an earlier version? Obviously, Sri Aurobindo looked at it as essentially a variation played upon a single theme and at the two versions as phases of one continuing phenomenon in a certain psychological progression which he characterised in two stages in the letter about lifting more and more high the inspiration of his early versions.

“In that case, for all the broad affinity of ‘A Tale and a Vision’ to ‘A Legend and a Symbol’, ‘the new frame’, of whose imposition on the old draft he has written, should be taken to mean a very late version. Possibly not even that which after several experiments at the opening line like

It was an hour of the transfiguring Gods

or

An hour was near of the transfiguring Gods

or

It was the hush of a transfiguring hour,

first struck upon

It was the hour before the Gods awake,

can qualify. In a wide sense the description would be apt only for the version on which the later *Savitri* is based—the one just preceding that from which instalments were communicated to me in 1936. In a specific connotation it could apply only to the last-named version in which for the first time there are passages briefly recording a climbing of subtle planes of existence by Aswapathy.”³

Sri Aurobindo made several recasts between 1916 and 1950. By early 1950 the subtitle had become “A Legend and a Symbol”. These changes reflect how the epic was then being transformed.

K. D. Sethna writes about the letters of Sri Aurobindo, “Of course the letters, extending over eighteen years and often touching on various subjects at a time or

dealing with the same subject at different times, could not always be arranged chronologically and in a regular series to make a continuous exposition. They have been sorted into sections, each section determined mostly by similarity of theme in its contents or by their broad subsumableness under a common head. One section has been specially devoted to comments on individual lines, phrases and words given as far as possible in the order of their occurrence in the poem. The order of the sections as well as of their contents has been dictated in the main by the consideration of either logical or textual sequence.”⁴

“As we know, *Savitri* itself was first drafted quite early in Sri Aurobindo’s poetic career and, in it, the recurrent theme takes a form that clearly shows it to be bound up with Sri Aurobindo’s own work in the world. The poem’s heroine grew in detailed depth with each of the nearly twelve recasts he made in order to lift the meaning and music ever higher until they should press everywhere towards what the old Rishis had called the *mantra* and arrive again and again at this speech that Sri Aurobindo has distinguished as one in which the vision, the word, the rhythm are born with an intense wideness and unfathomable massiveness from the Overmind. Here Savitri of the *Mahābhārata* fighting the God of Death who had taken away her consort Satyavan became more and more an Avatar of the eternal Beauty and Love plunging into the trials of terrestrial life and seeking to overcome them not only in herself but also in the world she had embraced as her own: she was sworn to put an end to earth’s ignorant estrangement from God—estrangement whose most physical symbol is Death, the bodily opposite of the luminous inherent immortality of the Divine.”⁵

When I began reading *Savitri* with Amal, he said that before we commenced our study of *Savitri*, it should be clear that we were not reading it as a poem, not even as a literary masterpiece, noting the diction, the similes and metaphors and other details. Our purpose in studying it was to enter into the spirit behind it, and in the measure in which we identified ourselves with that inspiration, we would grow in our understanding. And this understanding is not an understanding of the mind, though that also is possible, but as the Mother puts it, it is more an understanding of the heart.

With these preliminary observations, we took up the first canto, “The Symbol Dawn”. In this canto, he pointed out, there is a certain parallelism. The Dawn that is spoken of is not only the dawn of that fateful day when Satyavan must die, but it is also the beginning of the present cycle of Creation. In Sanskrit we call it *dhvani*, very poorly rendered into English by the word ‘suggestion’. In the earlier portions of the canto at any rate, the context of the dawn of creation is more preponderant than the dawn of the physical day. That is why it is entitled “The Symbol Dawn”—the dawn as a symbol: not merely the dawn before sunrise but the symbol of something else.

Symbol of what? Symbol of a new creation. This is not a thing that is created one day and another day absorbed, but it is a matter of cycles of creation. Each cycle

of creation has its beginning, duration and end, the end leading to another beginning. The dawn of which the poet speaks is the dawn before this Universe starts, before the present cycle of creation is initiated.

Amal Kiran says, “Just as we get a clue to the dawn in the line:

This was the day when Satyavan must die,

we get a clue to the night preceding the dawn in the line:

As in a dark beginning of all things...

Attend to that ‘As’. The night depicted is *comparable* to the beginning of the cosmos: it is not itself the starting-point of the universal evolution. It is, as a letter of Sri Aurobindo’s suggests, ‘a partial and temporary darkness’. This darkness is made a ‘symbol’, as that same letter indicates, of a state ‘of the soul and Nature’. The symbolic character is referred to in the very passage in the line:

In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse...

“One particular night, followed by one particular dawn which, like this symbolic night, is a ‘symbol dawn’ (Canto-heading): such is the opening scene of *Savitri*’s drama. The particularity is clear when from the immense nocturnal space-scape we focus down to the wheeling Earth

Thrown back once more into unthinking dreams....

‘Thrown back once more’—that is to say, forced to undergo a fresh fall like many a previous retrogression, like night after preceding night in the course of the long past.

“And a similar turn in another letter by Sri Aurobindo directs us to the particularity as well as to the symbolisation. Saying that the description is not ‘simply of physical night and physical dawn’, but that either of them is ‘what may be called a real symbol of an inner reality and the main purpose is to describe by suggestion the thing symbolised’, Sri Aurobindo goes on to declare of the inner reality behind the night-symbol: ‘here it is a relapse into Inconscience...’. The word ‘relapse’, like the phrase ‘Thrown back once more’, is an indisputable index of a new setback, involving here an unconscious state, as happens every night in the twenty-four-hour cycle through which we repeatedly pass.

“In the poem itself our interpretation is supported when ‘a nameless movement, an unthought Idea’ stirred the Inconscience and it was as though even in ‘dissolution’s core’ there lurked a surviving entity

Condemned to resume the effort and the pang,
Reviving in another frustrate world.

‘Resume’, ‘reviving’, ‘another’—all these are signposts to a particular night about to end, a period of darkness with a before and an after of the same kind. A before and an after are implied also when, a little later, a ‘hesitating hue’ on the eastern horizon, like a scout from the sun,

...conquering Nature’s disillusioned breast,
Compelled renewed consent to see and feel.

A disillusioning day preceding the night, a forced renewal of hope in the succeeding dawn, as in a past sequence again and again, are suggested.

“It may be argued: ‘Though a cycle of darkness and light is there, precluding a direct account of a straight once-for-all evolution from a cosmic Inconscience, the cycle is not diurnal but aeonic. The Indian cosmogonic theory speaks of a repeated emergence of the universe from the Unmanifest and a repeated disappearance into it: there comes a *pralaya*, a dissolution, after which once more a manifesting process starts. Sri Aurobindo shows us a new cosmic relapse into Inconscience and a new cosmic emergence: the effort and the pang of evolution are resumed, a revival in another frustrate world occurs, an old disillusioning cosmic history is forgotten and a compulsion is felt to renew consent to grow conscious. An aeonic vision, directly expressed, of destruction and creation on a cosmic scale is before us in *Savitri*’s opening account.’”⁶

“In *Savitri*, the passage of darkness into day is the last dawn in Satyavan’s life, a dawn packed with the significance of the immortal light which Savitri has to win for earth by challenging the age-old decree of death. ‘The huge foreboding mind of Night’ is first figured with a fathomless effectivity”:⁷

Across the path of the divine Event
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
The abysm of the unbodied Infinite...⁸

“The creation is to come: ‘the divine Event’—note the capital E. The Event to be is the manifestation to come. But before that event takes place there lies across its path ‘the huge foreboding mind of Night’. Night is in capitals to indicate that it is not our physical night, but the Inconscient Darkness. The mind of that Night is huge, all-

occupying; it forebodes, prognosticates; it has some indication of what is going to be in the future, and that is not very welcome. Foreboding always hints at something ominous. It is immobile, without movement. Where? 'In her unlit temple of eternity'. It is a state of eternity; 'unlit', there is no light, it is obscure and dark. 'Temple',—he [Sri Aurobindo] uses this word on purpose to indicate something spiritual, something sacred, about that eternity. The mind of Night lies upon 'Silence' marge'. Marge is not margin, marge is edge, the edge of Silence. Capital S shows that it is a spiritual Silence, and not just the absence of sound. Spiritual silence is different from physical silence. A physical silence can be oppressive, but a spiritual silence is invigorating, life-giving. So, there is immobility, there is eternity, there is silence. All these prevail before the hour of the Event."⁹

Regarding the principle of his symbol Sri Aurobindo states: "I was not seeking for originality but for truth and the effective poetical expression of my vision."¹⁰ "I have not anywhere in *Savitri* written anything for the sake of mere picturesqueness or merely to produce a rhetorical effect; what I am trying to do everywhere in the poem is to express exactly something seen, something felt or experienced; if, for instance, I indulge in the wealth-burdened line or passage, it is not merely for the pleasure of the indulgence, but because there is that burden, or at least what I conceive to be that, in the vision or the experience."¹¹

A more profitable study of Sri Aurobindo's symbolism in *Savitri* is possible if we go into the nature of the poem and its inspiration.

Savitri is "a mystic and symbolic poem although cast into a different form and raised to a different pitch..."¹² "...it expresses or tries to express a total and many-sided vision and experience of all the planes of being and their action upon each other."¹³ The visions may appear as 'technical jargon' or 'intellectual abstractions or metaphysical speculations.' Sri Aurobindo clarifies, "To the mystic there is no such thing as an abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event."¹⁴

Sri Aurobindo says, "... here the physical night and physical dawn are, as the title of the canto clearly suggests, a symbol, although what may be called a real symbol of an inner reality and the main purpose is to describe by suggestion the thing symbolised..."¹⁵

The Dawn which confronts us on the first page of *Savitri* has a subtle spiritual significance. Night is a symbol of the Inconscient which pervades the whole field of Matter. Dawn is the symbol of the Supramental Sun which awakens the waves of ignorant Matter. As Night passes into Dawn so the world of Nescience passes into the world of Supermind. As the Dawn is latent in the Night so Supermind is latent in Matter. As Night is hidden in the Dawn, so the Inconscient is hidden in the Superconscient. As Night evolves into the Dawn and the Dawn slips into the Night so the Inconscient travels to the Superconscient and the Superconscient passes into

the Inconscient. The movements of the Night and Dawn are symbolic of the cyclic manifestations of Supermind from eternity to eternity.

NILIMA DAS

References

1. *Mother India*, August 1981, pp. 421-22.
2. *Perspectives of Savitri*, Vol. 2, R. Y. Deshpande (ed.), p. 359.
3. *Mother India*, August 1981, pp. 423-24.
4. *Sri Aurobindo—The Poet*, by K. D. Sethna, p. 138.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40.
6. *Mother India*, January 1969, pp. 978-79.
7. *Sri Aurobindo—The Poet*, by K. D. Sethna, p. 441.
8. *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 28, p. 1.
9. *The Book of Beginnings*, by M. P. Pandit, p. 4.
10. *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 788.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 794.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 797.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 738.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 736.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 792.

Note:

In the september issue of the journal, the third line of the 2nd paragraph on p. 873 should have been:

eight Cantos. Part I consisting of the first twenty-four Cantos was

A few words on *Savitri*

Here are a few words of the Mother spoken to Norman Dowsett:

“For the opening of the psychic, for the growth of consciousness, and even for the improvement of English, it is good to read one or two pages of *Savitri* each day.”

(From Amal Kiran’s introductory remarks before beginning a reading of *Savitri*)

A CLEAR RAY AND A LAMP—AN EXCHANGE OF LIGHT

[After I had written this account, starting from correspondence with Amal Kiran that I had preserved dating to 1974, I received a wonderful gift from Mother India: photocopies of letters that Amal had written to me before 1974 and some after 1991, along with my replies to him. Memories flooded back in a tremendous surge, overwhelming me with a sense of deep gratitude to Mother India for enabling me to re-live the halcyon days of my first meetings with a genius the likes of whose range of mind, warmth of heart, profundity of spiritual insight, ebullience of humour and ever-youthful spirit I have not come across. This account is a tribute offered in all humility and love to Amal Kiran.]

I FIRST met Amal Kiran in 1969, being advised by Jayantilal-ji that in him I would find a kindred spirit—and how right he was! He was then living at 23 rue Suffren, and I used to help arrange his numerous unpublished typescripts (numbering 23 in 1974 as he writes) in a wooden almirah. Here is the list I had made in 1969:

1. *Talks on Poetry*
2. *Classical and Romantic*
3. *Adventures in Criticism*
4. *'Two Loves' and 'A Worthier Pen'*
5. *The Inspiration of 'Paradise Lost'*
6. *Blake's 'Tyger'*
7. *'A slumber did my spirit seal'*
8. *Glimpses of Mallarmé*
9. *Inspiration and Effort*
10. *The English Language and the Indian Spirit*
11. *The Thinking Corner*
12. *Greece and Sri Aurobindo*
13. *The Spirituality of the Future*
14. *The Real Religion of Teilhard de Chardin*
15. *Science, Materialism, Mysticism*
16. *The Harappa Culture and the Rigveda*
17. *Megasthenes and the Problem of Indian Chronology*
18. *Problems of Ancient India*
19. *Mandukya Upanishad*
20. *The Beginning of History for Israel*
21. *Eros Known and Unknown*

Whenever possible, I would get hold of newly published material on subjects

he was dealing with and send these to him. For instance, in the 1970s he was heavily into Velikovsky. I was able to obtain issues of the journal published by the Velikovsky Society and keep Amal updated. Later, I sent him articles and books on the Indus Valley Civilisation from various libraries. He, on his part, used to send me books on these subjects that he had been sent by friends and relations abroad. The correspondence is full of references to these exchanges. I valiantly tried to get his *Harappa and the Rig Vedic Nexus* and Blake’s *Tyger* published, sending the latter to an acquaintance at the Oxford University Press and reviewing the former at length at *Puratattva*, the journal of the Archaeological Society of India—all to no avail. My efforts to get his remarkable literary detective work on Shakespeare’s “Dark Lady” and Mr. W. H., the ‘onlie begetter’ of the Sonnets, reviewed by scholars in Calcutta also failed. The academic cloisters are too tightly shut to let in any fresh light.

But enough of failures. Let us turn to the scintillating play of light in his letters—rays of knowledge and twinkling sparks of humour suffuse them, shining through the clouds of financial crisis and labour trouble facing *Mother India* that try, fruitlessly, to overcast the clear ray from time to time. He always ended, “Yours affectionately, Amal” and the pressures of editorial commitments and his own research never seemed to be obstacles to his typing out long extracts from books that he had found interesting and felt I would benefit from, or from sending me lengthy, closely argued letters on issues of mutual interest, mostly relating to ancient history.

The first letter is dated 3.11.69 from 23 rue Suffren and records his reactions to the “little present” of my very first book: an annotated edition of Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* with a critical Introduction by me. What amazes me today is how someone so much more learned and fifty years my senior effortlessly spanned the gulf by creating a bridge of equality firmly grounded on deep affection. The very first sentence touches the heart delicately: “Your little present, along with the letter nestling in it...” He follows up by apologising for not acknowledging the present promptly and takes the trouble to explain that he waited till he had read my work and even glanced through the annotations. What a perfect gentleman! Then the master-editor takes over. Beginning with handsome praise of my Introduction as “very well done, both in arrangement of thought and organisation of word”, he does not skimp in pinning down even minor errors of repetition, taking the pains to suggest how I could rephrase the sentences! After the criticism he reverts to praise. It is fascinating to see how Amal ensures that while conveying the flaws that he has noticed in my work he so balances them by praise that the budding author is not discouraged. Swiftly he puts by the critic’s persona and actually reverses our positions. By sharing his own reactions as a schoolboy—albeit most precocious indeed to have devoured most of Ruskin at that tender age—Amal, unobtrusively and with incomparable sensitivity, lends considerable edge to me as a college lecturer: “Your analysis of Ruskin’s style interested me very much. In my late schooldays when I first read *Sesame and Lilies*, *Unto This Last* and collected all the volumes of *Modern Painters* I was a fervent Ruskin-fan as

well as a great admirer of Carlyle whose *Sartor Resartus* served as a model for a little book of my own.” One wonders if this “little book” can be found anywhere! The latter work by Carlyle was a text for the M. A. degree in English in Calcutta University, which surprised Amal who obviously found it fit for comprehension in high school. We poor post-graduate students had slaved over it no end, with me giving up and persuading my mother to make a summary for me. Amal builds on his comment to bolster the new author’s self-confidence by lavishing praise: “What you have said is highly perceptive and I agree with all of it”, immediately balancing it by pointing out, “except that I am not sure whether Ruskin’s prose in *Unto This Last* is really the best he has written.” Then he realises that this may sound too snooty about a major literary figure and quickly turns it around: “Or to put it in another way: this prose, excellent though it is, is not the best Ruskinian prose.” Then the literary critic in him takes over: “Ruskin *par excellence* would be a combination of highly imaginative artistic acuteness with incisive expository power in a mould of poetic prose which by its precision and personal rhythm keeps a perfect balance between the two mediums. This Ruskin is perhaps best found in parts of *Modern Painters*. Even if he is flawed at times the whole fabric remains typical and we can at once recognise him, just as Carlyle is most himself not in the more admired and maturer works like *Past and Present* or *The French Revolution* but in the early *Sartor Resartus*.” Having delivered himself of this judgement, Amal stops short to add a sensitive caveat, reviving his schoolboy persona *vis-à-vis* the college lecturer’s book he has in hand and whose feelings he does not wish to bruise: “Possibly I am relying for this opinion too much on adolescent memories and a re-reading of the authors now would change my view and bring me round to your sober professorial estimate.”

Amal’s irrepressible humour invariably delights in printer’s gremlins and he happily provides instances from the annotations that a fellow-lecturer had appended to this edition: “the proof-reading is scandalous... ‘the tdvance from Tisiphone... has to be rapair through misory and run’... ‘Jesus was tried at a feast’. Dante would surely put the Note-writer in the lowest circle of Inferno for ascribing to him the phrase: ‘Diligite. Justinian Qui Judicatis Terram.’”

Amal had quoted a lovely doggerel to me from G. K. Chesterton and in this letter he informed me that he used to devour his work in early college life at which time he considered his *Orthodoxy* “one of the masterpieces of the age, together with Wells’s *The New Machiavelli*, Shaw’s *Man and Superman* and Hardy’s *The Dynasts*.” GKC’s *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* Amal considered the best of GKC’s novels and he had special praise for the book on Bernard Shaw.

At this time I had hopes of getting Amal’s *Classical and Romantic* published in Calcutta. “The possibility... is thrilling news,” wrote Amal in this letter. “But who will pay the piper? If I don’t have to do it, I would say ‘Go ahead by all means. Give your copy to the Reader.’” And out pops the humorist: “I am sure my series of essays will help Calcutta students to some extent at least and so the book should sell a bit

and the publisher won’t have to practise classical austerity or undergo romantic agony.” Unfortunately, my hopes were belied as publishers would only take up a known, established name.

At this time I had committed a grave *faux-pas* by passing on to Amal, for his comments, some writings by Nandita (my wife-to-be). She was furious, as I explained to him in my letter of 14.6.70, because “she generally writes things, reads them to herself and then tears them up. I got these as a special favour and was not supposed to show them to anyone else, specially to a literature expert.... You are, accordingly, in her bad books along with me at present. She says she writes for her own satisfaction and if ‘certain literary snobs and professors don’t think much of her writing, they are welcome not to read it. Who asked them to anyway?’” Amal’s response of 25.6.70 was delightful:

“If, as you say, I am in her bad books along with you at present, I am in very good company and whenever she steals a worshipping glance at you when you are not looking she must be thinking also of me who is now associated with you inseparably—I must be working within her Yes-and-No heart for you as a kind of literary co-husband to be!... She is undoubtedly a gifted person, capable of good imaginative literature—and that too with a gusto, a *vivida vis*.”

He added rare praise regarding my first translation from a Bengali version of the *Adbhut Ramayana* named “Metamorphosis”: “It is done in a good style, the right style for the subject... As the English version was done with both ease and elegance I had nothing much to say except that you had succeeded throughout.”

This letter also contains the predicament in which Amal found himself *vis-à-vis Mother India*. Yet, he puts it across with a hearty laugh, making light of the serious situation:

“Our Manager, after sitting on the May issue of *Mother India* from May 22 onward, at last took it into his head to walk out of the Ashram on the night of the 14th of this month. Not only had he stopped the release of the May issue but he had also disallowed any preparation to post: the names and addresses of the subscribers had not been typed. So when he departed we had to shoulder the work of getting everything ready so as to catch the 26th (our posting day) with the issues of both May and June. A hell of a lot of typing had to be done.”

The next letter *Mother India* unearthed for me is dated 23.7.70. Amal had graciously sent me a poem for the first Eng-Beng min-mag [English-Bengali mini-magazine] I was editing, a minuscule-sized experiment. As usual he spotted two printer’s devils in it! In the meantime, I had sat for the UPSC examinations and was selected for the IPS. Amal approved of my continuing as a lecturer instead of joining the Indian Police Service: “Don’t get piqued over the poor scoring in the Personality Test. The fellows have pre-conceived ideas and are not ready to savour originality.” That is a comment the veracity of which has been proved time and again in my 33 years in the Indian Administrative Service. By now his *Teilhard de Chardin* and *Sri*

Aurobindo was being printed and Amal was anguished over the standard of printing in Varanasi, “But I had no choice. The publisher also had no choice really, for he was ordered into accepting me by my friend... actually the book can make his fortune abroad if he knows how to set about the business.”*

In the same letter we find that Amal’s “hectic career as Editor-cum-Manager has not come to a happy end yet.” There was a merry imbroglio that foxes him: “It beats me, for one thing, how the SLL (Students Lending Library) could receive the July issue when it is not yet out! Again, who could have posted you in mid-June the issues from Jan to April? I can’t think of anybody except myself. But bless me if I have the faintest recollection. The packet received by you about 28th June was certainly from me in my role as Manager. But how is it that the SLL has not got the benefit of them when I personally put the damn things in the envelopes meant for it?... As for the triplicate March issue, well, pass on one copy to Nandita if she can find it in her heart to have anything from the Abominable Snowman whom she found so frigid in response to her short stories (but who was not really such).”

He goes on to share, with understandable pride, two notes in Kathleen Raine’s monumental *Blake and Tradition* on pages 407 of vol. 1 and 285 of vol. 2 that refer to his unpublished essay on *The Tyger* adding, with a muted sigh, “I suppose that if some intelligent publisher read a Note of this kind he would be eager to bring out my book. But where is that rare phenomenon to be found?”

As the person in charge of the St. Xavier’s College Library, I had ordered all available issues of *Mother India*. In his letter of 7.6.71 Amal informs me that all the monthly issues in stock have been sent but “Copies of its fortnightly avatar are not available for sale”. His paper on Wordsworth’s *Slumber* that first came out in 1958 had by now been expanded considerably and he provides me a detailed list of contents to whet my “professorial appetite”. He had just met my parents and writes “The most sensational news came from your mamma—namely, that you are already spliced. No wonder you were curious to know how I got spliced twice. From your papa I got many tips on the India-Pakistan problem—the most surprising was that Pakistan could be won over by love. The most-eye-opening was the reminder that in 1958 Ayub had flown to Delhi to ask for a Joint Defence arrangement and Nehru had turned him down!”

I had sent Amal my article “Vyasa’s Epic” of which he wrote most flatteringly: “The piece is extremely well done—there is a masterly touch everywhere. Your comment on ‘romaharshana’ is perfect. I was glad to hear (for the first time) of ‘Deor’s Lament’ with its moving refrain ‘That sorrow passed away, so may this’, reminiscent of Virgil’s great

O passi graviora, dabit deus his quoque finem

* The book was finally published as *Teilhard de Chardin and our Time* in 2000.

which Sri Aurobindo has englished:

Fiercer griefs have you suffered; to these too God will give ending.”

Amal’s letter of 29.6.71 finds him “in a maelstrom of work”. Yet he responds so movingly to my sending him a photograph of Nandita and myself:

That picture of Nandita and you was heart-warming. Marriage seems again worthwhile. I don’t mean that I feel like marrying a third time but other people’s marriages don’t seem so idiotic and futile. Yes, Nandita looks radiant, but you too don’t appear quite the reverse: there is a dignity and an earnestness about you plus a very intelligent smile. It is almost as if you were going to say like Shaw once, “Men have much more intelligence and taste than women.” Mrs. Shaw replied, “Certainly. Look at my choice of a partner and look at yours.”

Amal’s keen interest in the Indo-Pak problems surfaces and he wants me to ask my father for details about Ayub Khan’s unexpected visit to Delhi in 1958 regarding the question of joint defence. Getting to know that my father had given a talk in the Ashram (later published as “A Turn of the Wheel”), he wrote, “I never knew... Why was I not told? I would surely have gone to listen to so knowledgeable a man... I do want to publish the talk in *Mother India*.”

I had now attempted to interpret the peculiar episode of Uttanka in the Adi Parva of the *Mahabharata* along the lines of Sri Aurobindo’s *Secret of the Veda* and Amal commented: “Your Aurobindonian gloss on the Uttanka episode is excellent and convincing.”

He ends the letter with a reminder, “Do hurry, if you can, in regard to that question of Ayub’s visit.” Unfortunately, I have no recollection whether these details could be collected and sent as I left the lecturing job to join the IAS in July 1971 followed in 1972 by frenetic work of rehabilitating evacuees in the newly liberated Bangla Desh. In 1973 I was thrilled to be posted as Subdivisional Officer of Chandernagore, which was familiar to me from before as I used to visit Motilal Roy’s Ashram there to get its Secretary to identify writings by Sri Aurobindo at the behest of Jayantilal-ji. It is there that I had the shock of learning of the Mother’s passing, soon after Nandita gave birth to our lovely daughter Deepanjali on Diwali morning with telegrammed Blessings from Mother sent by Nolini-da.

(To be continued)

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

THE GOLDEN BRIDGE TO INTEGRAL YOGA

At the prime blossoming of his youth,
A turbulent flare of barely twenty-three,
With all his flaming passion turned towards the Divine,
The “Sun-eyed”, blessed child of our marvellous Lord,
Prayed to the darling Divine Mother,
Uttering like a shooting, audacious arrow:
“I have seen everything of life.
Now I want only God!”

Despite the loving Mother’s words of caution,
Not to be in a frightful hurry,
And to stay in the Ashram
Only to “look around” for “some time”
Before taking the final decision,
Amal, the beloved disciple of the Master,
And the sweet Mother’s pet child,
Took the boldest, redeeming plunge of his life;
He decided to “stay on—for good”.

Eventful years rolled in succession
For the other “impassioned pronouncement”.
He had worked “almost single-handed” for
The first one-volume edition of *Savitri*;
When released, along with the Master’s copious letters
To *Amal Kiran*, he didn’t get a copy.
The Mother was aware of his “labour of love”;
Could it be the Mother’s way of testing endurance,
While shaping his Sainthood!

After a few days of silent waiting,
He made the “resounding statement”
And made it known to the all-compassionate Mother:
“I would give my heart’s blood for *Savitri*!”
The Divine Mother presented one copy,
With Her Gracious autograph and Amal’s name written.

The inimitable Sadhaka, groomed by the Mother
And Sri Aurobindo, with endless love and care,
Epitomises endurance, equality and literary grace:
Endowed with rare wit, humour and charisma,
He richly deserves a dedicated life,
Far beyond a Century, full of smiles,
On his way to the Supramental Goal.

TODAY

TODAY
There are many more suns rising
On the horizon,
Many unknown birds chirping
On the trees around,
There are many luminous hearts
Waiting to greet you with
An aspiration of Immortality.

Today
I discover myself
A child
Groping and stumbling
In the darkness of its own solitude
Looking at your glory
With inexpressible love and wonder.
And humbly it says,
You have given us so much, Friend,
Still we hope for more.

MAMATA DASH

You have my full consent to write poetry, and Sri Aurobindo says that there is no doubt about your poetic capacity. Today's poem is very good. But when you try to write every day, it becomes more and more mental and you lose contact with the true inspiration. That is why you should write only when you feel that the inspiration is there.

The Mother

(Some Answers From the Mother, MCW, Vol. 16, p. 138)

PRAYER FOR PERFECTION

PRAYER FOR PERFECTION

Out of our darkness lead us into light -
Out of false love to Thy truth-piercing height -
Out of the clutch of death to immortal space -
O Perfect One with the all-forgiving face!

From Thy pure lustre build the mind anew -
From Thy unshadowed bliss draw the heart's hue -
From Thy immense bring forth a godlike clay -
O Timeless One self-sought through night and day!

Dearest Mother,

May I hope that one day you will answer this prayer of mine, which begins with a reminiscence of the soul's cry in the past and goes on to our own aspiration?

30.12.1963

Love, Amal

One day is sure to come ---

blessings



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of
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