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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE PILGRIM OF THE NIGHT

I made an assignation with the Night;
 In the abyss was fixed our rendezvous:
In my breast carrying God's deathless light
 I came her dark and dangerous heart to woo.
I left the glory of the illumined Mind
 And the calm rapture of the divinised soul
And travelled through a vastness dim and blind
 To the grey shore where her ignorant waters roll.
I walk by the chill wave through the dull slime
 And still that weary journeying knows no end;
Lost is the lustrous godhead beyond Time,
 There comes no voice of the celestial Friend,
And yet I know my footprints' track shall be
A pathway towards Immortality.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 132)

THE REASON AS GOVERNOR OF LIFE

REASON using the intelligent will for the ordering of the inner and the outer life is undoubtedly the highest developed faculty of man at his present point of evolution; it is the sovereign, because the governing and self-governing faculty in the complexities of our human existence. Man is distinguished from other terrestrial creatures by his capacity for seeking after a rule of life, a rule of his being and his works, a principle of order and self-development, which is not the first instinctive, original, mechanically self-operative rule of his natural existence. The principle he looks to is neither the unchanging, unprogressive order of the fixed natural type, nor in its process of change the mechanical evolution we see in the lower life, an evolution which operates in the mass rather than in the individual, imperceptibly to the knowledge of that which is being evolved and without its conscious co-operation. He seeks for an intelligent rule of which he himself shall be the governor and master or at least a partially free administrator. He can conceive a progressive order by which he shall be able to evolve and develop his capacities far beyond their original limits and workings; he can initiate an intelligent evolution which he himself shall determine or at least be in it a conscious instrument, more, a co-operating and constantly consulted party. The rest of terrestrial existence is helplessly enslaved and tyrannised over by its nature, but the instinct of man when he finds his manhood is to be master of his nature and free.

No doubt all is work of Nature and this too is Nature; it proceeds from the principle of being which constitutes his humanity and by the processes which that principle permits and which are natural to it. But still it is a second kind of Nature, a stage of being in which Nature becomes self-conscious in the individual, tries to know, modify, alter and develop, utilise, consciously experiment with her self and her potentialities. In this change a momentous self-discovery intervenes; there appears something that is hidden in matter and in the first disposition of life and has not clearly emerged in the animal in spite of its possession of a mind; there appears the presence of the Soul in things which at first was concealed in its own natural and outward workings, absorbed and on the surface at least self-oblivious. Afterwards it becomes, as in the animal, conscious to a certain degree on the surface, but is still helplessly given up to the course of its natural workings and, not understanding, cannot govern itself and its movements. But finally in man it turns its consciousness upon itself, seeks to know, endeavours to govern in the individual the workings of his nature and through the individual and the combined reason and energy of many individuals to govern too as far as possible the workings of Nature in mankind and in things. This turning of the consciousness upon itself and on things, which man represents, has been the great crisis, a prolonged and developing crisis, in the terrestrial evolution of the soul in Nature. There have been others before it in the past of the earth, such as that which brought about the appearance of the conscious life of the animal; there must surely be another in its future in which a higher spiritual and

supramental consciousness shall emerge and be turned upon the works of the mind. But at present it is this which is at work; a self-conscious soul in mind, mental being, *manomaya puruṣa*, struggles to arrive at some intelligent ordering of its self and life and some indefinite, perhaps infinite development of the powers and potentialities of the human instrument.

The intellectual reason is not man's only means of knowledge. All action, all perception, all aesthesis and sensation, all impulse and will, all imagination and creation imply a universal, many-sided force of knowledge at work and each form or power of this knowledge has within its own distinct nature and law its own principle of order and arrangement, its logic proper to itself, and need not follow, still less be identical with the law of nature, order and arrangement which the intellectual reason would assign to it or itself follow if it had control of all these movements. But the intellect has this advantage over the others that it can disengage itself from the work, stand back from it to study and understand it disinterestedly, analyse its processes, disengage its principles. None of the other powers and faculties of the living being can do this; for each exists for its own action, is confined by the work it is doing, is unable to see beyond it, around it, into it as the reason can; the principle of knowledge inherent within each force is involved and carried along in the action of the force, helps to shape it, but is also itself limited by its own formulations. It exists for the fulfilment of the action, not for knowledge, or for knowledge only as part of the action. Moreover, it is concerned only with the particular action or working of the moment and does not look back reflectively or forward intelligently or at other actions and forces with a power of clear co-ordination. No doubt, the other evolved powers of the living being, as for instance the instinct whether animal or human,—the latter inferior precisely because it is disturbed by the questionings and seekings of reason,—carry in themselves their own force of past experience, of instinctive self-adaptation, all of which is really accumulated knowledge, and they hold sometimes this store so firmly that they are transmitted as a sure inheritance from generation to generation. But all this, just because it is instinctive, not turned upon itself reflectively, is of great use indeed to life for the conduct of its operations, but of none—so long as it is not taken up by the reason—for the particular purpose man has in view, a new order of the dealings of the soul in Nature, a free, rational, intelligently co-ordinating, intelligently self-observing, intelligently experimenting mastery of the workings of force by the conscious spirit.

Reason, on the other hand, exists for the sake of knowledge, can prevent itself from being carried away by the action, can stand back from it, intelligently study, accept, refuse, modify, alter, improve, combine and recombine the workings and capacities of the forces in operation, can repress here, indulge there, strive towards an intelligent, intelligible, willed and organised perfection. Reason is science, it is conscious art, it is invention. It is observation and can seize and arrange truth of facts; it is speculation and can extricate and forecast truth of potentiality. It is the

idea and its fulfilment, the ideal and its bringing to fruition. It can look through the immediate appearance and unveil the hidden truths behind it. It is the servant and yet the master of all utilities; and it can, putting away all utilities, seek disinterestedly Truth for its own sake and by finding it reveal a whole world of new possible utilities. Therefore it is a sovereign power by which man has become possessed of himself, student and master of his own forces, the godhead on which the other godheads in him have leaned for help in their ascent; it has been the Prometheus of the mythical parable, the helper, instructor, elevating friend, civiliser of mankind.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Human Cycle*, SABCL, Vol. 15, pp. 94-97)

For the faculties that transcend the senses, by the very fact of their being immeshed in Matter, missioned to work in a physical body, put in harness to draw one car along with the emotional desires and nervous impulses, are exposed to a mixed functioning in which they are in danger of illuminating confusion rather than clarifying truth. Especially is this mixed functioning dangerous when men with unchastened minds and unpurified sensibilities attempt to rise into the higher domains of spiritual experience. In what regions of unsubstantial cloud and semi-brilliant fog or a murk visited by flashes which blind more than they enlighten, do they not lose themselves by that rash and premature adventure! An adventure necessary indeed in the way in which Nature chooses to effect her advance,—for she amuses herself as she works,—but still, for the Reason, rash and premature.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 11)

‘I SEEK...’

...WHAT then do I seek? I seek a light that shall be new, yet old, the oldest indeed of all lights. I seek an authority that accepting, illuminating and reconciling all human truth, shall yet reject and get rid of by explaining it all mere human error. I seek a text and a Shastra that is not subject to interpolation, modification and replacement, that moth and white ant cannot destroy, that the earth cannot bury nor Time mutilate. I seek an asceticism that shall give me purity and deliverance from self and from ignorance without stultifying God and His universe. I seek a scepticism that shall question everything but shall have the patience to deny nothing that may possibly be true. I seek a rationalism not proceeding on the untenable supposition that all the centuries of man’s history except the nineteenth were centuries of folly and superstition, but bent on discovering truth instead of limiting inquiry by a new dogmatism, obscurantism and furious intolerance which it chooses to call common sense and enlightenment; I seek a materialism that shall recognise matter and use it without being its slave. I seek an occultism that shall bring out all its processes and proofs into the light of day, without mystery, without jugglery, without the old stupid call to humanity, “Be blind, O man, and see!” In short, I seek not science, not religion, not Theosophy, but Veda—the truth about Brahman, not only about His essentiality, but about His manifestation, not a lamp on the way to the forest, but a light and a guide to joy and action in the world, the truth which is beyond opinion, the knowledge which all thought strives after—*yasmin vijñate sarvam vijñatam*. I believe that Veda to be the foundation of the Sanatan Dharma; I believe it to be the concealed divinity within Hinduism,—but a veil has to be drawn aside, a curtain has to be lifted. I believe it to be knowable and discoverable. I believe the future of India and the world to depend on its discovery and on its application, not to the renunciation of life, but to life in the world and among men.

In these articles I shall not try to announce truth, but merely to inquire what are those things in Hinduism by following which we may arrive at the truth. I shall try to indicate some of my reasons—as far as within these limits it can be done—for my faith in my guides and the manner in which I think they should be followed. I am impelled to this labour by the necessity of turning the mind of young India to our true riches, our real source of power, purification and hope for the future and of safeguarding it in the course of its search both from false lights and from the raucous challenges and confident discouragements cast at us by the frail modern spirit of denial. I write, not for the orthodox, nor for those who have discovered a new orthodoxy, Samaj or Panth, nor for the unbeliever; I write for those who acknowledge reason but do not identify reason with Western materialism; who are sceptics but not unbelievers; who, admitting the claims of modern thought, still believe in India, her mission and her gospel, her immortal life and her eternal rebirth.

SRI AUROBINDO

(From “Hinduism and the Mission of India” in *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 61-63)

‘LET THY LIGHT BE MANIFEST’

November 28, 1912

THE outer life, the activity of each day and each instant, is it not the indispensable complement of our hours of meditation and contemplation? And is not the proportion of time given to each the exact image of the proportion which exists between the amount of effort to be made for the preparation and realisation? For meditation, contemplation, Union is the result obtained—the flower that blooms; the daily activity is the anvil on which all the elements must pass and re-pass in order to be purified, refined, made supple and ripe for the illumination which contemplation gives to them. All these elements must be thus passed one after the other through the crucible before outer activity becomes needless for the integral development. Then is this activity turned into the means to manifest Thee so as to awaken the other centers of consciousness to the same dual work of the forge and the illumination. Therefore are pride and satisfaction with oneself the worst of all obstacles. Very modestly we must take advantage of all the minute opportunities offered to knead and purify some of the innumerable elements, to make them supple, to make them impersonal, to teach them forgetfulness of self and abnegation and devotion and kindness and gentleness; and when all these modes of being have become habitual to them, then are they ready to participate in the Contemplation, and to identify themselves with Thee in the supreme Concentration. That is why it seems to me that the work must be long and slow even for the best and that striking conversions cannot be integral. They change the orientation of the being, they put it definitively on the straight path; but truly to attain the goal none can escape the need of innumerable experiences of every kind and every instant.

...O Supreme Master who shinest in my being and each thing, let Thy Light be manifest and the reign of Thy Peace come for all.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, pp. 6-7)

TO CHOOSE THE TRUTH

Conversation of 24 December 1966

What is the Truth? What do you mean when you speak of “the Truth”?

YOU want a mental definition of the Truth. The Truth cannot be expressed in mental terms. Yes, it is so. And all the questions put are mental questions.

The Truth cannot be formulated, it cannot be defined—it is to be *lived*.

And one who is wholly consecrated to the Truth, who wants to live the Truth, serve the Truth, will know at each moment what must be done: it will be a kind of intuition or revelation (most often without words, but sometimes also expressed in words) which will make you know at every minute what is the truth of that minute. And it is this that is so interesting. You want to know “the Truth” as a thing well defined, well classified, well established, and after that you are at rest: there is no need to seek any more! You take it up, you say: “Here, this is the Truth” and then it is fixed. This is what all the religions have done. They have established their truth as a dogma. But it is not the Truth any more.

The Truth is something living, moving, expressing itself at each second, and it is *one* way of approaching the Supreme. Each one has his way of approaching the Supreme. There are perhaps some who are able to approach him from all sides at the same time, but there are those who approach through Love, those who approach through Power, those who approach through Consciousness and those who approach through Truth. But each of these aspects is as absolute, imperative and undefinable as the supreme Lord himself is. The supreme Lord is absolute, imperative and undefinable, unseizable in his action, and his attributes have this same quality.

Once one knows this, he who puts himself at the service of one of these aspects will know (it is expressed in life, in time, in the movement of time), will know at each moment what Truth is, and will know at each moment what Consciousness is, and will know at each minute what Power is, and he will know at each minute what Love is. And it is a multiform Power, Love, Consciousness, Truth that expresses itself innumerable in the manifestation, even as the Lord expresses himself innumerable in the manifestation.

THE MOTHER

(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 15, pp. 417-18)

EDUCATION AND INITIATION

IN olden times, in our country, nay, in China, Egypt, Greece and amongst all ancient nations, there was in practice a highly respected tradition which held that in order to have one's education one must take refuge under a particular Guru. The learner had to take initiation from him to start with and only then could he begin his education. There could be no education without such an initiation. Today, large-scale movements concerning education are taking place all around us claiming that without a universal education, without a compulsory education, the progress of our country is not possible. In the midst of all these clamours and controversies, we have forgotten this hoary practice of the ancient world, or, if not forgotten, we do not at least feel the need to pay enough attention to it.

What is education? What we really mean by education is acquiring knowledge, getting introduced to tangible objects, gaining mastery over certain subjects or *śāstras*. Or, instead of considering only the aspect of knowledge in education, if we intend to include also the other aspects of man, we may then say, in a general way, that education signifies cultivation of faculties, development of various parts of the being—intellectual, emotional and physical. No one denies that there could be a difference of opinion regarding this ideal of education. But a question may arise: Is this the whole of education? Or, in order to make this education integral, is mere learning or some familiarity with *śāstras* or the cultivation of some faculties its primary, intermediate and ultimate object?

What we expect from education is the development of faculties. It sounds good. But the problem is how to achieve it. From where have we begun, which system are we following? The present system of education starts from the study of subjects. Laying stress on subjects, it seeks to build man according to them; compelling him to be led by subjects, it tries to cast man in their mould. This is because somehow we have this ingrained notion that the thing to be learnt is completely different from man and external to him. What is to be learnt is self-evident, established in its own fullness, noble in its own usefulness and something infallible, irrefutable. Just as he earns money, it is incumbent upon man to earn it, acquire it and accumulate it in his coffer. The prestige of the coffer-owner is commensurate with the riches his coffer contains. Philosophy or science, discourse or dissertation, governance of a State or warfare are but some such subjects, branches of knowledge or *śāstras*. All this man has to know, conquer and master.

We have thus presented before man a variety of subjects for study. The question that has inspired this action of the modern mind is this: What are the weapons man should be armed with? If he has to win in the struggle for life and survive in this world, what nobler means are needed for this purpose? Which subjects are to be mastered, which parts or faculties to be developed and to what extent? All these things are to be determined taking into account their benefits, their usefulness, in

accordance with their need in the present context of the world. This need, however, depends on our outer experience, on the demands of Nature. The East India Company needed a few clerks conversant in English and this led to the birth of modern Indian universities. Germany needed soldiers for the protection of her empire or for the sake of her super-expansion; hence she adopted an educational system run by the overriding dictates of the State. England is now contemplating reforms in education and that she feels the need for studying primarily physics rather than poetry and ancient literature is also the basis of this perception that for survival in the struggle of life we need more arms and ammunitions. And here at home, we are shuddering at the sight of the mounting number of illiterate people. Even behind this feeling there lurks the fear that perhaps we do not possess the required resources, that perhaps we will not be able to stand the competition with the West.

But we are unable to understand the simple error of all these ideas i.e. whatever may be the usefulness of arms in the struggle of life, that is not an important point. What we need first is man, the man who has realised in his heart of hearts the throb of life, the source of strength. It is not difficult for such a man to be well-equipped with arms and ammunitions. As a matter of fact, the ill effects of the system that concerns itself only with education, that is, only with the mastery over subjects can be realised very easily. In the first place, such an education ignores the learner, it does not try to establish any simple and natural relationship with the learner, it does not allow him to realise deeply and firmly his inner life-pulses. He has been given a few selected subjects, he has been told that the proficiency in these subjects is a sign of culture or an imperative necessity of life. But it has tried little or not at all to know the views of the learner; he has not been given the chance to express his inner being which may have some say in it. He would have agreed, most likely, to all these things and followed very easily this selection-process of subjects had he got an opportunity to establish a spontaneous relationship with the system. From the very outset, a massive load of subjects has been thrust upon him and he has been commanded to master them all. In the second place, consequent upon what has been stated above, no recognition is being given to the existence of things like human personality and individuality. All, without exception, have been led through the same system, all are being hammered and cast in the same mould. The individual is lost in the collectivity. The country, the nation must develop as a whole. We need, therefore, philosophers, scientists, ethicists and warriors. That is why the country has set up schools or machines for such an education and the educated people are being distributed all over the country's market like goods manufactured by machines. But man, by this means, has lost his independence and his multi-faceted and vast spontaneity.

That this subject-oriented education is not the living thing of man's life is substantiated by the fact that we have never been able to decide upon the correct way of selecting the subjects. We are always changing it, rearranging it over and over again or cancelling it once more to reshape it anew. But we are unable to grasp the

right thing by any means. Sometimes we say that the main subject of education is religious texts and at other times practical subjects; now we advocate literature, now science; at times we even blend them in different ways. Sometimes we advise that it is good to be specialised in one subject and at other times we advise that one must know all subjects or at least many subjects.

The history of the national education movement of Bengal is a very conspicuous example in this regard. The National Council of Education was set up in Bengal as the British universities were considered inadequate for imparting true education. Many had a lot of expectations, many had dreamt many dreams. Today the plight of that National Council of Education is pitiable and everyone bemoans it. But nobody seems to have delved deep into the reason for this situation. The reason is that the National Council of Education was constituted on the very model of the British universities. Both followed the same pattern, the same policy; both wanted to impart education through the mechanism of subject-selection. But a mere change of curriculum does not necessarily effect a change in education. The English schools laid stress on English language, English literature, English history and now instead of these you put emphasis on Sanskrit and Indian literature, but what difference does it make since the fundamentals remain the same? The student of a national school learns a few more things about his country, while the student of an English school learns a few things more about another country, but is there a difference of heaven and earth between the two?

Let there be the culture of Sanskrit in our country, let everyone be well-versed in our national language, let everyone know the history of our country, let us enrich our national wealth acquiring all knowledge from abroad—all this is indeed necessary. But if we say that this is all or this alone is the main thing, that the principles of education should be founded upon this alone, then we are mistaken. What counts most is the people of our land. The riches of a man are not more valuable than the man himself. You cannot constitute a man by the acquisition of sensory knowledge of material things or through the mastery of various subjects. You may stuff him with all the sciences and *śāstras*, still, for that very same reason, he may become as dead an object as the *śāstras* themselves.

The basic point is that education begins with the student and not with the subjects. Education must be allowed to blossom from within the student, from the heart of the student—everything lies only there, the external ingredients have to be provided as and when needed as props and guides. For this, it is not enough to know the general nature of the student, the general psychology of the child—this is a truth which some people have begun to realise only recently. But every student has to be dealt with individually: the nature of the person, the force, the inspiration, the yearning that lie hidden in him, the specific quality with which he has come into this world—all these have to be observed and thoroughly comprehended. He has to be awakened to his soul, and this is termed as initiation. He who has got initiation and has found his own

strength, his own individuality, the divine being within him, will be able to discover easily his own wealth of knowledge.

Our national education or the existing system of education could not realise this truth. They have clung to the school as an imperative necessity and as the sole support. In the school everyone has to move in the same groove, follow the same method—one has to drag oneself along with one's own class like the proverbial movement of the flock of sheep. In the end, when the time comes for selecting some particular subjects, one acts according to one's own convenience or as chance ordains and one confines oneself to one or more than one subject concentrating exclusively on them. The student moves like a machine dumb and dull, propelled by the practices and prejudices in which he has helplessly grown. What he himself is, what his soul is, what represents his originality—all these have been crushed, no one knows when and where. That is why we often hear our educated youth questioning what he has really gained after reading so much or learning so much. He has cultivated his faculties but not realised the fulfilment of his soul; he has not learnt to put his faculties in touch with his soul. His learning is only an imposition, similar to that of the golden veil over the soul—it is not the spontaneous radiance of the riches of the soul.

The reason why the proficiency in subjects or cultivation of faculties are not the main criteria of education is that man is not merely a sum-total of various faculties. The play of faculties works on the outer being of man; below the faculties there exists yet another profounder reality which is their source and in which lies their purport. It is the man himself, his uniqueness, his soul, the divine being in him. The cultivation of faculties is the fruit of education, at best its secondary means of support. The first and foremost thing is to get hold of the source, the seed—to awaken the inner being of the learner. This awakening does not come through the study of diverse subjects. Subjects are inanimate matter. How can a conscious being be awakened by their touch? That is why education begins through a spontaneous touch of the soul between man and man, through soul-exchange between the teacher and the student, between the master and the disciple, in other words, through initiation, as we have already stated.

It is not for nothing that we have used the term “soul-exchange”. Just as the Guru observes keenly each disciple, so too the teacher must observe his student so that he may grow according to his own innate genius. But never should he treat him as a machine nor should he think that he would be able to guide him properly once he understands his inner mechanisms. The disciple or the student will progress by his own force, by the unfailing flowering of his own nature. The true Guru of a disciple is his own inner self. The outer Guru should try to become only a living example of the inner Guru. Unifying himself with the inner being of his disciple, the outer Guru should identify himself with the disciple's inner Guru and allow him to be led only by the inspiration of that inner Guru. This is the essential principle of initiation.

He who has thus been initiated recognises his self, is established in his

svadharmā. The source of the Mandakini-stream has now opened in him. This stream shall now flow ceaselessly through ever-expanding channels. *Śāstras*, sensory knowledge of objects, proficiency in various subjects—all that we call education is but the application, illustration and expression of this initiation. Schools, books etc. are meant for supplying materials and information to acquire knowledge. Once knowledge springs up in somebody, a natural inquisitiveness will also blossom in him. We shall then see that inspired by the inner joy of learning, whatever subject he takes up for study, he gains mastery over it and his natural talent shines through by virtue of his spontaneous concentration. Not only knowledge but all the faculties will also flower faultlessly as all the powers of the being are embedded therein in their fullness. Whatever is needed for establishing himself in this world—all the wealth and all the powers [*vibhuti*]¹—has now become a part and parcel of his being.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(Courtesy SACAR, Pondicherry, for this essay taken from *Education and Initiation*, translated by Amarnath Datta from the Bengali original—*Shikkha O Dikkha*, first published in 1926.)

I find tests an obsolete and ineffective way of knowing if the students are intelligent, willing and attentive.

A silly, mechanical mind can very well answer a test if the memory is good and these are certainly not the qualities required for a man of the future.

It is by tolerance for the old habits that I consented that those who want tests can have them. But I hope that in future this concession will not be necessary.

To know if a student is good needs, if the tests are abolished, a little more inner contact and psychological knowledge for the teacher. But our teachers are expected to do Yoga, so this ought not to be difficult for them.

22 July 1967

The Mother

(*On Education*, CWM, Vol. 12, p. 203.)

LAND OF THE GODS*

(Continued from the issue of April 2004)

In the first instalment of this story we read of the hero's early youth. He renewed his contact with his distant cousin, Sutapa. We read of the days of ferment, the Non Co-operation Movement. The arrest of popular leaders led to the students enlisting themselves for picketing. Amal was one of them. He was soon arrested and spent a couple of months in jail. After the mellowing experience of jail Amal met his mother who hugged him 'as though she had recovered a precious jewel.'

THE students' Non Co-operation Movement came to an end. Once more they began to attend classes. Driven by a noble ideal, Amal decided to study medicine although he was not overly fond of the subject. The course was supposed to be very tough. The temptations too were many. So Amal prepared himself to be steadfast in his studies. He had called on Sutapa a few times but, although there was no dearth of kindness and affection on her part, he sensed a kind of withdrawal, a stiffness in the others, which hurt him. When he learnt that her guardians did not approve of her intimacy with a "Swadeshi", a nationalist, sternly he himself put an end to his weakness for her. He accepted the pain that it caused him as the decree of a Benevolent Power and decided to be resigned to it. But what can a mere human will do? What do we know of that other Power that plays with us, drives us? During the vacation he was going home. Leaning on the railing of the Goalanda steamer, he was watching the bustling passengers, when he felt a tug on his shirt. Turning round he heard a sound of merry laughter and following the direction of a pointing finger, saw Sutapa standing in the doorway of a cabin. He went forward and was greeted with her familiar teasing smile.

—"Halloa, what were you watching with such absorption? Tuli recognised you at first glance. Come in, come in. We never see you nowadays. Of course, the fault is entirely ours, and today I'm going to make amends. But first tell me what you are doing at present."

Without showing any emotion Amal said, "Before I answer your question, you must tell me, how it is that you are travelling unchaperoned ..."

—"Silly fellow! Can you imagine my father to be that liberal? Look, that stupid man has been sent to watch over us."

—"So! that gave you the courage to call me?"

Sutapa swallowed the sarcasm and said in a hurt voice, "You know very well how dependent we are. Do I love my country any less than you? I had incited you to go to jail, was that just for fun? Have you men given us any liberty? Not only that,

* Translation by Aniruddha Sircar of the piece, *Debabhumi*, taken from Nirodbaran's Bengali book *Rachana Bichitra*.

you think that women are so weak that they cannot do without a stick to lean on, be it an old man or a young lad, a cane or a bamboo. Well, I'm not going to waste precious time commenting on male mentality. Tell me about your studies."

—"Don't you know what I'm studying?"

—"I didn't ask about your studies in general, you clever man! What in particular are you doing now?"

—"Oh that. Well, I dissect cadavers."

—"Trying to frighten me? I'm not afraid of dead bodies. But didn't you use to murmur around fragrant flowers?"

—"The dead body too is a flower at one stage."

—"Wonderful! At least you've learnt to talk! Such love for your studies is a very good augury! But joking apart, tell me truly, didn't you feel any revulsion when you had to face a cadaver for the first time? I hear many students are frightened, some even throw up..."

—"They've nightmares of ghosts and ghouls chasing them! If not that, at least a disgust towards life, an urge for renunciation... is that what you mean?"

—"Stop it! I ask a serious question and you make fun. Just think whose dead body you've to handle, may be that of an untouchable!"

—"So according to you, even a dead body has a caste!"

—"At least it has a smell, and that isn't floral."

—"It has a smell but it's medicinal. A fluid is injected into the body to make it hard and germ free. Then you see the veins a beautiful vermilion, and the boys, some girls too, holding a handkerchief over their nose, casually sit down beside the cadaver and cut through the arteries, veins and the network of nerves. Descending from a distant Gangotri, the artery divides itself into a hundred branches, sending them north, south, east and west; in this manner the Ganges of blood flows through the body! When the boys discover these facts they're overjoyed. What's the relationship between the vein and the nerve? They're cousins no doubt, but maternal or paternal? Or is there some other type of kinship? Which muscle intervenes and complicates matters? —All such entertaining knowledge, is it available in your philosophy of Hegel¹ and Shankara²? They will just shrug it all off, saying, 'It's all an illusion'."

Sutapa burst out laughing. She said, "You've made a lot of headway! If it were such fun, I too would have studied medicine. But be serious. Why do you want to become a doctor? It's never been your line."

—"I've to earn a living."

1. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), very well-known German philosopher. His philosophical ideas had greatly influenced the thought process of the 19th Century.

2. Shankaracharya (788-820), was an Indian philosopher and scholar. Born in the village of Kaladi on the Malabar coast of Deccan, he propounded the philosophy of Advaitavada and Mayavada.

—“As though you’ve to worry about earning a living! The one and only black diamond of rich parents!”

—“Then what about you? You’re a red ruby. However well educated you may be, your ultimate destiny is to hang round the neck of some glorified ape.”

—“You’ve guessed right. That’s exactly what father wants. If the choice were mine, I’d have gone to England for further studies. But women are caged birds while men have the freedom of the skies. Enough of this. Let’s go on the deck and breathe the free air of Padma.”

Infinite sky, wide waters, massy earth! Having finished his journey over this part of the world the sun god was disappearing ever so slowly. As he rises so he sets, he comes, bringing with him an endless treasure of light and he goes, giving away all his wealth of beauty. Sutapa and Amal stood side by side, totally absorbed. Amal had crossed the Padma many times in the past: in Winter, Summer, the rainy season, but such scenic beauty he had never seen. The country boats with their swollen sails, the shoals teeming with flocks of white water birds, the green-gold corn fields on the distant banks, the graceful village women carrying their water pitchers,—where had Mother Nature kept hidden this simple, pure beauty? Sutapa stood speechless, still as a painting, her eyes fixed on the horizon in a trance. Where was that girl of a moment back with her lively, saucy talkativeness? Amal could not bridge the gap that separated these two totally different persons.

When night came spreading her raven wings, Sutapa sighed and said, “Let’s eat now. We’re about to dock in Chandpore. Who knows when we shall meet again? You’ll be busy with your dissections and I’ll live in my world of illusions.”

Amal was relieved; he had never been comfortable with riddles. In his nature there was not much of philosophy or mysticism, but there was a quiet gladness. It was as though he had found some unearthly wealth, which filled everything around him with sweetness and charm as though the beauty of a woman was pervading all. On reaching Chandpore and having made sure that everything was all right with Sutapa’s family, he disappeared into the darkness.

We see him next as a village doctor. Among his penniless, sick, fatalistic countrymen he had established his temple of service to his Motherland. His means were meager, claims on him endless, but his dedication had, to some extent, met the needs of ten neighbouring villages. When the illness was serious, the villagers lost faith in the homeopaths and kavirajs and approached him. Fortunately, most of the cases got cured naturally with just a little help from the doctor by way of fever- or cough-mixture.

In the midst of this busy life he got news of Sutapa’s wedding. The bridegroom was handsome, rich, variously gifted and held a high-ranking Government post! Sutapa herself wrote to Amal in her beautiful calligraphy. Regretting the termination of their friendship, she expressed her appreciation for his noble work and requested his blessings for this most auspicious event of her life. However, as soon as Amal had

finished reading the letter he was filled with a strange sense of sadness. In between the beautiful lettering he was aware of the presence of some ominous black spots. Thinking that his eyes were playing tricks on him, he rubbed them and looked again. No, there was no mistake. Was it then a reflection of his own perverted mind? There was no denying the fact that he deeply loved Sutapa, but he had never consciously been possessive. Were those spots then hinting at some evil outcome? In a moment their childhood friendship flashed before his eyes, the sweet “floral memory” of their first acquaintance. In the courtyard of Amal’s maternal uncle’s house there was a “shiuli” tree. Early in the morning her soft white caress could be felt through the spread of hundreds of flowers. On a misty late autumn morning, having come to collect that caress, Sutapa found that there was another claimant. “Who are you?” she asked in wonder. When she learnt who he was, she exclaimed, “Oh, so you’re the thief? Did you come yesterday, too? But what will a young lad like you do with so many flowers?” Amal smiled and replied, “I love the fragrance of ‘shiuli’.” Even though Sutapa was not pleased, she conceded his claim, “All right, let us share. You take just a few flowers and I’ll take the rest. My grandma worships the Buddha. Without flowers the puja can’t be done, do you understand? Now, look at me! I’ve forgotten to bring the flower basket. Well, it doesn’t matter. Put all the flowers in the corner of my sari. And come with me, see me home.” Soon they became the best of friends. Early every morning along the sleeping village pathways, skirting the cane bushes, past the peepul tree, between the twin lotus ponds, rang their footsteps punctuated by Sutapa’s endless chatter. Mostly she talked about her grandmother. Every day, morning and evening, the old lady took her to the Vihara, the Buddhist temple. In the afternoons she recited the name of the Buddha and made her do the same. Sometimes Sutapa fell asleep but the grandmother went on and on. How sweet and tuneful was her voice! “Listen, one day a strange thing happened,” Sutapa held Amal’s hand and continued. “In the Vihara the huge statue of the Buddha had just been completed... You’ve seen the statue, haven’t you? On one side of the Buddha are the gods, Indra, Shachi, Brahma, etc., on the other side are Ananda and the rest of the Buddha’s chief disciples. Next day the dedication ceremony would take place. Some worshippers were spending the night in the Vihara. Suddenly at midnight they all woke up and heard heavenly voices chanting the mantra in unison, ‘Buddham sharanam gachchhami, dhammam sharanam gachchhami, sangham sharanam gachchhami’...”¹

Sometimes she would ask Amal about his village. Amal’s habitual shyness would exasperate her but the account of his hilly country, footpaths of red soil, the fordable Ichchhamati, the current of swollen Karnaphuli coloured her imagination. Perhaps it was because Amal belonged to that mystery land, that she became fond of him. One day while they were playing, Sutapa suddenly placed a garland of “bokul” flowers

1. In Buddhism it is known as the “tri-sharan” mantra.

round his neck. Her friends started laughing and teasing her, "What have you done? You've garlanded your bridegroom?" Calmly Sutapa told him, "Don't pay any attention to them. I like your stories, that's why I gave you the garland." Amal had to struggle hard to keep himself from blushing.

That Sutapa was going to be married. The river of time had flowed along many strange, unknown courses. Borne by that current Sutapa had reached a bank of jubilation while he was on the other bank tending the sick and the suffering. There was no bridge joining the two banks... Just then he came back to the present and remembered those ill omens. With a shudder he prayed, "O God, please protect her."

It was not possible for Amal to leave his village dispensary and attend the marriage. He was then very busy treating an apoplexy patient. He had even called the European doctor of the Missionary Hospital, situated some seven miles away in the hilly area, for consultation. A wonderful man, this German doctor, very gentle and sweet-natured. In broken Bengali he asked the patient, "What is your problem? Where does it hurt? How long have you had this fever?" His quiet concern effected half the cure. Coming from a faraway country across the seas, he had established a hospital for the care of the hill people. Mountains all around, a swift stream flowing below, in these picturesque surroundings stood the tiny, neat and clean hospital, run by this simple, humble, caring European. Amal too aspired to mould himself after his model. In his world filled with sickness, sorrow and mourning, he received from various sources news of Sutapa's married life. Her husband had many talents. On the one hand, he was a capable government servant, on the other, a friendly, popular, fun-loving gentleman. He was a sportsman, loved literature and often held musical soirées in his house. In their town too, he organised many cultural functions. The vacations found the couple enjoying themselves travelling all over India, as though they were keen to drink this transient life to the lees. For some two years they lived in this hectic manner, floating on the waves of bliss. But then one day, suddenly everything came to an end. Sutapa's husband was struck down by thrombosis. When Amal arrived, it was all over. Sutapa had turned to stone. Her face was like a mask, totally expressionless. She did not speak, did not look at anybody, and went about her duties like an automaton. Seeing her stern, ascetic appearance, Amal shivered in his heart. He realised that she was controlling herself with all her might. He knew that the outcome would be dangerous, but he also knew that she alone could save herself; or that very Power which in the first place had delivered this blow. Man was helpless. With a heavy heart, Amal bade her farewell.

After a few months, receiving an urgent summons from Sutapa, he went to meet her. She lived with her younger brother and a maid. The dark shadow of grief had not yet faded from her pensive eyes. "After you went away that day, surely you didn't expect to be called so soon," she said. "But I've no one else to turn to. I need somebody now to whom I can open my heart. I know that I can always depend on you and that you alone will understand how I have passed all these months." Amal

listened in silence, his eyes fixed on the evening star.

—“You know, I’ve seen him!”

—“Seen whom?” Amal looked at her in surprise.

—“He came to me in a dream. He looked sad. He said, ‘Su, I know that you used to feel hurt when I didn’t listen to you. But we all have our own nature, our different ways of approaching life. I did try to change myself, but it was no good. I don’t regret that. Only, I feel bad to see you unhappy. I never gave you the opportunity to lead your own life. But now I beg of you to go away somewhere else and build up your life in a beautiful way, exactly as you want to.’ ”

It was all a riddle to Amal. He waited for the explanation. Sutapa continued, “I’m sure you’re puzzled. Let me clarify. He had tremendous vitality. After the office hours he just couldn’t keep still. Some uncontrollable power drove him all the time, tossing him about like restless waves. But what is natural for the ocean, is, for an ordinary man, especially one like him, with a weak physique, an over-spending of energy. I’d warned him time and again, pleaded with him to control his excitable nature, but how long can a sandy bund contain a flood? It was not as though his excitements harmed only him; trying to keep up with him, I too used to get exhausted. Women, at least my kind of women, want stability; and men, perhaps, want untiring movement. But unless pace is controlled by stability, the expenditure exceeds the income. I was constantly worrying about Nature taking her revenge. It may be that his vital being knew that he didn’t have long to live, and so it wanted to drain the cup of life.”

At this point Sutapa broke down but soon recovering herself, she said, “Now, I want your advice about what I should do with myself. I’m sure you can guess what my parents expect from me. Is there any way I can be independent and lead a beautiful life?”

Amal remained silent for a long time, then said, “In our country there’s only one profession open to educated women.”

—“Go on.”

—“Teaching. You’ve a good degree. It’ll not be difficult for you to get a suitable job.”

—“But that’s not possible here. He too insisted that I should restart my life somewhere else.”

Amal was about to ask her how much importance should be given to a dream. But thinking that he had no right to question another’s faith, said, “Then you want to leave Bengal? Will you be able to bear the heavy pressure of living in a strange place?”

Sutapa smiled, “What else can I do? Although I love Bengal, this total disruption of my world doesn’t leave me with any option. Moreover, during these two years I’ve passed many exams. Why waste all that effort? Whatever offer I get, I shall accept.”

Amal did not want to encourage her, either because his affection for her weakened him or because he was afraid of the uncertainties she would have to face. Yet Sutapa must tread the path of the unknown. Some temporary solitude too was necessary for her. When the wound is very deep, for certain natures solitude is the only ointment that can cure that wound. Of course, loneliness too brought its own dangers, but one could hope that the inner strength which had sustained her during her calamity, would protect her in her hour of need.

Sutapa got a teaching job somewhere in North India and left Bengal. After that there was no news of her, as though she were living in a convent in the Middle Ages and for her the outside world did not exist. Amal worried about her all the time, but felt that it was not seemly to make enquiries. In any case, he had a strong faith that sooner or later he would hear from her. His expectations were fulfilled after more than a year when Sutapa's letter came, written in her beautiful hand. Amal trembled with joy and excitement. On opening the letter the first thing that he saw was a rose with two leaves, carefully pressed. Again a flower! Spontaneously he smelt it. The subtle fragrance of a fresh rose was still there. On noticing the address he was greatly astonished. Ashram! Amal read the letter:

“I've at last crossed the endless sea of sorrow. I've found peace. What a great attainment it is, I know you'll understand. You've always remained in the background and wished me well. That's why I'm giving you this news. The Divine Mother is the living deity in this Ashram. Her sacred touch has erased the sorrowful past from my mind. The rose that you'll find here, has been blessed by Her. Accept it with due reverence. If you feel like it, visit this place. From time to time I shall write to you about this land of the gods.

Affectionately,
Sutapa.”

After reading the letter Amal kept still for a long time. Just a few sentences, and yet they were pervaded by such a light, peace and perfume of purity, that it seemed that the letter had come from some other world. At once question after question rose in his mind: Who was this Mother? What power did she wield that she could erase the grief of bereavement? How could he disbelieve Sutapa's own experience? In the history of spirituality such a phenomenon was not rare. Coming in contact with the Buddha, grief-stricken people had forgotten their grief, Chandasoka had become Dharmasoka. So many legends were current about Christ too. But was it possible in the present age for a woman to possess that sort of power? Who was she? What did she look like? What was her Ashram like, that land of the gods?

In his reply he wrote, “The good news that you have given me is rare in this world. One has to admit the holiness of a place where one forgets one's grief of bereavement; and the person who can perform this miracle is surely not of this earth.

May your light blossom in a beautiful manner in Her protection. I am following the path of serving my country for which you had given me the inspiration in my youth. If now I receive a greater and nobler call than that, I shall surely come forward.”

(*Concluded*)

NIRODBARAN

(Reproduced from *Nirodbaran: Divinity's Comrade*, Sri Mira Trust, 2003)

INCONCEIVABLE DELIGHT

I WEPT when Autumn fled the barren fields
 And yet again at winter's solemn close,
 But Spring outdistanced me; I could not hold
 The beauty of the cherry and the rose.

I sang when I caught hold of summer's feet
 Passing through the garden of my soul,
 Her flowered prints so manifold and sweet
 Across my earth-hewn body gently stole.

I leapt with joy when Nature took my hand
 And led me through her golden sunlight's door,
 Her mysteries that I might understand
 Divulged, and beauty never seen before,

The promise of greater wonders still to come
 When earth receives the all-transforming light
 And man acknowledging the spirit's home
 Sustains an inconceivable delight.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

ON THE OCCASION OF THE 55TH ANNIVERSARY OF *MOTHER INDIA*

Go on as if the Divine Power is endless. All difficulties it can resolve if you have faith in it.

* * *

There is no end in the journey to the Divine, for indeed the Divine is endless.

21st February, 2004

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

PROTECTION

IF ALL your certitudes have melted
And you now fail to find your soul
This is the time, be sure, that I'll be with you
And find the way to make you whole.

I may feel thorny and the stones
we lie on break your every bone
But in their sharp unyieldingness lies your protection
That with my silence in each cell
I've well and truly sewn.

So bear with me for I am with you,
In every moment of your night and day.
Your anguish is my anguish
Burn it with a single heart-leap
And to my Heart of Love you'll find your way.

MAGGI

ON 'WHATEVER GOD GIVES YOU, ACCEPT.'

A LETTER

WHEN your friend says, "Whatever God gives you, accept. You should not hanker for promotion", there is a basic truth, but I am afraid that it has not been seen in its full depth and that its application is not precise enough.

The first part of the statement should surely not imply in the literal sense that no matter how wretched, how obscure and imperfect and harmful the state in which we find ourselves we must make no attempt to change it. What it basically implies is that we must take everything with equanimity and try to read God's message hidden in it. Without equanimity we would not know the grace which God intends to go with every state. But this does not mean we should be static on all occasions. There are times to be static and times to be dynamic. And, while we should be free of hankering, that is, of nervous fretting, whether for promotion or anything else, it is not at all a forgetfulness of God to strive for bettering our condition by the right means.

The next question is: What are the right means? They certainly rule out crookedness and injustice—doing an innocent person down and getting the better of him at all costs. They do not exclude opposition to crookedness and injustice. Nor is such opposition unspiritual. There is a spirituality which is world-shunning and non-active. There is also a spirituality that accepts the world and seeks actively to transform it at the same time that one works to transform oneself by developing inner equanimity and self-dedication to the Divine without losing the inspiration for dynamism. This kind of spirituality is what is proper to one who has for his background the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga.

Such spirituality does enjoin that one should not keep a grudge in one's heart. Your friend is correct there; but, when one has done one's best to keep the heart calm and wide, one is not thereby stripped of the power to act against crookedness and injustice. Indeed, if one fails, one should not be disturbed, but on the other hand one should not feel helpless: one should be ready to move again with trust in God's ultimate Will.

Coming to your particular case I would tell you: "Avoid the excitement to which you are prone, and the war-whoop that comes natural to a certain side of your temperament.... But what is 'success' really? According to me, one is never defeated as long as one goes on fighting and there is no failure except giving up. This does not mean that one must mechanically maintain a fight for the sake of fighting, nor know the moment to stop. Discretion and the capacity of self-control have always to be there, but mere odds and the sight of crowned and magnipotent Iniquity should not stop one. But here you are the best judge of what, in the round, will be truly helpful. And, whatever you do, keep your heart inwardly bowed to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Whether you win or lose, never lose your faith in their grace. That will be the greatest victory."

SOME REMINISCENCES OF REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITY AND YOGA

Some friends asked me to write my reminiscences. I represented to them why I was averse to it: generally it is an attempt to interpret the past in the light of the present. In my opinion it should rather be reliving the past. I grant there are merits in both ways of writing, for even when one tries to be objective, it is the result of his present or past subjectivity. Almost invariably the element of autobiography plays a part.

The answer of some friends was that they were not asking me because of their interest in my biography; they wanted to have, if possible, some glimpses of the early Ashram life and also of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

I undertake the task in order to satisfy their desire as far as I am capable of doing it. I beg to be excused for the personal element which is inextricably bound with such writing. I would request the reader not to treat this even as part of my political autobiography. It is the events that I want to recount and some glimpses of those days. That is the main purpose.

WHEN Sri Aurobindo came to Baroda after attending the Surat Congress in [December] 1907, my elder brother, Chhotubhai B. Purani, met him in Sjt. Khasirao Jadhav's house and asked for guidance for starting revolutionary work in Gujarat. Sri Aurobindo gave a plan, drawing a sketch with notes in pencil on a foolscap paper. It had three concentric circles—the first, the smallest ring, was formed of the few members who would act as the nucleus, the second larger ring was composed of persons and activities that could provide the recruiting ground, and the third, the largest circle, would be the general public whose sympathy and support must be enlisted for the cause. The liaison among them was to be provided by someone from the inmost group.

We preserved this paper for some time but when the police became suspicious, we buried it underground in a tin and painted the tin with tar to prevent rusting. But it was of no avail. Some years later, when we opened the pit, it was completely worm-eaten.

During Sri Aurobindo's sojourn in Baroda, Barin came two or three times to our house on the Raj Mahal Road, Kumedan Falia, to see my brother. They used to go out together for a walk on the Baroda-Vishwamitri rail-track. I learnt afterwards from my brother that Barin explained to him the organisation of the revolutionary activity in Bengal and on the last day he asked my brother to promise that he would take up the same type of work in Gujarat. He also gave the formula for preparing bombs. My brother told him that work in Gujarat would have to be done under different conditions. He could not promise that it would take the same form. But he promised to prepare at least ten men who would be ready to die for the country. This promise he more than fulfilled. After Barin's departure my brother received two or

three post-cards signed 'Das Gupta' evidently from Barin under an assumed name. Thus a link was established between Gujarat and Bengal.

After Sri Aurobindo left Baroda, our small group became very active. To begin with, the work was in three spheres: 1) Education on national lines; 2) Spread of physical culture; and 3) Uplift of villages by co-operative movement in the cotton-growing districts of Broach and Ankleshwar.

As a result of our activity from 1909 to 1914 a group came into existence which we called 'Our Mandal' and outsiders knew it as the 'Purani-Mandal'. It was in many ways a unique organisation. It had no constitution, no written rules and no treasurer, as there was no money! It was a sort of natural union of persons inspired by an ideal whose mode of working was freedom of thought and expression for the members. Its strength lay in honesty of purpose, sincerity, and the spirit of sacrifice for the cause of Indian Independence. Absence of rules did not lead to lack of efficient work or discipline. The volunteers who took up the work were anxious not to take any remuneration for it as far as they could and when obliged to take it, they tried to take the minimum. It had no "ism", and was not supported by any great personality.

*

My elder brother had lent his services to the D. A. V. College, Lahore from Baroda State after 1908-09. But in 1914, the situation in the country became acute¹ and he returned to Baroda, resigned his post, and started the Broach Education Society, which I also joined. The course of studies in this Education Society started from the infant class and ended in the Matric class of the High School. Later, after 1918, we had also the first year College class. C. B. Purani was the first to introduce the Montessori method in Gujarat and he translated a work on the same subject. The school staff prepared text-books for teaching in our schools; many extra-curricular activities—including professions like weaving and carpentry—were introduced.

When there was a great demand for nationalising education, the Gujarat Vidyapith was started at Ahmedabad; I was a member of the original committee set up for the purpose. When there was a cry for affiliation of our Broach Institute to the Vidyapith, a reference was made to all the guardians of the students and an overwhelming majority voted against it. My brother and others lost interest in the work. He turned to political work though it was not to his taste. I was reading the *Arya* since its commencement in 1914 August. My brother knew my interest in the Gita and in Yoga. I tried to interest him in Sri Aurobindo the Yogi, but he steadily refused to accept him as such. He said: "My Guru is Sri Aurobindo, the patriot and the politician. I follow him alone." He remained one of Sri Aurobindo's true political disciples to the end of his life.

*

1. That is, disturbed due to the outbreak of the First World War.

I took up the physical culture part of our programme. Yashwantraji Joshi took up the village organisation work with a few helpmates. All of us, except my brother, were students when the plan was conceived, it must be remembered. I trained myself in all the arts and practices of physical culture and starting as a student I continued the work after I graduated from St. Xavier's, Bombay. The chain of our *vyayam mandirs* (gymnasiums) spread from Surat in the south, to Mehsana in the north of Gujarat, including Broach, Baroda, Nadiad, Ahmedabad, Anand and other places. This net was intended to serve as the recruiting ground and to support and ultimately to work as the basis for revolutionary activity.

Our gymnasium was not merely an institution, it was rather a movement; going to the gymnasium was not merely for physical exercise but for the country. The gymnasiums we started did change the course of the lives of many young men and gave direction to many others. Some of the best workers in the subsequent political movement in Gujarat came from those who had their training in these gymnasiums.

Over and above physical exercise, there was an effort to prepare young men temperamentally to face dangers, to be adventurous, to accustom themselves to hardships. During our "Hill Fights" our party divided itself in two groups and actually carried out fighting. Organising tours for one or two weeks during vacations was part of the physical culture programme in all gymnasiums. These tours were planned in advance in every detail—things necessary were listed and made ready.

Tours on foot too were organised—the group walked about 20 to 25 miles per day—of course, this was only for the middle age-group, all 15 or above 15 years. These walking tours also included reading maps, crossing streams, cooking, keeping watch, etc. They gave the students a knowledge of the countryside, of its roads, places of safety, etc. All these activities instilled in many young men the spirit of service and sacrifice for Mother India and also taught them to organise themselves for action when needed.

The description of one such tour is worth recording. It was during the First World War, probably in 1915, that we started from Baroda via lake Ajwa, which supplies water to the city of Baroda, to reach Mt. Pavagadh. This was a very unusual route to Pavagadh in those days. It was part of the training for revolutionary work, for, we had to learn the use of the pedometer, of maps and charts, telescope and binoculars. We had to cook our food on the way, camp and pitch tents and guard them at night.

The most impressive sight that met us when we reached Ajwa was the golden reflection of Mt. Pavagadh in the still waters of the lake. The afternoon sun had gilded the grass on the mountain in gold and we were delighted to see its double in the water.

As we went further the terrain became more wild, hardly any roads were visible. The villagers we met on the way always guided us in the wrong direction! I must also confess that our unusual dress and the arms we carried could not have inspired

sympathy in the villagers. The result was that we went on from place to place without reaching our first halt. At last we gave up asking the villagers and resorted to making our way by reading the map. At the end of the day when we reached the village the pedometer had registered 50 miles!

But a more surprising experience was in store for us at the village. As soon as we entered, people closed their doors—shops not excepted—and they peered from behind the cracks and holes in the windows. We went to the little pond by the side of which there was a temple and a verandah around it. We put our bags and baggage on the verandah and decided to prepare *khichadi*. We knocked at a shop; but the shopkeeper would not open the door. We could not understand this behaviour at first. Later, after their attitude changed, we found that they had closed their doors out of fear, thinking that we were out to recruit soldiers by force for the World War! We had a few khakhi half-pants as part of our dress and our arms—swords, lances, *dharias* [scythes]—had added a sinister colour to their fear. When they found out that we were as good men as they, they confided that they were also afraid that we might be robbers come to loot the village. Here was an example of the characteristic lack of unity and co-operation among our people. Some of the villagers even tried to accuse us for our dress and equipment, completely ignoring that they had behaved as cowards,—in the village each was for himself only!

We bought some rice and *dal* and cooked *khichadi* and everything ended in a good spirit. It is true however, that some recruiting in the villages was done by unscrupulous agents who lured simple villagers with false promises and then forced them to join the labour corps.

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An incident during this period, when we were preparing for the revolutionary work, is worth recording.

The first gymnasium we started at Baroda in 1909 was in the heart of the city. From the College hostel which was outside the city proper, I used to go there every afternoon at about 4.30. The main workers did not leave the gymnasium before 8 p.m. One day on my way to the gymnasium, while crossing the Vishwamitri bridge, I passed a group of about twenty people looking down at something below on the river bed. I too looked down and saw a cow sinking in the soft mud of the narrow bed. The group was talking about it and sympathising with the cow—from the bridge. In about two minutes I decided to go down to do something to take the cow out. A collegian friend was there who also followed me. I had a piece of cloth and using it like a rope I wanted to extricate the cow. But before we could do anything, by our very presence perhaps, the cow pulled herself out of the mud,—it did not take more than five minutes! This has always been a characteristic example of our people's mentality to me: we Indians have ideas—sometimes more than we should have, and

theories and philosophies—tons of them—but hardly an ounce of practice or timely action.

In 1916-17 when I was working at Nadiad for establishing a gymnasium, I received a post-card from Mahatma Gandhi—only four lines, asking me to find time to see him at the Ashram that he was trying to establish at Sabarmati. He had heard about the ‘Purani Mandal’ and wanted a *vyayam mandir* to be started in his Ashram. I went and met him. He wanted to ascertain whether we believed in non-violence. I told him frankly that we did not believe in non-violence as a religion or creed. Man has a right to risk his life in fighting for his freedom if every other means fails. But I assured him that as long as we subscribe to non-violence as a policy we will stick to it. With this understanding I sent him one of our workers—Dwarkanath Harkare of Baroda—who was willing to work at Ahmedabad. I used to go to Ahmedabad to prepare the ground for starting a gymnasium in the city and also supervise the work at the Satyagraha Ashram.

Vinoba Bhave had recently joined the Ashram and his room was just on the bank of the river Sabarmati. He got interested in physical culture and I remember teaching him *lakadi-patta* (called *fari-gatka* in the north) which he learnt well. Perhaps, it may be a pleasant surprise to some to know that the ardent votary of non-violence learnt the art of offence and defence also.

Sometimes, when the Mahatma was free—and in those early days he was more free than in later days—myself, Dr. Chandulal Desai and Swami Adwaitanand had discussions with him on Incarnation, the Gita, Non-violence etc. I think at the end of such discussions both sides remained firm in their respective positions.

*

The difference of ideal between the various political leaders at that time was brought home to me when I had a talk with Lokamanya Tilak at Surat. There was a great agitation for Home Rule at that point and members were being enrolled with a pledge to secure it ‘with peaceful and legitimate means’. When our group was approached we did not join it on the ground that we did not approve of the limitation of ‘peaceful and legitimate means’. We assured the Congress that we would co-operate with it and do everything without signing the prescribed form. Tilak came to know about it and said, “Why do you hesitate to join the Home Rule League and sign the form? When you want to carry out revolution you say that you have changed your mind. That is all.” Tilak, certainly, was a politician!

*

Of the many tours on foot in which I took part, my impression of the Abu tour is worth recording. About 42 of us went from Ahmedabad to Abu-road. It was decided

that about eight to ten hardy grown-up boys would try to climb to the top of Mt. Abu by a short but unusual and narrow footpath with me, while the rest of the company would walk up by the ordinary wide road which was much longer. The shortcut had no water and was steep, while the long road was easy, and had facilities. But the youngsters protested at night and did not want to miss the thrill of the adventure. So at last it was decided that all go by the shorter way.

Early next morning the march began and at the last well everyone took his fill of water and all water-cans were filled up. I remained at the tail-end to see that no one was lost on the path which was unknown to all of us. We continued walking until 10 or 10.30 when I felt that the party was going on the wrong track. All water-cans were empty by that time. It was the month of June and we were on the borders of Rajputana. The temperature on Abu was unbearably hot, very often reaching 110° F. I stopped the company and decided to send all back to the main road from where we had diverged. I could see the road through the telescope and guided the members along the rough and rocky course of a stream which had completely dried up. Following my signals the party at last reached a place on the main road where there was a well. But during the interval every one felt such acute pangs of thirst that it had become an unforgettable experience to all. Some boys in the company could not swallow sugar, others could not take lime or onion for want of salivation in the mouth. Everyone had taken such an overdose of water that some of them vomited. The detailed description of this adventure may be found in the hand-written monthly magazine of our Ahmedabad branch or when some participant like Pujalal writes about it.

Everyone threw down their packs in the valley and raced to the main road. I remained alone on the hill and tried to find the way to the top. But after about half an hour gave up as I was not sure of the way and was anxious about the party. The heat dried up almost all the water from the system and the skin became, after sometime, full of eruptions. A shepherd who met me gave me some water to drink from his bag, but that was no solution. Some of the captains after reaching the road and well, came in search of me fearing I might have become unconscious. But I answered their whistle and we all came out safe.

There was a sequel to this. Everyone had left everything in the valley. So, early next morning a strong party was sent to recover all that was abandoned and as no time was lost, the party recovered literally everything, including blankets, foodstuff, sweets and postcards.

*

One day in 1914 I saw a notice in the Bombay Chronicle declaring that Sri Aurobindo was bringing out a monthly, the *Arya*, on August 15th and it called for subscribers. I immediately sent my name and I believe I was the 24th or 25th subscriber to it. I ordered it to an address outside the College hostel [St. Xavier's, Bombay] in order to

avoid suspicion.² I began to read it in my hostel at night because being very active during daytime I could not spare time then. So, I kept it for the night, getting up at midnight, reading it up to 2 a.m. in the quiet hours. Then I found that I was able to understand it.

*

All these incidents I have recounted are to show how all our activities had their origin in the inspiration which Sri Aurobindo had given to us. It was after these preparations lasting for eleven years that I came to Pondicherry to seek his assent to the active execution of the plan which he had given.

A. B. PURANI

(From an incomplete type-script available at the Archives with several changes and corrections marked by the author. Edited by Sunjoy for publication.)

2. Sri Aurobindo was then considered an absconder from British Justice and any communication or contact with him automatically invited the suspicions of the British Indian police.

A THUNDER STORM

As a thunder cloud with lightning streaked, He came.
 His beauty thrilled my heart and filled my eyes;
 I uttered yearningly His mystic name,
 For Him I knew e'en through His dark disguise.

His blue black silken limbs soon covered the sky;
 Twinkling eyes smiled and flashed thro' collyrium smear;
 His red lips parted. A pearly sheen glimpsed I
 Which lighted the mischief in that face so dear.

His body shook and shook with suppressed laughter
 As He frolicked with the wind and teased the sun:
 That was the thunder roll which came soon after
 The gleam in His eye announced, "The game's begun".

And then my Darling poured, like a naughty child,
 A deluge of shining showers, fanciful, wild.

ANIRUDDHA SIRCAR

THE MOTHER—WHO BINDS MAN TO THE SUPREME

(Continued from the issue of April 2004)

WE have said earlier that the manifestation of the Divine in this world is progressive. As higher Gods descend into this creation, the greater is the power of the consciousness which can receive their influence. The Gods who have manifested so far in this creation have been Overmental Gods.¹ Human consciousness has been able to feel their influence in varying degrees but this influence has not given humanity the ability to counter successfully the domination of adverse or hostile forces and change human nature. Sri Aurobindo has indicated what effect the manifestation of the supramental principle in the earth-consciousness is likely to have:

Its first effect on mankind would be to open a way between the order of the Truth-light and the orders of the Ignorance here on earth itself, a sort of realised gradation by which it would be possible for mental man to evolve more easily and surely from the Ignorance towards the Light and, as he went, organise his existence according to these steps. For at present the grades of consciousness between mind and supermind act only as influences (the highest of them very indirect influences) on human mind and consciousness and cannot do more. This would change. An organised higher human consciousness could appear or several degrees of it, with the supermind-organised consciousness as the leader at the top influencing the others and drawing them towards itself. It is likely that as the supramental principle evolved itself the evolution would more and more take on another aspect—the Daivic nature would predominate, the Asuro-Rakshaso-Pishachic prakriti which now holds so large a place would more and more recede and lose its power. A principle of greater unity, harmony and light would emerge everywhere. It is not that the creation in the Ignorance would be altogether abolished, but it would begin to lose much of its elements of pain and falsehood and would be more a progression from lesser to higher Truth, from a lesser to a higher harmony, from a lesser to a higher Light, than the reign of chaos and struggle, of darkness and error that we now perceive.²

In *Savitri*, which is a spiritual biography of the Mother, Aswapati, the representative modern man, explores all the occult worlds in this creation but fails to find in any of these worlds a Power strong enough to transform the human consciousness. He then enters the Transcendental world where he sees “a new and marvellous creation” in which:

A Bliss, a Light, a Power, a flame-white Love
Caught all into a sole immense embrace;

Existence found its truth on Oneness' breast
 And each became the self and space of all...
 There were no contraries, no sundered parts,
 All by spiritual links were joined to all
 And bound indissolubly to the One:
 Each was unique, but took all lives as its own,
 And, following out these tones of the Infinite,
 Recognised in himself the universe....
 There was no sob of suffering anywhere;
 Experience ran from point to point of joy:
 Bliss was the pure undying truth of things.
 All Nature was a conscious front of God...

Savitri, pp. 322-324

This is the Supramental world, a consciousness entirely spiritual, and with the power to change human nature. If the human consciousness begins to receive the power of this consciousness, then it will be able to bring perfection to this world. But, as we are told in *Savitri*, only the Supreme Mother incarnate, that is Savitri in the epic, can bring this world down into our creation. It is the belief of all those who have recognised the real being of the Mother, the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, that she was in fact the Supreme Divine Mother incarnate on earth and she had come down with the specific mission of bringing down and establishing this new level of being on earth. That is why *Savitri*, the great epic of Sri Aurobindo, has been regarded as the spiritual biography of the Mother. Those who know something of the inner lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother know how hard both struggled to bring the supramental world down on earth.

The Mother has announced that this new world actually descended on earth on 29 February 1956. On that day, “the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.” The world may not know it yet but what the Mother had ushered in is the greatest event in human history.

We can now be absolutely certain that under the influence of this consciousness and the power it has brought with it, man will grow into a divine being, a superman and that man's aspiration through countless millennia for a perfect life on earth will be fulfilled.

The Mother was able to accomplish all this because she was what Kapali Sastriar called her—the *Adya Sakti*. She was Ishwari, the Lord in his expressive poise, the Creative Spirit. She has already brought into manifestation the four cosmic Powers to which are given the great Names—*Maheshwari*, *Mahakali*, *Mahalakshmi* and *Mahasaraswati*. And it is owing to the influence and grace of these powers on the human consciousness, that man is capable of a seeking for truth and knowledge (the grace of Maheshwari), capable of waging a struggle with himself and with forces

around him (the grace of Mahakali), is capable of engaging himself in constant production and adaptation (the grace of Mahalakshmi) and is capable of applying skill in works and service and sacrifice (the grace of Mahasaraswati). These powers still find an imperfect and crude manifestation in most of us. This is because of the inadequacies in human consciousness.

Now the Mother has brought also from the transcendental world new Godheads or Powers hitherto not active in the earth consciousness and established them in the higher planes of this creation—altogether new Godheads, the Supramental Godheads. It is now up to the human consciousness to strive to reflect in itself these new Godheads and derive strength from them and free itself from the clasp of the forces of Ignorance.

It should be clearly understood that the Mother is not limited to any Goddess; all the Gods and Goddesses are her embodiments, her powers. As mentioned above, the four great Names—Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati—are the powers or Personalities of the Divine Mother. The Mother whose 125th Birth Anniversary we are celebrating this year was an incarnation of this Divine Mother.

Once a disciple asked Sri Aurobindo the following specific question about the Mother:

Am I right in thinking that she as an individual embodies all the Divine Powers and brings down the Grace more and more to the physical plane, and her embodiment is a chance for the entire physical consciousness to change and be transformed?

Sri Aurobindo's answer:

Yes. Her embodiment is a chance for the earth-consciousness to receive the Supramental into it and to undergo first the transformation necessary for that to be possible.³

Sri Aurobindo has elaborated on this in another letter:

There is one divine Force which acts in the universe and in the individual and is also beyond the individual and the universe. The Mother stands for all these, but she is working here in the body to bring down something not yet expressed in this material world so as to transform life here—it is so that you should regard her as the Divine Shakti working here for that purpose. She is that in the body, but in her whole consciousness she is also identified with all the other aspects of the Divine.⁴

Until now this whole earth has been receiving the forces and influences that come from the Overmind. What we call a God is in fact a Force, a power, and until

now the whole universe was under the Gods of the Overmind. Beyond the Overmind there is something and now it is the turn of that something to come and rule the earth, to manifest upon earth. Therefore the Mother has said that there is now no need to speak of the Overmind.⁵ Sri Aurobindo has come to speak of something new. But people are still unable to come out of their attachment to the old Gods and Goddesses. Just as there is a tendency among some of us to worship the old Avatars and to hesitate to accept the new Avatar, there is also a tendency even among devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to see the Divine only as one or more of the Gods and Goddesses of the Overmind. Somebody had put the following question to the Mother:

Once one has taken the path of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, should not one stop worshipping all other gods and goddesses?

And this was the Mother's answer:

One who truly follows the path given by Sri Aurobindo, as soon as he begins to have the experience of this path, will find it impossible to confine his consciousness to the worship of any god or goddess or even of all of them put together.⁶

The Mother has clearly stated why the Overmental Godheads humanity has been worshipping so far have not been able to transform human nature and why we should now turn our entire devotion to the Supreme Divine:

Now it is this Overmind that has up to the present governed our world: it is the highest that man has been able to attain in illumined consciousness. It has been taken for the Supreme Divine and all those who have reached it have never for a moment doubted that they have touched the true Spirit. For, its splendours are so great to the ordinary human consciousness that it is absolutely dazzled into believing that here at last is the crowning reality. And yet the fact is that the Overmind is far below the true Divine. It is not the authentic home of the Truth. It is only the domain of the *formateurs*, all those creative powers and deities to whom men have bowed down since the beginning of history. And the reason why the true Divine has not manifested and transformed the earth-nature is precisely that the Overmind has been mistaken for the Supermind. The cosmic Gods do not wholly live in the Truth-Consciousness: they are only in touch with it and represent, each of them, an aspect of its glories.⁷

The creation of the Overmind was an age of the gods, and consequently the age of religions. "In the supramental creation there will *no longer be any religions*. The whole life will be the expression, the flowering into forms of the divine Unity manifesting in the world. And there will no longer be what men now call gods."⁸

In *Savitri* we have a clear indication of the inadequacy of the Overmental Godheads. During Savitri's inner journey in search of her soul, she meets the three Madonnas, who are the Godheads belonging to the Overmental world. Each one of them claims to be Savitri's soul. Here, for example, is the Madonna of Might speaking to Savitri:

Men hail in my coming the Almighty's force
 Or praise with thankful tears his saviour Grace.
 I smite the Titan who bestrides the world
 And slay the ogre in his blood-stained den.
 I am Durga, goddess of the proud and strong,
 And Laksmi, queen of the fair and fortunate;
 I wear the face of Kali when I kill,
 I trample the corpses of the demon hordes.
 I am charged by God to do his mighty work,
 Uncaring I serve his will who sent me forth,
 Reckless of peril and earthly consequence.
 I reason not of virtue and of sin
 But do the deed he has put into my heart.
 I fear not for the angry frown of Heaven,
 I flinch not from the red assault of Hell;
 I crush the opposition of the gods,
 Tread down a million goblin obstacles.
 I guide man to the path of the Divine...

Savitri, pp. 509-510

We meet here Durga, goddess of the proud and strong, and Lakshmi, queen of the fair and fortunate, and Kali, who tramples with her feet the demon hordes. The Goddesses of Compassion, Might and Wisdom have been active in our world for a long time now, and yet the world remains thwarted in its growth towards perfection. The reason for this is not that these Godheads are not powerful.⁹ Durga, for example, destroys her asura, but she has to do it every year. This she will have to go on doing until the Asuras are banished from this world. As the Mother has pointed out, the Asuras will be there as long as they are useful for intensifying the aspiration, clarifying the consciousness, for putting to test the sincerity of people. The Asuras will disappear from this earth only when hatred, selfishness, ugliness and evil disappear from this world. But this is the work man himself will have to do. The Gods who have manifested so far will not do it for him and the influence he has received from them in his consciousness has not been able to do it either. It is he who will have to transform this earth. And he will not be able to do that without acquiring the Supramental consciousness, without turning exclusively to the Supramental Godheads.

The reply Savitri gives to the Mother of Might indicates this:

“Madonna of might, Mother of works and force,
 Thou art a portion of my soul put forth
 To help mankind and help the travail of Time.
 Because thou art in him, man hopes and dares;
 Because thou art, men’s souls can climb the heavens
 And walk like gods in the presence of the Supreme.
 But without wisdom power is like a wind,
 It can breathe upon the heights and kiss the sky,
 It cannot build the extreme eternal things.
 Thou hast given men strength, wisdom thou couldst not give.
 One day I will return, a bringer of light,
 Then I will give to thee the mirror of God;
 Thou shalt see self and world as by him they are seen
 Reflected in the bright pool of thy soul.
 Thy wisdom shall be vast as vast thy power.
 Then hate shall dwell no more in human hearts,
 And fear and weakness shall desert men’s lives,
 The cry of the ego shall be hushed within,
 Its lion roar that claims the world as food,
 All shall be might and bliss and happy force.”

Savitri, pp. 513-514

In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo had foreseen the manifestation on earth of the Supermind and superman in these words:

If a spiritual unfolding on earth is the hidden truth of our birth into Matter, if it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in Nature, then man as he is cannot be the last term of that evolution: he is too imperfect an expression of the Spirit, Mind itself a too limited form and instrumentation; Mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being. If, then, man is incapable of exceeding mentality, he must be surpassed and Supermind and superman must manifest and take the lead of the creation. But if his mind is capable of opening to what exceeds it, then there is no reason why man himself should not arrive at Supermind and supermanhood or at least lend his mentality, life and body to an evolution of that greater term of the Spirit manifesting in Nature.¹⁰

We have already mentioned that the Supramental consciousness actually descended on earth on 29 February 1956. In 1958, the Mother announced that we have now reached a certitude that there is already a beginning of realisation. She also

asserted with certainty that there will be an intermediate species between the mental and supramental being, a kind of superman who will still have the qualities and in part the nature of man. This transitional being was present on earth in the Mother's material body, and what is possible in the Mother would be possible for the whole of humanity.¹¹ The Mother continued to work all her life for the realisation of the ideal set before us by Sri Aurobindo.

A new consciousness like the Supramental consciousness which is altogether a higher kind of consciousness than the mind would require a new material body to manifest it. Now, in order to be able to make such a body possible, there will have to be a basic change in Matter. Until now this tremendous task was undertaken by Nature whenever a higher level of consciousness was about to descend on earth, and each such step took millennia, and that is why evolution has been so slow when looked at from the human measure of time. But now, man has to consciously participate in and accelerate the pace of this evolutionary change. Such a stupendous task cannot be initiated and brought to a successful conclusion by one or more human beings. Only the Divine incarnated in a human body on earth can do this. The Mother took up this challenging task during the last phase of her earthly existence. Since this is a subject too complex and too vast for me to be able to deal with here, I will not go here into any of the details. Suffice it to say, that eight years after the departure of Sri Aurobindo in 1950, the Mother withdrew to her room to grapple with this most basic of all the problems—that of changing the consciousness of our physical cells. By 1973, she had slowly but surely discovered the Great Passage to the next species and a new mode of life in matter. This required an unprecedented *tapasya* on the part of the Mother.

This then was the Mother whose 125th Birth Anniversary is being celebrated this year. She not only addressed the question “who after man?” but worked out the “how” of it in her own physical body.

(Concluded)

MANGESH NADKARNI

Notes and References

1. A level of being much above the present mental level but lower than the Supramental level.
2. Quotation from *The Integral Yoga* (Selected Letters of Sri Aurobindo), pp. 73-74.
3. *The Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 49.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.
5. *Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 5, p. 284.
6. *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, pp. 255-256.
7. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 173.
8. *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, p. 150.
9. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, pp. 97-100.
10. *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, pp. 846-847.
11. Georges Van Vrekhem: *The Mother: The Story of Her Life*, p. 432.

THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of April 2004)

7. Veda Vyasa

THERE is a circular tank called Chandra Pushkarini within the famous Ranganatha Temple in South India. History, myths and legends swirl in the waters of this tank presided over by the serene figure of Veda Vyasa. Tradition tells us that it was here, beneath the Pinnai Tree that Srivaishnava Acharyas expounded the great epics and Puranas from the time of Sri Nathamuni (10th century A.D.) The Acharyas were particularly fond of the Krishna incarnation and at some point of time made the charama sloka of the *Bhagavad Gita* (XVIII, 66) as one of the three “secrets” imparted to a disciple during the moment of spiritual initiation. Since this sloka is part of the *Mahabharata*, Vyasa is held in high veneration at this spot and a temple has been erected to him. Annual guru puja is performed on the appropriate day.

Interestingly enough, Vyasa is also considered to have written other works, among them the Brahmasutras and the Puranas. He is also said to have codified the Vedas. Naturally, this would mean there have been many Vyasas in our tradition. The term perhaps refers to the editor or compiler of a particular work. Tradition speaks of twenty-eight Vyasas in the Vaivasvata Manvantara. Which Vyasa wrote the *Bhagavata*?

One could fondly relate him to the son of Parasara as indeed, we have been told. He is the great grandson of Vasishta, grandson of Shakti, son of Parasara and himself the father of Suka. The *Vishnu Purana* is attributed to Parasara. The introduction to that Purana opens with a conversation between Parasara and Rishi Maitreya. Parasara tells the Rishi that he had been angered when an asura sent by Viswamitra had immobilised King Kalmashapada who then became a demon and devoured Shakti. To avenge his father’s murder, Parasara began a sacrifice that proceeded to destroy innumerable asuras. Vasishta then approached Parasara and asked him to give up his anger since it was fated Shakti should die thus. Noble persons should always uphold compassion. Bowing to the wish of his grandfather Parasara ceased the dread sacrifice. Pulastya, son of Brahma, was pleased by this act of self-control and blessed Parasara with the boon of inditing Puranic literature. Henceforth Parasara could effortlessly create the *Vishnu Purana*.

His son must have received the gift by sheer observation and absorption. The *Bhagavata* can be spoken of as an extension and elaboration of what is contained in Parasara’s creation. And the *Bhagavata* Purana has become the most popular of the genre. The work itself contains a portrait of Vyasa by Suta who is relating the narrative, having heard it from Vyasa’s son Suka. The character of Vyasa as revealed by Suta no doubt explains why the Purana touches our hearts.

One day, at the conclusion of the Dwapara Yuga, Vyasa sat on the banks of the river Saraswati. He was filled with a great sadness. Hadn't he done much to elevate mankind, and raise man's consciousness through codifying the Vedas? These hymns had been propagated well but were not within the reach of women, Sudras and those of the higher castes who had fallen low through moral turpitude. Out of his compassion, Vyasa had then narrated the itihasa, *Mahabharata*. He had also set down the Puranas for the same purpose. This was the time when he should feel happy with a sense of achievement. From whence then this sorrow, this sense of failure? He tells himself:

"I, who am considered great and perfect among those endowed with the lustre of spiritual refinement, fail to feel that enrichment and joy of the spirit. Is it that I have not given an adequate exposition of the Laws of Divine Life (Bhagavata Dharma), which are so dear to the Paramahansas (men of the highest enlightenment) as also to the Supreme Being (Achyuta)?"

This is an understandable feeling which comes upon thinkers and leaders of the society when they see their hard work coming to nought since man has a way of losing faith and sincerity, blinded by the temptations around him. Rishi Narada who usually makes his entrance at catalytic moments, now comes to Vyasa. Vyasa tells him that he is not able to explain the reason for the sorrow that is gnawing at him from within. Narada's explanation is so apt, so simple. Yes, Vyasa was a master of knowledge but mastery of knowledge alone does not ensure us happiness. The Vedas, the Brahmasutras and the Itihasa do not expound the greatness of the Supreme adequately. All this is dry knowledge which has not been kindled by the flame of devotion. None of Veda Vyasa's works composed earlier is devoted totally to the Lord:

"You have not adequately described the unsullied glory of the Supreme Lord. I consider as imperfect all those philosophies which fail to please the Lord because of their lack of devotional exuberance, which alone can give full satisfaction to Him. You have not expounded the greatness of Vasudeva with that exhaustiveness with which you have treated the Vedic rites and the four-fold end of human life, consisting of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha (Virtue, Wealth, Desire and Liberation)."

Rishi Narada assures Vyasa that literary artistry or "high-falutin'" scholarship neither pleases the Lord nor do they bring joy to the creator. Vyasa will have to bestir himself and write about the divine play of the Lord on earth to give a point of focus to man engaged in everyday concerns and ever in danger of falling into the meshes of evil. The Lord's story alone can give man the needed anchorage to remain safe when tossed by the play of senses. Narada also tells Vyasa that by codifying the ritualistic part of the Vedas performed for personal satisfactions as Dharma, he has unconsciously encouraged man to rely excessively on ritualism. Now man gets lost in the rituals and goes for more and more material pleasures! The relevance of the Puranas for our century is thus pithily inscribed in this speech. Mere ritualism based

on knowledge and scholarship can only make man a materialist monster! Narada says further:

“Literary compositions, which are characterised by the presence of words indicating divine attributes and glory, destroy the sins and evil tendencies of people even if there are mistakes in every one of their lines. Holy men hear the exposition of such texts, and themselves expound and sing them.”

It may not be out of place to mention here that the rise of the Bhakti Movement of the Alvars lies in between the *Vishnu Purana* and the *Bhagavata*. While the Vedas and the Upanishads were too much with the people who were gradually overwhelmed by the excessive ritualism of the Vedic religion and could not easily understand the abstruse philosophical concepts of the Upanishads either, the Bhakti Movement gave them the needed breather. Inspired by the *Vishnu Purana* man was drawn very close to God. For the first time he could see the Supreme as a child, for this early Purana spoke of the birth of Krishna to Devaki and Vasudeva. The devotee could watch Vasudeva moving in the rainy night towards Gokula and placing the babe near Yasoda. He could see the little child destroy Putana and Sakatasura, bring down the Arjuna trees, dance on the serpent Kaliya, kill demons like Dhenuka and Pralambha and raise the Govardhana Hill by his hand. Krishna became the Prince of Mathura by killing Kamsa and married Rukmini. All the well-known episodes like the bringing of the Parijata tree from Indra’s garden as well as the end of the Yadavas are found in the Purana which, however, is silent on the *Mahabharata* activities of Krishna.

The *Vishnu Purana* became the favourite of the masses as it was recited and expounded by learned scholars as well as poetic souls. Soon the Alvars appeared, weaving exquisite poems based on the legends in the Purana with inputs from the ancient Tamil tradition of the Sangam Age as well as their own personal mystic experiences. By the 10th century the poems of the Alvars were anthologised by the great Vaishnavite Acharya, Nathamuni, who set them to music, and gave them an official position in the rituals conducted in South India’s Vishnu temples. The spirit of Vishnu’s incarnations was imbibed eagerly by the populace and it was time to gather once again all the received tradition and the new experiences of sages into a Puranic whole to help the devotional exuberances of the eager devotees. Scholars view this development as consisting of three phases. There is here very old material which was later shaped into the Purana and made contemporaneous during the time of the Alvars. Swami Tapasyananda finds internal evidence of the Alvar connection in the Purana itself and quotes a verse from Skandha XI:

“Men of the Krita and other ages desire to be born in the so-called degenerate age of Kali. For, in Kali, are surely born many devotees of Lord Narayana in several parts of the Dravida country through which holy rivers like the Tamraparni, the Kritamala, the Payasvini and the Cauvery flow. Those who drink the water of these rivers become pure in heart and develop devotion to Vasudeva.”

Based on this verse, Swami Tapasyananda feels that the Purana may have been

revised or radically recast by an unknown savant from South India. The point we have to note here is that the Purana has now become drenched with the mood of bhakti and the author (or the new editor) underlines this through the words of Narada. Narada's words to the sorrowing Vyasa are a magna carta for Bhakti yoga to approach the Divine. Both Jnana and Karma cannot be meaningful unless they are ignited by bhakti and dedicate knowledge and works to the Supreme. Man, tossed around by his senses cannot renounce enjoyment easily. To make him steady and bring him to safety, he needs the hold of bhakti. Unlike other ways, the path of devotion never fails man:

“O dear one! A person devoted to the Lord is never caught up in this repetitive process of Samsara like one devoted to the Vedic rites and desire-prompted activities. For whoever comes to be attracted by the Lord, who is all bliss, is constantly attached to Him by the joyous memory of His service, and never feels inclined to leave the same, lured by worldly enjoyments.”

The Universe is the Lord and yet the Lord is distinct. He is the material and efficient cause of the universe and yet has this creation as his joyous sport. Contemplating upon this activity of the Lord and His incarnations is indeed the final flight in our ascension to Him:

“Great men have established that the supreme, imperishable consummation of all spiritual disciplines—be it austerities, scriptural study, sacrifices, Japa, gifts or discrimination—consists in the development of keen interest in contemplation and exposition of the glories and attributes of the most Exalted Being.”

Narada then tells Vyasa of his birth as the son of a maid-servant who worked for people engaged in Vedic ritualism. It was from these ritualists that he happened to hear of Krishna's manifestation and ministry. From childhood he was thus charmed by the anecdotes concerning the Lord. He realised that the blending of devotion with works and knowledge assured one of Realisation. When he became an orphan soon afterwards, he sat under a tree in a forest, lost in meditation. The Lord revealed Himself little by little to the consciousness of Narada and presently the boy went into samadhi and had a full vision of the Lord. When the samadhi was broken, the Lord disappeared. When Narada tried to concentrate again he could not regain the vision. But Vasudeva spoke to him as a disembodied voice. Narada was not eligible to have the vision again in this birth. The Lord revealed Himself once, so that Narada would long to recapture that vision. However, he would not be drawn by worldly things anymore and would become an attendant of the Lord after this birth.

Much later, when he had exhausted his earlier karmas (*prārabdha*), his physical body fell away and he was given a divine body (*suthām bhāgavatīm tanum*). No more would Narada be obstructed by the division of yugas or cosmic dissolution. He would be there, forever, move wherever he wanted to, and spread the message of devotion, twanging his lute. Narada's words do have a pointer for our century increasingly given to a confusion regarding the goal of life in this uncertain world

which is buffeted by terrorism and moral turpitude:

“The description of the Lord’s deeds and attributes is the one means, a veritable boat, to cross the ocean of Samsara for those who are rendered miserable by the desire for sense-objects. Men who are constantly pestered by passions like lust and greed, are never pacified so effectively and readily by Yogic disciplines like Yama and Niyama, as by the service of the Lord.”

With these words Narada went away. Now Vyasa sat on the western bank of the Saraswati river in the holy place, *samyāprāsa*, in samadhi and gained a vision of the Supreme. He realised the power of Maya which confounds the jivatman to think that he is not free but a body. This wrong view of the body made of the three gunas causes him to suffer. To overcome this ignorant view of the body and the atman, the only way was devotion to the Supreme. With the coming of this realisation, Vyasa proceeded to compose the *Bhagavata Purana*. This Purana is known as *sātvata-samhitā* (scripture of devotion). Even by beginning to study it, one is freed from sorrow! For, the beginning has no end. It draws one towards the Lord by developing devotion unknown even to oneself. After composing the Purana and revising it, Vyasa taught the narrative to his son Suka.

The Pauranikas of old never cared for broken images. They tried their best to remove all possible confusion from the minds of the listener. Towards this end, they continuously formulated questions and stated the answers. We who have learnt about the great renunciate Suka would naturally wonder about his reaction to the narrative which deals with so many moods and incidents that call for a constant suspension of disbelief. How could he have the patience to learn about it all and lose his advaitic bliss? What need had he to learn about the deeds of the Lord anyway since he was already filled with divine consciousness? The listener’s question is formulated by Saunaka, and Suta immediately replies:

“Such is the inherent attractiveness of Sri Hari that even such contemplatives steeped in the Atman-consciousness are drawn to Him. Because Sri Suka, the son of Badarayana (Vyasa), was extremely fond of devotees and their company, and because he was strongly fascinated by the excellences of the Lord, he took the trouble of learning the extensive literature (so that he might serve the Lord and the devotees) by expounding it.”

It needs no special elaboration to note the special attraction one has for the story of Krishna. Each of the incarnations has a facet that pleases the devotee no end. The touching tale of the king Satyavrata and the astonishing macro-fish during the deluge; the gracious tortoise that set the Mandara Mountain straight during the churning of the ocean; the terribilita of Narasimha; the sweet presence of Vamana; the glorious Trivikrama; the expert archer Rama who was verily Truth and Dharma incarnate. But Krishna holds us in thrall then and now. For He is truly the Delight of Existence.

The other facets of one’s striving, like knowledge and works, are important but

they remain poor without one's gathering this Delight into the heart. What is the use of achieving great things if one's body and mind do not remember God, if one's heart does not sing paeans of God! Rejecting the contention by some people that bhakti marga is inferior to the other paths, Sri Aurobindo remarks that this misunderstanding rises due to perceiving a difference between the devotee and the Lord in bhakti yoga. Oneness with the Lord is rightly considered to be the highest spiritual experience, but the seeming difference is part of the striving on the path. External worship of the Lord is but the first step:

“Where external worship changes into the inner adoration, real Bhakti begins; that deepens into the intensity of divine love; that love leads to the joy of closeness in our relations with the Divine; the joy of closeness passes into the bliss of union. Love too as well as knowledge brings us to a highest oneness and it gives to that oneness its greatest possible depth and intensity. It is true that love returns gladly upon a difference in oneness, by which the oneness itself becomes richer and sweeter.”¹

This idea of a steady growth of bhakti leading to oneness with the Lord and finding a richer experience in the “You-me” idea has been stated as a triple-experience by Sri Ramanuja in his own style. He speaks of three states of bhakti. There is the state of Para bhakti (devotion for the Lord) when the individual thirsts for a vision of the Divine. Having learnt about the Divine and being convinced that the Lord is the Goal of one's life, the devotee aspires to attain Him and sings of the Lord or listens to the Lord's stories. This constant absorption in the Lord grants him Para Jnana (knowledge of the Lord). This is the moment of union with the divine, a oneness with the Lord. But this state can never be a permanent one. Like Narada losing the vision of the Lord with the disturbance of his samadhi state, the devotee is necessarily brought back to his earthly existence. But he is not the same person now. The Lord fills his being and the devotee is now in the state of Parama bhakti (Constant devotion). There is no more a need to aspire for the Divine, for the Divine is with him, within and without. This is the condition described by Nammalwar in a verse dipped in bridal mysticism. The state of the jivatman (the beloved) is brought to us even thus:

“She says that the food she eats
The water she drinks, and the betel leaves
She munches are all Krishna, my Lord.
Her eyes stream forth tears. She inquires
About his residence which is richly endowed
And enters Tirukkolor, my doe-like girl!”²

Everywhere the Lord, *Vāsudevaḥ sarvam!*

Suta indicates that Suka learnt the story of the Lord's incarnations to help ordinary mortals evolve in bhakti and see the whole world pervaded by the grandeur of

God. This underlines the Vedic dictum: *ekam svādu na bhunjāā!* Do not eat tasty food all alone! Share, share food with others and share the Lord's incarnations with others. Spread the message! To those who would demur that this was diluting the highest flight of spiritual experience, Sri Aurobindo's advice is to rise above the normal mind which compartmentalises the Eternal and the Individual. It would be a grievous error to build "an unbridgeable gulf between the Absolute and the Relative." Rather, we should see that there are three terms of the Ekam Sat: Transcendent, universal and individual. This is no compartmentalisation though:

"The human being is here on earth the highest power of the third term, the individual, for he alone can work out at its critical turning-point that movement of self-manifestation which appears to us as the involution and evolution of the divine consciousness between the two terms of the Ignorance and the Knowledge. The power of the individual to possess in his consciousness by self-knowledge his unity with the Transcendent and the universal, with the One Being and all beings and to live in that knowledge and transform his life by it, is that which makes the working out of the divine self-manifestation through the individual possible; and the arrival of the individual,—not in one but in all,—at the divine life is the sole conceivable object of the movement."³

Suka is aware of a need to help the individual being arrive at the universal by contemplating upon the incarnation. As devotion increases in the aspirant, he moves from ignorance about himself as a separate body (*dehābhimānī*) and learns of the soul's oneness, slipping thus into a universal consciousness. Ignorance falls away from the aspirant as he then speeds towards the knowledge of the One. With the typical generosity of a born teacher full of compassion, he comes down to the level of the listener and educates him on the bhakti shastra that would lead him to union with the Divine.

But how much of such a seeking is relevant to our century? Is the kind of devotion and absorption in Krishna valid at a time when we have to live with a variety of horrors, disgusts, disappointments and chicaneries in everyday life? Surely all of us cannot run away to forest hermitages! Or, is such absorption going to be no more than a self-drugging to take a flight from reality? Drawing his sustenance from the Aurobindonian canon on the subject for his poem, *Krishna Geetam*, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar seeks an answer for this searing self-doubt in this time of the breaking of the worlds. The Guru speaks to the disciple not to give in to despair even in the worst of scenarios:

"For even in these grim outrageous times,
normalcy is still the rule,
peace and its blessings are widely diffused,
and sanity holds its own.

And if you keep your eyes and ears open,
the Delight of Existence
invades you from all sides, and Harmony
holds you in its firm embrace.

Without succumbing all too readily
to the reign of the evil
of our times, why not look for the deeper
antidotes of Trust and Love?"⁴

The *Bhagavata* offers us these two antidotes a-plenty. Once we manage to escape suicidal despair with its help, may we not hope to feel selfconfident enough to pursue the Sadhana to gain the Mind of Light in this century?

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

Notes and References

1. 'Love and the Triple Path', *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1970), p. 525.
2. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.
3. 'The Eternal and the Individual', *The Life Divine* (1970), p. 386.
4. *Krishna Geetam*, Prologue, Canto V, verses 96-98.

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

In fact the better comprehension that is now returning to us of our own self and past shows that the Puranic religions are only a new form and extension of the truth of the ancient spirituality and philosophy and socio-religious culture. In their avowed intention they are popular summaries of the cosmogony, symbolic myth and image, tradition, cult, social rule of the Indian people continued, as the name Purana signifies, from ancient times.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Renaissance in India, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 372)

SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from the issue of April 2004)

SELF-REALISATION, says Sri Aurobindo, is the sense—secret or overt—of individual and of social development. What is the precise meaning of this? The whole race is as yet a far-off thing in our imagination, to us the largest living unit is the nation. But even this unit is too large and too complex a thing to be grasped thoroughly and readily. It is easier for us to begin with the individual and proceed to the larger unit. What we find to be valid for the single man is likely to be also valid in its general principle to the Collective Man. Besides, the development of the free individual is the first condition for the growth of the perfect society.

Man is, apparently, a mental being possessed of a living body. But this is only his outer self. He seems to be guided by his mind but, in reality, behind every thought and every act of his, there is his real being—what “he secretly is and is obscurely groping or trying overtly and self-consciously to become.” The race, as a whole, knows nothing of this. The ordinary man is unconscious of it. What we see, however, is that man is a very complex being. His body is a complex affair, his thoughts and emotions are even more complex. His former selves, inconscient matter, subconscious vegetable, the unthinking lower animal, each has left a legacy to him. His proneness to inertia, his readiness to vegetate and cling to the roots, his ignorant brutality, his subjection to passions, all this constitutes his heritage and makes self-exceeding so terribly difficult for him. Yet man, even though endowed with an intellect, must exceed himself if he is to move towards perfection.

But apart from the sub-human stages of evolution, even as the *homo sapiens*, man has passed through a phase of life that has left its mark on him. This is the state of barbarism, wherein he identified himself completely with his body and bodily life. Let us hope, in the light of civilisation and culture, it is passing away for good. “To take the body and physical life as the one thing important, to judge manhood by the physical strength... to despise knowledge as weakness and inferiority... this is the mentality of the barbarian.” Of course it is possible, even now, for any individual or group to revert temporarily to this type. But the man belonging to our cycle of civilisation is pre-eminently a mental animal. His outlook on life is definitely mental, ethical and economic. The fact that general education is considered necessary, even essential, in our present-day life shows what importance we attach to mental development. It does not mean that we neglect physical culture. On the contrary, we develop the body scientifically in order to provide a reliable foundation for our all-round development.

The ancients (Greek and Roman) were by no means followers of a lop-sided culture. They developed their bodies as assiduously as their minds. Why then could

they not hold out against the onslaught of barbarism? Sri Aurobindo indicates two reasons. The first one is that there was grave inequality within the State; a large mass of the people were poor and ignorant, and had no share in the culture and greatness of the State. These people proved useless when evil days came. The second reason was that the centres of classical civilisation were surrounded on all sides by sturdy barbarians possessed of natural vigour and inured to all kinds of hardship. The decadent aristocrats of the two Roman empires were incapable of offering any real resistance to the Teutons and Goths who flooded the continent. The old civilisation perished, and perished in such a way that for fifteen centuries no revival was possible. Of course the fate that overtook Rome cannot repeat itself today. Science has provided civilised man with such deadly weapons that he need have no fear of the barbarian, of any Attila or Alaric. But, on the other hand, Science and a scientific industrial civilisation has called up a new kind of barbarism quite as dangerous as the old one, which Sri Aurobindo calls the economic barbarism. "...the vitalistic or economic barbarian makes the satisfaction of wants and desires and the accumulation of possessions his standard and aim. His ideal man is not the cultured or noble or thoughtful or moral or religious, but the successful man." Sri Aurobindo has written more of this in the Chapter on "Civilisation and Culture" (*The Human Cycle*). This barbarian must be eliminated to ensure the safety of the race. If allowed to persist too long, Life would burst and perish of its own plethora.

Sri Aurobindo sums up thus the course of man's past evolution: the atom and the elements organise brute matter, the plant develops the living being, the animal prepares and brings to a certain kind of mechanical organisation the crude material of Mind, but the last work of all, the knowledge and control of all these things, and self-knowledge and self-control, that has been reserved for man. So far, it is familiar ground. But it should also be noted that in order to enable Man to do all this better, nature compels him to repeat stages of his former evolution, to return upon them with a greater power, with a larger aim, so that he may make a fresh start on a wider curve of progress and fulfilment. In this march onward, man has need for both integrality and self-exceeding. He has to turn his mind not only on itself, but also on Life and Matter, and at the same time he has to grow upward, exceeding himself into something spiritual and divine.

Culture is pursuit of a mental life for itself, but mental life must be understood in a very wide sense; for mind embraces a very wide range of faculties from the physical mind of the lowest animal to the supermind of the god-man through various intermediate stages like the intelligent, the illumined and the intuitive. The mind has its action peculiar to each one of these middle stages—rational, ethical, aesthetic and so forth. The very complexity of the mental faculty has led to many hostile distinctions, oppositions and struggles that have bewildered man throughout his long career and bewilder him still. He is ever swinging between one exclusive ideal and a comprehensive harmony.

The very distinction between civilisation and barbarism is anomalous. Even a rude people like the Basuto or the Red Indian have their own civilisation, an organised community, a social code, ideas of right and wrong, a good many virtues that are very rare in civilised society and so-called civilised people have very many savage qualities. We use the word "civilised" about ourselves more or less in the same spirit that people formerly used in the opposite direction—opprobrious epithets like pagan, heathen, Kaffir, Mlechchha, about people they looked down upon. The word "barbarian" itself means a man who speaks an unintelligible language. But still when we say "civilisation" we mean something fairly definite. A civilised man has generally an active mind, his mental pursuits are fairly developed, the regulation of his life by the mind is self-conscious. The word "culture", however, implies something more than mere mental life; the cultured man is more developed, he has raised himself higher. We have mentioned already the vital or economic barbarian. He was well known as the Philistine in the Nineteenth century. He was rich, he lived luxuriously, he tried to control society and, even, the state; he posed as a patron of literature and the arts in his crude vital way. His life and conduct was marked either by vulgarity or smug hypocrisy. Sri Aurobindo has a lot to say about him. "His ethical bent is a habit of the sense-mind." "He is not mentally active, but mentally reactive,—a very different matter." This Philistine no longer reigns in the world, but in his place has arisen a new giant,—the sensational man. We can describe him as follows. He is trying to be mentally active... he lives in a maelstrom of new ideas and new movements... he can understand or misunderstand them... and even, it would appear, die for them... he can catch at new ideas and hurl them about in a rather confused fashion. Science brings her discoveries to his door and equips him with machinery, politics is subservient to him. He was the force that made the movements of Lenin and Hitler so rapidly successful.

Such is the sensational man whom new methods of education and new principles of society have to transform. It will take time, but "the eye of faith" can see that a great change has begun.

Culture, then, is neither the physical life of the primitive barbarian, nor the vital and economic life of, say, the modern Philistine. European life of the nineteenth century was certainly civilised, but not cultured and refined like the life of ancient Athens or Italy of the Renaissance or India of the olden times. Even pursuit of wealth, abundant manufacture, progress of science, works of the intellect, do not constitute culture, if these things are devoted to the service of commercialism and vital success. Likewise, a mentalised sensational life of conventional conduct, average feelings, customary ideas, borrowed opinions and prejudices is not consistent with the ideal of culture, a society based on these ideals is a Philistine society—a prison, in Sri Aurobindo's words, which the human soul has to break, man dwells therein in an inferior uninspired and unexpanding mental status. It is not enough to open a window or two in the walls to get a little fresh air, a fragrance of true art and beauty, a glimpse

of the higher ideals. Man must break out of the prison-cell and live in the open air and light.

But even on the higher mental plane, there may well come a clash between culture and conduct—between, roughly speaking, pursuit of the aesthetic aim and pursuit of the ethical. This clash has occurred in the past and is not unknown today. The aesthetic man is impatient of the ethical code; he calls the puritan crude and uncultured. The old cavalier phrase “canting hypocrite” is indicative of this mentality. On the other hand, in the eyes of the ethical man, the worshipper of beauty is a mere hedonist, an immoral seeker after pleasure. But in our pursuit of a higher life we have to transcend both these ideals and arrive at a state of mind where the two find a reconciliation. The ideal of Rome and Sparta is not the only ideal that ancient man pursued. Athens, we know, concentrated on thought and beauty and the delight of living, and imparted her view of life to many other states. Both these phases of life, the Spartan and the Athenian, have contributed to the growth of man. As a matter of fact, without character, without discipline, there can be no enduring power of life. In one brilliant century Athens exhausted its vitality. Nor have purely ethical cultures shown any greater lasting qualities. They have either collapsed leaving no residue, like Sparta, or they have broken down like Rome into an egoistic and orgiastic licence. As we have said before, conduct and culture—*Tapas* and *Ananda* of Indian thought—must combine their potentialities in a higher principle provided for us by our faculty of reason. Just at the present point of evolution, reason, using the intelligent will, is man’s sovereign faculty.

(To be continued)

C. C. DUTT

The Philistine is in fact the modern civilised barbarian; he is often the half-civilised physical and vital barbarian by his unintelligent attachment to the life of the body, the life of the vital needs and impulses and the ideal of the merely domestic and economic human animal; but essentially and commonly he is the mental barbarian, the average sensational man. That is to say, his mental life is that of the lower substratum of the mind, the life of the senses, the life of the sensations, the life of the emotions, the life of practical conduct—the first status of the mental being. In all these he may be very active, very vigorous, but he does not govern them by a higher light or seek to uplift them to a freer and nobler eminence; rather he pulls the higher faculties down to the level of his senses, his sensations, his unenlightened and unchastened emotions, his gross utilitarian practicality.

(The Human Cycle, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 88)

THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS

(Continued from the issue of February 2004)

(12)

Mother Divine,

For some time a thought has been occurring in my mind that I must organise my life and inner being fully before I leave my body; so that I am fully conscious after my death and the continuity is not snapped. That is why I thought that it was time for me now (I am already 51) to give full concentration to this work. I still fall back to old stupidities. Parts of my being are still open to hostile attack. It is still so difficult to have a control over my physical mind and vital-physical. When I go to Bengal, the surroundings there help my darkness and stupidities more than my inmost aspiration around which I have to organise my whole being.

And yet if *You* think that it is “truly indispensable” for me to go there for Your work, I am prepared to go. For, by now I am sure that my existence upon earth is only for Sri Aurobindo’s work. And I remember with gratitude that Your solicitude and Grace has been carrying me through all my difficulties and my stupidities. I can only hope and pray that my inner being, thoroughly organised, may belong to You and Sri Aurobindo before the time comes for me to leave the body.

Shall I start for Bengal after 9th December or even before that?

With pranams,

9.11.69

Your child
Abani

*If it is not absolutely
indispensable, you need
not go. Remain here and
concentrate on your yoga
love and blessings*

If it is not absolutely indispensable, you need not go. Remain here and concentrate on your yoga.

Love and blessings

The Mother

(To be continued)

REMEMBERING CHANDRADEEP-JI

ON April 28th 2004, Chandradeep-ji would have been a hundred. The centenary year of Chandradeep-ji is an occasion for those who received his love, affection and help to remember him. A disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, his spiritual personality was shaped by the constant kindness and guidance of the Mother. A detailed account of his psychic and spiritual growth is given in Shyam Kumari's book, *How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother*, Vol. 3. If one reads this account, some spiritual truths are highlighted, especially the saying: those who choose the divine are chosen by the Divine. The Mother was kind enough to accept him as her instrument to spread the divine light of Sri Aurobindo in the Hindi belt of India. The greatest service done by Chandradeep was to make Hindi-speaking people aware of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through his books in Hindi and the periodicals he edited.

The Mother had given Chandradeep the opportunity to translate Sri Aurobindo's writings so as to enable the Hindi-speaking devotees to know about the integral Yoga, the psychic being, the supramental manifestation and other related topics. These books in Hindi were written in a style which was easily understood by the common reader. It was through these books that I met Chandradeep in August, 1972, the birth centenary year of Sri Aurobindo. It was my first visit to Pondicherry, and like him, I had come with a strong aspiration to find a spiritual shelter. Chandradeep gave me his full support. Gradually we became good friends. I planned to visit the Ashram on all Darshan days. Chandradeep kept my clothes in his room so that I could travel light. He was my guide and companion in the Ashram. I owe a lot to him spiritually.

Chandradeep was not an orator but whatever he said came from his heart and thus his listeners were able to receive the divine light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. To the questions put to him, he answered from his own inner realisation. He spoke with sincerity and understanding. To know him was to love him. So through Chandradeep a large number of devotees came in touch with and tried to practise Sri Aurobindo's Yoga—the *Poorna Yoga*.

Chandradeep had a full command over the *Bhagavad Gita*. In his talks he invariably referred to the *Gita* and this enabled his audience to understand the teachings of Sri Aurobindo. It may be mentioned here that Sri Aurobindo himself had realised the Krishna Consciousness. The concept of the Overmind is related to the Krishna consciousness and all this was beautifully and briefly put forth by Chandradeep when the occasion arose.

Once Chandradeep narrated an incident. An advocate-devotee asked him about the psychic being. The advocate wanted to know the method of working of the psychic being. Chandradeep asked the advocate to tell him how he obtained a new idea to support a legal point while arguing a case in the court. The advocate said that he did not know. But then the new point came to mind suddenly and enabled him to win the

case. Chandradeep told him that if an individual is honest and acts in full sincerity, the Divine helps him to overcome his difficulties. Similarly, if one seeks sincerely, the psychic responds. By giving simple examples from day to day life, Chandradeep made people understand the marvel of yogic experiences.

I would also like to mention a few of Chandradeep's qualities. First of all, he was extremely considerate. He promptly replied to all our letters. Any letter written to him was always answered with sympathy, kindness and with blessings from the Mother. Another quality he had was his hospitality. He made his visitors comfortable by removing their difficulties regarding accommodation, food, etc. He would do whatever was possible when he was in his fifties and sixties. But later, due to old age, his movements were restricted; yet he still did all he could for all those who came to him.

May the Mother and Sri Aurobindo enable us to serve them as completely as Chandradeep did.

SITARAM JAYSWAL

Addendum:

We include here a portion from Shyamkumari's book, *How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother*, Vol. 3, pp. 112-115, that speaks of Chandradeep's first contacts with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

In 1921 during the summer holidays I went to Calcutta for sightseeing. There I was the guest of the manager of a Hindi press. At his house I heard Sri Aurobindo's name for the first time. A person who was staying with him told me, "Sri Aurobindo had his education in England and is a great scholar. At first he was a revolutionary leader but now he has become a great Yogi. He initiates people just by looking at their photographs. In Calcutta there is a Sri Aurobindo Centre where we go to meditate after getting his permission."

These words impressed me greatly. In those days we heard everywhere of the Independence Movement of Gandhi. I believed that for an Indian there was no higher ideal than to help gain the independence of the country. And when I heard that a man of such high calibre as Sri Aurobindo, who had risked his life for the country, had left the service of the Motherland to take the path of Yoga, I resolved to find out about him and his Yoga.

I tried to find some books about Sri Aurobindo but did not succeed until 1924 when I completed my school education. After leaving school I went to Calcutta with two aims. The first was to find out something about Sri Aurobindo and the second was to take up some part-time job and study further. I became a proof-reader under the famous Hindi scholar, Lakshman Narayan Garde, who published a religious weekly, *Sri Krishna Sandesh*. At this time I met a clerk of the press, Krishna Shambhu,

who had been to Pondicherry several times. When he came to know that I was eager to know about Sri Aurobindo he came to see me regularly. He didn't tell me much about Sri Aurobindo or the Ashram but he did suggest that I should learn Bengali to read the articles of the sadhaks of the Ashram. With a little effort I learned Bengali. I began to buy any magazine which contained articles by the sadhaks of the Ashram and by other authors on spirituality. This helped me to understand something of spiritual matters, but it did not give me any satisfactory information about Sri Aurobindo.

In 1928, inspired by Krishna Shambhu, our manager Garde went to the Ashram for the November Darshan. He had deep respect for Sri Aurobindo as a political leader but knew nothing about Yogi Sri Aurobindo. He returned from the Ashram with an unshakable faith in the divinity of Sri Aurobindo. One day he narrated his experiences at the Ashram....

Garde had become a true devotee of Sri Aurobindo and told his story with great faith. While listening to him I felt it was my first initiation in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

In 1929 I shifted to Benares with Garde and began to live as a member of his family. We became very close to each other and began to read Sri Aurobindo's books regularly early in the morning. We took up part [1] of *Essays on the Gita* and finished it within one year. These studies improved my capacity to understand English and gave me an entry into the deep spiritual insight of Sri Aurobindo. At the same time I learned the job of editor and later came to Calcutta as an assistant editor with Garde.

Here I came in contact with Pooranmal Dhandhanian who, in 1932, showed me the book *Conversations with the Mother*. This was the first book of the Mother published both in English and in French. Each copy was numbered and the book was not on sale publicly. The Mother herself gave a copy to each disciple after signing it. Pooranmal said that if I aspired to have the book I could write to the Mother and it would be sent by post. Within a few days I wrote a letter and received the book and two photographs.

The joy I felt on that day when the book arrived and I saw the photographs is indescribable. It was the occasion of my first inner contact and first self-offering to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

For a few years I had kept a picture of Sri Krishna with me and I used to read the *Gita* regularly. Now I had these new photographs mounted and, in place of the *Gita*, began to read the book written by the Mother. In those days the instructions were to show neither the photographs nor the books to anybody and therefore I kept them in a small trunk and brought them out only for Pooja. At that time I considered Sri Krishna as my God and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as my Gurus.

In late 1932 I received a letter from Krishna Shambhu. He suggested that I go to Pondicherry for the November Darshan. Financially it was not possible. Still I wrote a letter to the Ashram asking for permission for Darshan and it was granted. Then, miraculously, I received the money required for the journey in a most unexpected

way and reached Pondicherry on November 17.

Krishna Shambhu had made arrangements for my stay in a local hotel because new visitors were not allowed to stay in the Ashram guest-houses. But for the first time three of us were allowed to take our food in tiffin carriers from the Ashram Dining Room.

In those days at 6 a.m. the Mother used to come to the Meditation Hall and receive the Pranam of the disciples. In the beginning there would be a meditation for five minutes and then everyone did Pranam. The seating arrangement of the sadhaks and the order in which they made Pranam was fixed. On the morning of November 17 I went to the Ashram with Krishna Shambhu. For a long time I sat and observed how the people did Pranam and how the Mother blessed them. This scene made a great impact upon me. When a soul offers its whole being at the feet of the Supreme Lord and when that Divine Being leans down and accepts its own individual manifestation into Itself, that impressive and luminous event is beyond description.

When my turn came I stood up and with a palpitating heart knelt in front of the Mother and placed my head on her feet. When she put her hand on my head in blessing I raised my eyes and looked at her. Oh! What is this! In front of my eyes was a large living image of the Mother made of white marble. She had very large penetrating eyes. I felt she was looking at each atom of my being, inside and outside. "The gaze of God,"—I remembered this description from a Bengali story. For a long time I felt as if something had touched all my limbs.

On November 24, at the fixed time, I went for Darshan. After offering Pranam, when I looked at Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, I saw two living images of white marble sitting on the throne. Both had large soul-touching eyes of Gods. My being filled with great faith and a divine light and something within said, "Uma, Maheshwar".

From my very first day in Pondicherry I felt as if I had entered a different world. Whole days passed in a strange yet felicitous way.

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE PROBLEM OF POETIC TRANSLATION

Introduction

SRI AUROBINDO'S translations evoke the living atmosphere of the original works and are inspired literature in their own right. Whatever he chose to render into English from the several Indian and European languages at his command—whether it was a drama of Kalidasa or the epigrams of Bhartrihari, passages from the Ramayana or the Iliad, a lyric poem of Chandidas or Catullus—Sri Aurobindo had a rare capacity to capture the spirit of it in words and rhythms that give an authentic sense of the beauty and power of the work translated.

A born poet, Sri Aurobindo was richly endowed with linguistic, scholarly and critical abilities as well. What is more significant, the exceptional versatility of his mind reflected the universality of soul underlying his deep-rooted affinities with the most diverse cultures, ancient and modern, oriental and occidental. So equipped, he consciously worked to perfect the art of translation, seeing its potential for fostering the growth of mutual understanding between the peoples of the East and the West.

Much of what he did in this field is unfinished, fragmentary or experimental. But the intrinsic value of his contribution is not diminished by its incompleteness. Even his fragments could well inspire fresh approaches to the English rendering of the works of several major poets, from Valmiki and Kalidasa to Homer and Virgil. Translators today have much to learn from Sri Aurobindo, the master of the grand style. With the spread of his world-wide reputation as a mystic, philosopher and poet, this little-known facet of his work is sure to be discovered in the course of time and his impact felt even in this specialised area.

Many of Sri Aurobindo's literary translations were done early in his career and inevitably bear the stamp of the time when they were written. Their seemingly dated language and style may pose an obstacle to their appreciation by some modern readers. But at their best they transcend their period and have lost none of their relevance.

An attentive study of Sri Aurobindo's translations and his writings on the subject could lead to new and badly needed insights, especially into the neglected art of poetic translation. In an age when translation has an increasingly vital role to play in overcoming cultural barriers created by differences of language, the influence of Sri Aurobindo might help to establish a higher ideal in this area as in so many others.

“On Translating Kalidasa”

Sri Aurobindo's essay “On Translating Kalidasa” is a thought-provoking exposition of his theory and technique of translation as it took shape in the first years after his return from England. Written around the turn of the century in Baroda, where most

of his poetic translations were done, it is a stimulating introduction to Sri Aurobindo as a translator. It was found in an unrevised state in one of his notebooks and belongs to an early stage in the development of his thought and style. Yet its penetrating and original ideas on the process of translation are of lasting interest.

The essay begins with a frank recognition of the forbidding difficulty of the problem:

Since the different tribes of the human Babel began to study each other's literatures, the problem of poetical translation has constantly defied the earnest experimenter. There have been brilliant versions, successful falsifications, honest renderings, but some few lyrics apart a successful translation there has not been.¹

It is a widely acknowledged fact that good poetic translations are rarer than great poems. The convincing recreation of a poem in another language is such an uncommon event that poetry has often been defined as that which is lost in translation.

Nowadays the consensus of opinion seems to favour abandoning the idea of poetic translation altogether—except perhaps for some sort of free verse, often only typographically distinguishable from prose. Many would say that an “honest rendering” without poetic pretensions is the most that should be attempted. But Sri Aurobindo would not accept defeat so easily. He continues:

Yet it cannot be that a form of effort so earnestly & persistently pursued and so necessary to the perfection of culture and advance of civilisation, is the vain pursuit of a chimera. Nothing which mankind earnestly attempts is impossible....²

The very difficulty of the endeavour seems to have been part of what attracted Sri Aurobindo. Later in the same essay we find a sentence that could well be regarded as his motto, not only as a translator but in everything he did:

Difficulties are after all given us in order that we may brace our sinews by surmounting them; the greater the difficulty, the greater our chance of the very highest success.³

But difficulties must be confronted with intelligence as well as determination. The solution is bound to evade us so long as we persist in a misconception of the elements of the problem. While he acknowledged that the nineteenth century had seen some positive developments in this area, Sri Aurobindo nonetheless felt a need to base the art of translation on more enlightened and consistent principles than the haphazard notions and practices current in his own day. He did not claim to have dissipated single-handed all the perplexities that beset the “unhappy translator”.⁴ He

was convinced, however, that only by thoughtful efforts along some such lines can sound and fruitful methods be discovered.

The Word and the Spirit

To begin with, Sri Aurobindo put his finger on what he regarded as the central error vitiating much work hitherto done by conscientious translators. This was “the superstition that the visible word is the chief factor in language and the unit which must be seized on as a basis in rendering”.⁵ The right starting-point for the theory and practice of translation had, he felt, been tentatively grasped in the nineteenth century, but its ramifications were not pursued far enough. It consisted in the recognition that “there is a spirit behind the word & dominating the word which eludes the ‘faithful’ translator”. This being the case, it is surely “more important to get at the spirit of a poet”⁶ than to reproduce the exact sense of his words.

It is encouraging to note that recent theories of translation in Europe, after a swing in the opposite direction, have begun to move back towards a view like the one put forward by Sri Aurobindo a century ago. For example, in a scholarly book published in France in the 1980s, we read: “Fidelity to the word is the great obstacle to translation.”⁷ The authors of the book, *Interpréter pour Traduire*, reject the assumption that translation is a purely linguistic procedure in which words and grammatical structures of one language are directly substituted for the closest corresponding words and structures of another.

Seleskovitch and Lederer posit a stage of “deverbalisation” between the translator’s comprehension of an idea in the source language and his re-expression of it in the target language. They show how a skilled translator chooses the words that will communicate the meaning and tone of a text most naturally and effectively in the language into which he is translating. In order to do so, he may use sequences of words whose relationship to the wording in the original language is too complex and unpredictable to be explained by analysis only on a linguistic level.

This kind of translation is more exacting than word-for-word rendering. If it is to be done well and not degenerate into loose paraphrase, the freedom it permits must be subjected to a rigorous discipline. Far more challenging still than the problem addressed by ordinary theories of translation is that of poetic translation; “for the prose translator,” Sri Aurobindo writes, “being more concerned to render the precise idea than emotional effects and the subtle spiritual aura of poetry, treads an immeasurably smoother & more straightforward path.”⁸

But for this very reason, it is even more necessary for the poetic translator to “deverbalise” his text, to pass beyond the words to what they express, before attempting to recreate the poem in a new language. This, we can gather from Sri Aurobindo, is the key to the mystery of poetic translation—this pregnant pause to assimilate the content of the original on all its levels, this concentrated waiting in an

inner silence for words which, besides communicating the thought and imagery of the poem, will echo its music and convey a vibrant sense of its feeling and atmosphere.

(To be continued)

RICHARD HARTZ

Notes and References

1. *Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 239.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 252.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
6. *Ibid.*
7. "La fidélité au mot, voilà le grand obstacle à la traduction." *Interpréter pour Traduire*, D. Seleskovitch and M. Lederer (Paris: Didier Erudition), second edition, 1986, p. 32.
8. *Early Cultural Writings*, p. 244.

The swiftness of the muse has been embodied in the image of Pegasus, the heavenly horse of Greek legend; it was from the rapid beat of his hoofs on the rock that Hippocrene flowed. The waters of Poetry flow in a current or a torrent; where there is a pause or a denial, it is a sign of obstruction in the stream or of imperfection in the mind which the waters have chosen for their bed and continent. In India we have the same idea; Saraswati is for us the goddess of poetry, and her name means the stream or "she who has flowing motion". But even Saraswati is only an intermediary. Ganga is the real mother of inspiration, she who flows impetuously down from the head of Mahadev, God high-seated, over the Himalay of the mind to the homes and cities of men. All poetry is an inspiration, a thing breathed into the thinking organ from above; it is recorded in the mind, but is born in the higher principle of direct knowledge or ideal vision which surpasses mind. It is in reality a revelation. The prophetic or revealing power sees the substance; the inspiration perceives the right expression. Neither is manufactured; nor is poetry really a poesis or composition, nor even a creation, but rather the revelation of something that eternally exists. The ancients knew this truth and used the same word for poet and prophet, creator and seer, sophos, vates, kavi.

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 28)

MONSIEUR ET MADAME FRANÇOIS MARTIN IN PONDICHERRY

[*We present here only the Preface and the Appendix of a work that attempts to recreate an eventful period in the history of Pondicherry—the first explains the approach and the second establishes a chronology for reference. The story of Monsieur and Madame François Martin will appear in instalments.*]

PREFACE

HISTORY to most people is a boring subject, but a story isn't! But what is history? How does it come to be told, without anyone around who had lived it? Did no one have to do anything to make a book, a picture, a city or a kingdom exist materially?

It is said that history is the story of the lives of great men and women who lived before us. Where does history happen? On earth, of course, in different parts of the world. So, the geographical surrounding is the stage and the story of certain people, enacted there as in a theatre hall, is the play—through the centuries, in one place or another.

Pondicherry is a small township on the coast of the Bay of Bengal, which has shot into prominence for more reasons than one, especially because of the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo and because of Auroville, apart from its earlier connections with France.

Before the merger with the Indian Union, this was a French colony. A few institutions are still run by the French and there is a Consulate here, but the town as a whole has lost that earlier foreign flavour which lent it its greater charm in the first decade of its merger with India. Of course, the streets have mostly retained their French nomenclature, recalling the names of the former Governors and other prominent figures of Pondicherry. Actually, the most famous of them all is not seen anywhere, Dupleix! His street is called Nehru Street, the main thoroughfare today; his statue stands unnoticed at the southern end of the sea-front boulevard. Its earlier place was opposite the Gandhi statue where it had stood for quite a number of years... That quadrangle used to be known as *Place Napoléon III* and afterwards as *Place Dupleix*. We have been told that the six pillars around the Gandhi monument belonged to the palace Dupleix had built for himself in the vicinity. It must have been very impressive. Quite a different picture from whatever we can imagine today!... What was it like in those days? What were the people's activities? And... Why the French?... Well, let us look into that story....

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It so happens that this small low-lying land situated as it was at the mouth of a river, was, in early times, like a small archipelago. The tiny islands were connected

to each other by boat and inhabited by people whose way of life must have been centred around one craft or another, not only for fishing but,... who knows?

In the 1st century A.D. settlers arrived by sea. They must have found inhabitants already here and joined hands with them to make their own dwellings in keeping with their earlier ways elsewhere. Who were these people? Romans... from far off Italy.... In the early 1940s an excavation conducted near Ariancoupam river showed the remains of such a township—burial urns and polished clay utensils show the existence of real people. It is said that South Indian temples adopted from them the superimposed blocks of granite to construct their walls and the gopuram.

Around 1000 A.D., others had taken their place and we have been told that it was considered a centre of learning, where Brahmanic scriptures and other books of wisdom were discussed and studied. They say its name was ‘Vedapuri’, for that reason. But the word ‘Pudu-cheri’ is most probably the origin of the present name—it could have meant at that time a ‘new-settlement’. After years of human activities in the region there naturally formed groupings with leaders whose life and works have been mostly forgotten, or remembered only in the form of popular tales and records, in the ruins of temples or statuary. ‘Elango’ seems to be the name of a great king of the medieval times here. But who were these people? What did they live on? What material wealth did they work with? Copper, granite, clay and wood—materials for the builder and craftsmen; veins and streams of fresh water, cotton, coconut groves and the sea—there was much one could do with these. Fossils and laterite stones, the red soil and hillocks, dark rocks and crystal, and the green vegetation around were picturesque surroundings where the early population in Pondicherry grew up and “developed like others through the first stage... finding naturally and freely its own norm and line, casting up form of life and social and political institution out of the vital intuition and temperament of the communal being”. (CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 401)

When Vasco da Gama reached India in 1498, the Vijayanagar Empire flourished on the western side of the peninsula, and in the middle and the east were the five sultanates—Bijapur, Golconda, Ahmednagar, Berar and Bidar—all vying with each other as patrons of art and culture. The Portuguese who had landed in Calicut and later secured Goa, managed to trade with the people of Vijayanagar and afterwards received a grant in 1537 of a site in Hooghly (Bengal) and their trade activities increased. In the year 1600, Queen Elizabeth I of England signed the charter for the English East India Company to begin a connection with India that would eventually grow into an empire.

THE FRENCH IN INDIA

- In 1609, more than half a century after the first ships had been sent to India in vain, a book was published describing the life and ways of the people of India as seen through the eyes of a French traveller.

- In 1664, 22 years after it had been established, the French East India Company was restructured by the minister Colbert with the intention of increasing trade relations abroad, during the reign of Louis XIV. The accounts written by French travellers to India had become popular in Paris. The best known among them were ‘Tavernier’, a dealer in diamonds and precious stones and ‘Bernier’ who had been allowed to travel all over the Mogul empire during the reign of Aurangzeb.
- Politically an envoy, a certain Germain, was sent to Sivaji in 1677; he must have been familiar with the ways of kings in India. Later on, Sivaji himself had met François Martin to work out the terms for French traders in Pondicherry.
- The French factory in Surat was opened long after the arrival of the English, who had the place in 1657, and the Dutch too had their own factory there. The first French governor in Surat was Monsieur Baron under whom François Martin had been in the service of the French East India Company since 1669. He was given the charge of Pondicherry in 1683, when it became the capital of the French settlements in the south and in Bengal. Martin worked in that post of Governor till his death in 1707. Madame Martin came to Pondicherry in 1686 and died there in the township they had built together with much dedication (1686-1711).

The following pages are an attempt to give a living picture of the times by connecting various real incidents and accounts from contemporary records of travellers and traders. Most of the material is an adaptation from a French book on Madame François Martin where the author, Yvonne Robert Gaebelé, has tried to give a biographical approach to history by arranging in a logical way documents collected from the archives of Pondicherry and Chandernagore. The presentation is as objective as possible. It is not like a historical novel where the writer weaves stories based on scanty factual details.

In this compilation, a clearer sequential presentation of events has been attempted, combining the personal approach of Monsieur and Madame François Martin to their function in Pondicherry and the historical background of the time collected from other history books, encyclopædias, etc.

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It is only appropriate to recall here that Madame Gaebelé’s book, *Une Parisienne aux Indes au XVII^e siècle*, published in 1937, is correct and dependable, as her work was in general recognised by the literary circles and French historical journals. She has written other books on the history of Pondicherry of which mention may be made: one on Jeanne Dupleix, *Créole et Grande Dame: Johanna Bégum, Marquise Dupleix (1706-1756)*; one on Ananda Rangapillai, *Enfance et Adolescence d’Ananda-*

rangapoullé; and another called *One Thousand Years of Pondicherry—A.D. 1000 to our times*. Her keen interest in the subject made her look for the locations of these early places in the Pondicherry of her time. In the 1950s and 1960s she was quite an authority on the subject. The only remnant of her extensive research, apart from the printed books, is the present Romain Rolland Library,—a name she had given in 1968 to the Public Library where she had done much work as Librarian-in-Charge, to reorganise the archives and the materials in that collection.

A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE FRENCH ADMINISTRATION IN PONDICHERRY

- After the land for a factory was acquired by the French from the kingdom of Gingee in 1683, it took the governor, François Martin, and his wife 10 years to build an understanding among the French settlers here.
- By 1693, the war in Europe gave the Dutch the upper hand in India. Pondicherry went under their control for four years—1694 to 1698.
- With the Treaty of Rijswijk signed in Europe, Pondicherry was returned to the French. François Martin got back his governorship. By 1707, at his death, he had given shape to the first well-planned European township in Pondicherry.
- From March 1707 to July 1708, Mr. and Mrs. Livier were appointed interim governors.
- Chevallier Hebert and his son served for two terms as governors, from 1708 to 1713, and 1713 to 1718. During their 2nd term, in order to boost the trade activities, they invited a few merchants from Madras to Pondicherry. Apart from trade, they brought into the town the distinction between the purer Tamil and the local dialect. One of these merchants was the father of Ananda Rangapillai who was to become the right-hand man of Governor Dupleix in the near future.
- The beginning of the 18th century was the hey-day of the French in India and overseas. Mauritius was taken and colonised by 1720. The prosperity of Pondicherry became substantially better under the governorship of Lenoir; trade activities were revived during both his tenures—1721 to 1723 and 1726 to 1735.
- Benoit, after him, secured the friendship of the Karnatak, and Karaikal was acquired.
- Dumas in 1740, had enough power to extend protection to those who were in danger due to the attack of the Mahrattas. He gave asylum to two fugitive Muslim families,—those of Safdar Ali and Chanda Sahib here in Pondicherry. Under the able governorship of Dumas and Dupleix the supremacy of the French in the South became undeniable. They both forged ahead with ambitious schemes which aimed at bringing larger areas under French control.
- After becoming the Governor-General of all territories in India that came under the French administration, Dupleix continued the earlier policy of extending

the “empire”. His idea of dominating the whole of India was imitated later by the British. It was not a utopic dream but a well thought-out plan by a political genius. But he had to face a very strong opposition from a General, La Bourdonnais. The latter had seized Madras but refused to obey Dupleix who had asked him not to take any decision regarding the ransom without consulting the governing body of Pondicherry, as it might endanger the whole area. Dupleix argued that as Governor-General he had the right to ask him to wait, till the Council fixed the terms. But La Bourdonnais pulled out his troops on his own, without any approval.

- As expected, Pondicherry suffered. The English army under Admiral Boscawen laid siege in 1748, driving it to the verge of disaster. No water, no food. It was the indefatigable work of Jeanne Dupleix that saved the situation. The people in gratefulness started calling her “Johanna Begum”, for without her the whole town would have been destroyed. Then on, there developed quite a rivalry between Rangapillai, the appointed dubash, and herself. She had her own connections and knew many languages. Over and above that, having lived in Pondicherry and Chandernagore, she was aware of the political trends in all these places. The worst blow to her came when she had almost secured the annexation of Cuddalore through her own connections but Dupleix had already accepted a different plan given by Ananda Rangapillai.
- Six years after the siege, Dupleix was suddenly called back to Paris, in 1754. Before leaving, he explained the different aspects of the situation to Godeheu and left him in charge. For a time, things went on well. But in Paris he found that he had lost the favour of the Cabinet of Versailles. Both husband and wife were very upset and surprised, for whatever they had done to uphold the French territories after La Bourdonnais’ disobedience, went quite un-noticed. All attempts to make the authorities see the actual situation faced by them in Pondicherry were in vain: the 1748 siege and its consequences did not exist for them at all. No one knew all the effort and planning that had ensured the place of the French in India. No one understood that the whole set-up was managed by Dupleix who knew exactly the time and the manner in which to take advantage of the “neighbouring rulers with the consummate skill of a supreme artist in intrigue.” His 8-foot-statue in Pondicherry and the one in his home town in Landerries show that he did receive recognition, but nothing during his life-time.
- De Leyritt became governor after Godeheu; and Lally Tollendal, a General of merit, was successful in occupying Fort St. David and Devikottai, but failed to secure Madras. He was badly defeated in 1760 at Wandiwash and Colonel Coote laid siege on Pondicherry which was forced to capitulate. Lally Tollendal was taken as a prisoner of war to London. He was bitterly criticised and condemned in France. Going against the suggestion of all his legal advisors he insisted on

appearing personally for his trial in Paris. He was released “on parole”, but within two years was beheaded for treason. His image was re-established in Paris by his son, with the strong support of the great social critic, Voltaire. This extraordinary judicial blunder was recognised posthumously thanks to Lally Tollandal’s diary and the records kept by him when in India. Let us look at the varying fortunes of Pondicherry through the following years:

- 1761—The French had lost all their settlements in South India, including Gingee and Mahe.
- 1763—Pondicherry was restored to the French. Like the English, they also had battalions of native troops known as sepoy. This allowed them to take advantage of the existing kingdoms around them, Hindu or Muslim.
- 1778—It was taken by Hector Munroe and all the fortifications destroyed, rased to the ground.
- 1783—Re-transferred to the French.
- Throughout 1786 and 1787 the French had helped Tipu Sultan; in 1788 and 1789 there was an attempt to bring the Nizam and the Sultan together, but in vain.
- 1793—Pondicherry was recaptured by the English. The Nizam, the Mahrattas and the English came closer, moving away from the Sultan and the French.
- There was war in Europe and as per the treaty of Amiens, Pondicherry was restored to the French in 1802. But again in 1803, it was in the hands of the English.
- 1816—Finally restored to the French, it remained thus, until transferred to India in 1952, a French colony in the subcontinent, with Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam attached to it.
- By 1921, that is to say, about a hundred years after 1816, a well-planned township had been built. Entirely surrounded by the South Arcot district, 122 miles South of Madras, the territory of Pondicherry had an area of 163 sq. miles with a population of 176,168.

Administration: it was ruled by a Governor with a Privy Council and a General Council having its representations in the French Senate and Chamber.

There was a Court of Appeal. A general hospital existed apart from those connected with the Churches.

The town itself was well laid-out with parallel roads and public buildings built in colonial style which were lit by electricity in 1920. The water supply came from the artesian wells converted into what was known as the Mettur dam.

The chief crops were dry grains, rice, ground-nuts and some indigo.

Education: There was a college, the Lycée, with all the classes from the primary

level to the 1st Baccalauréat level, equivalent to a pre-university diploma: after securing it, any student could qualify for further specialisation in France.

There was an English consulate for checking all transactions; and as this was a free port, any material or product bought here had to pass through their Customs duty and taxes fixed by the Government of India of that time had to be paid; this pattern was in force from 1920 to 1952.

(To be continued)

AMITA SEN

The ancient Gallic people, in spite of or perhaps because of its Druidic civilisation and early greatness, was more incapable of organising a firm political unity than even the ancient Greeks or the old Indian kingdoms and republics. It needed the Roman rule and Latin culture, the superimposition of a Teutonic ruling caste and finally the shock of the temporary and partial English conquest to found the unequalled unity of modern France. Yet though name, civilisation and all else seem to have changed, the French nation of today is still and has always remained the old Gallic nation with its Basque, Gaelic, Armorican and other ancient elements modified by the Frank and Latin admixture.

(The Human Cycle, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 309)

The political evolution of the human race follows certain lines of which the most recent formula has been given in the watchwords of the French Revolution, freedom, equality and brotherhood. But the forces of the old world, the forces of despotism, the forces of traditional privilege and selfish exploitation, the forces of unfraternal strife and passionate self-regarding competition are always struggling to reseat themselves on the thrones of the earth.

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 36)

THE LAND WHERE I LIVE

THERE is a rainbow land
Where the splendid Sun
Scatters its colourful grains
To make the earth
Delightful and blithe.
There I live, I live.

There is a fairy land
Where the moon hops down
With a broad smile
To pipe a silvery song.
There I live, I live.

There is an enchanting land
Where the fast brook
From the hill-top
Falls and froths
To babble over pebbles.
There I live, I live.

There is a fragrant land
Where smile the lovely blossoms
To sway with the breeze
In honeyed lilt.
There I live, I live.

There is a joyous land
Where the cheerful birds
Carol and cackle,
Chatter and twitter
To sing the long year through.
There I live, I live.

There is a sublime land
Where a life full of loveliest things
With prettiest shores
And happiest skies
Voyages from dawn
To a greater dawn.
There I live, I live.

SURYAKANTI MOHANTY

HISTORY AS HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

(Continued from the issue of April 2004)

Plan of the ground covered in the previous issue:

I. Individual and Collective Development

- *The Individual and the Collectivity: The Psychological Structure*
- *The Perfect Individual in a Perfect Society*
- *The Group-soul and the Nation-unit*

II. Inner Dimensions of History

- *The Fourfold History of Man*
- *The Mentor and the Cultural History*
- *The Marshal and the Political History*
- *The Merchant and the Economic History*
- *The Worker and the Social History*
- *The Ego Factor*

III. The Goal of History: The Integral Man

WE may now reformulate our concept of human destiny or the goal of history, which we have discussed earlier, a little differently. The aim of human development through history may be perceived under two aspects. The inner aim is a full, harmonious and integral development of the Mentor, the Marshal, the Merchant and the Mass consciousness or the Worker and the faculties, powers and qualities they represent. The outer aim is a full, harmonious and integral self-expression of these four inner powers in the outer life through their corresponding social organs, that is Culture, Polity, Economy and Society.

This brings us to another aspect of the ideal of integral development. The highest aim of evolution could probably be to make each part conscious of and manifest the whole. This means that each of the four inner powers and their corresponding human types and social organs have to develop not only the faculties and qualities specific and natural to them but also that of the other three, and express them in a unique harmony according to their intrinsic and dominant nature and values. For example, the Marshal, individually as a human type and collectively as his self-expression in Polity, has to develop not only his intrinsic, natural and dominant powers and qualities of the Will and the vital force; he must also develop the powers of organised efficiency, adaptation, skill and innovation of the Merchant; develop the intellectual, ethical and spiritual faculties of the Mentor and govern his faculties of power by knowledge and values; and finally he has to make or use his power, position or authority not to

aggrandise himself but as a means to serve the people and the community. And this applies to all the other three human types and organs of the society.

Interestingly, we can see this integral development beginning to happen in our modern age in the Merchant and the Worker. The modern Merchant has acquired the aggressive virtues of the Marshal for expansion, conquest and acquisition. The ancient Marshal built huge political empires and some of them like Alexander had the ambition to build global empires. But modern Merchants are building global business empires using economic, commercial and technological means. But some of the methods used here, for example, acquisitions and takeovers and the attempt to gain “competitive advantage” over rival companies, are as combative as the methods of the ancient Marshals. With the advent of the industrial revolution and the increasing application of reason, science and technology to business, “knowledge” is becoming a vital resource in business. There is also a growing recognition of the importance of ethics, values and social responsibility in business. Thus the modern Merchant is developing the intellectual and ethical faculties of the Mentor. The other significant development in modern business is the “empowerment” movement which aims at a devolution of knowledge, power, wealth, decision-making and responsibility to the front-line worker, which, if pursued to its logical conclusion, will lead to an integral development of the Worker.

Thus we can see that the consciousness of the modern Merchant and his outer organ of Business are slowly moving towards the ideal of integral development. But at present only a tentative beginning has been made in this direction and there is still a long way to go to reach the ideal. For the ethical turn in business is still rudimentary and the spiritual and aesthetic faculties are still totally unmanifest. But these emerging trends in business give an indication of the ideal towards which Nature is pushing human evolution.

The Spiritual Aim

But the full and highest development of the Mentor leads to the spiritual consciousness. For, as we have already indicated, the Mentor represents and expresses the innermost Soul or Spirit and the Higher Mind in Man. As the higher intellectual, ethical and aesthetic mind grows in subtlety, depth and sensitivity, it opens more and more to the spirit within man. And in the Indian spiritual perspective the ideal Mentor is the spiritually illumined Sage, Rishi, who knows, not intellectually as a concept or idea, but through a direct intuition or inner experience, the highest truths and laws of life, not only of the spiritual life but also of the secular life. So, Indian thought considered the spiritual man as the best guide not only of the religious life but also of the worldly life.

The full development and establishment of this spiritual consciousness, which is the true Self and the highest potential in man, in the individual and the collectivity,

is probably the significance of the next step in human evolution and the future history of humanity.

All the past cycles of human history were perhaps a sort of education or preparation of the human consciousness to make it fit to receive, manifest and express this spiritual consciousness. This was probably what the medieval Christian mystic, St. Augustine, meant when he summarised the meaning of history as: “The education of the human race, represented by the people of God, has advanced, like that of an individual, through certain epochs, or as it were, ages, so that it might gradually rise from earthly to heavenly things and from the visible to the invisible.” But in our integral view, the goal of history is not only “to rise from earthly to heavenly things”¹ but also the unveiling and unrolling or manifesting of the heavenly and invisible in the earthly and the visible, leading ultimately to a heavenly transformation of the earthly life or, in other words, the kingdom of God on Earth.

History of the Future

In the past, the spiritual consciousness and its faculties were realised only in a few sages, saints, artists and thinkers belonging mostly to the Mentor type, expressing themselves in the organs of culture, that is in religion, philosophy, art and literature. But if the integral development of the whole of the individual and collective human organism is the aim of human evolution, then the spiritual consciousness has to be awakened in every individual type and in every organ of the collectivity. This means that the spiritual consciousness has to be developed and established not only in the Mentor and his self-expression in Culture but also in the Marshal and his Polity, in the Merchant and his Economy and in the Worker and his Work or social life. So, in the future we may witness leaders with spiritual consciousness emerging not only in religion or culture but also in politics, government, administration, business, commerce, science and technology, the work-force and the civil society, giving a total spiritual direction to the whole of human life. In the past most of the spiritual personalities were of the contemplative mentor-type. This is the reason why in most of the spiritual disciplines of the past there is so much emphasis on meditation and contemplation and the insistence on the outer renunciation of life and the world. But in the future we may witness this spiritual consciousness emerging in men and women of action belonging to the Marshal, Merchant and Worker-type. This means the spirituality of the future will be not a life-denying and a predominantly contemplative spirituality; it will be a life-affirming and a life-transforming spirituality with a greater emphasis on action rather than contemplation; there will be new systems of spiritual disciplines which can be practised in and through our daily life and activities. This life-embracing spirituality will be the governing paradigm of the future evolution of humanity.

1. Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress*, p. 60.

And this is already beginning to happen all over the world. There is at present a growing and widespread seeking for inner fulfillment in every part of modern life, especially among professionals in business, health, industry and commerce. Spiritual ideas and methods are entering into health, management and popular literature.

IV. The Process of History

Indian Insights

We have spelt out so far the broad outlines of a spiritual, psychological and developmental vision of history. We may now examine the process of history. Here, a well-known concept of Indian Psychology can throw some revealing lights on the process by which Nature works out human evolution through history.

The Triple Qualities of Nature and their Impact on History

We have said that the history of the past and the present is the Age of the Ego. But the ego-centric (lower) nature of our being is not made of a single piece. Each part of our nature, our body, life and mind, has its own unique ego with its own distinct temperament. And according to Indian psychology, human nature is made of three psychological qualities: Tamas, Rajas and Sattwa, which may be roughly translated as Inertia, Dynamism and Luminosity. In this section we will apply this Indian concept to trace the psychological process of history.

Tamas is the predominant quality of the physical ego in man. The manifestations of Tamas in the human organism are laziness, indolence, blindness of ignorance, unwillingness to change or make the effort for progress, attachment to status quo and inaction, mechanical routine, clinging to the established customs and tradition, and a consciousness driven by the subconscious instincts and needs of the body and sunk in the subconscious mass of the group. The effect of Tamas and the tamasic ego on the collective life and history are stagnation in every part of the society and entrapment in the fixed and mechanical routine of customs, tradition and rules and most often enslavement to or destruction by more vigorous tribes from outside.

Rajas is the predominant quality of the emotional and vital ego and the life-energy in man. The manifestations of Rajas are the urge for action, expression and creation, for power, possession, enjoyment, conquest, expansion and progress. If the rajasic ego is strong and left to itself without any guidance or control from the higher mental, moral or spiritual will, then it may degenerate into lust and wrath and greed, selfish ambition, violent conflict with other egos, exploitation of others for its own self-interest. Even if all these negative manifestations of Rajas are minimised by some higher control, there will still remain in the life of a Rajasic ego anxiety, tension, restlessness, stress, lack of peace and absence of tranquillity.

The effect of Rajas and the rajasic ego on history is change, activity, progress, growth, expansion and individualism. From an evolutionary perspective, the most important contributions of the rajasic ego are the urge for progress and individualism. For both these factors or values are indispensable for realising human destiny. Change and Progress are the eternal laws of life. Anything which does not progress in this world begins to stagnate, disintegrate and die. But the tamasic physical ego has no urge for progress; it is content to turn around endlessly in the mechanical round of its habits, customs and routine. And progress requires the initiative of a well-developed and conscious individual. For the consciousness of a community cannot progress by itself because it is sunk in the dead-weight of its subconscious mass. In order to progress, the community requires the creative impulse of conscious individuals. And the tamasic physical ego does not have a well-developed and conscious individuality; it is submerged in the subconscious tribal mass of the community. It is the Rajasic ego which helps the human being to emerge from the subconscious and tamasic mass of the community and realise self-conscious individuality. But Rajas also has its negative effect. It creates intense conflicts between competing rajasic egos, each trying to dominate, possess and enjoy as much of life and the world as possible. And the result is lack of peace and harmony in the community.

The third quality of Nature is Sattwa which is the essential and predominant quality of the higher mental ego made of the intellectual, ethical and aesthetic being of man. The main manifestation of Sattwa in the psychology of man is the aspiration for knowledge, understanding, clarity, vision, peace, harmony and higher values. The sattwic ego may appear very spiritual, noble and disinterested but behind the saintly appearance there is an ego with an intense attachment to and pride in its knowledge and virtue, and the peace and happiness that come from Sattwa. This sattwic ego helps the human being to progress from the vital ego and its turbulent desires and ambitions to the clarity and tranquility of the higher mental consciousness. But when the sattwic ego clings to its pride of knowledge and virtue it becomes an obstacle to a higher spiritual progress beyond the ego to the egoless and universal consciousness of the Spirit. Another defect of the sattwic ego is that, when it is developed exclusively, it tends towards a quietistic, soft, gentle, and aloof-from-life poise of the mind without sufficient rajasic energy and strength for vigorous and forceful action to face and conquer the fierce and aggressive onslaughts of life; or else it may lead to a life-denying asceticism which may result in a loss of vitality. So Sattwa or sattwic ego, however noble it may appear to be, is not considered the highest ideal of human development in the Indian spiritual tradition. The highest ideal is the spiritual consciousness of the Soul beyond Sattwa. But sattwic development is very much recommended because Sattwa is closer to the spiritual consciousness than Tamas or Rajas and therefore considered as the ideal preparation for the higher spiritual evolution of the human being.

The effect of Sattwa on history is cultural progress in art, science, philosophy, religion and literature. But if Sattwa is too exclusively developed without sufficient Rajas it may lead to a lofty but a weak and inefficient civilisation prone to attack and conquest from a stronger and more rajasic civilisation and subjugated or destroyed in the process or else it may lead to a top-heavy civilisation governed by a small, oppressive and arrogant aristocracy.

The Triple Qualities and the Evolutionary Process of Nature

This concept of the triple qualities of ancient Indian psychology throws light on one of the strategic principles of Nature in her management of the human development process through history. Nature uses Rajas to awaken and subjugate Tamas and uses Sattwa to enlighten, restrain and guide the rajasic ego.

Nature uses the quality of Rajas and the rajasic ego in man to awaken the tamasic individual and communities from their lax and indolent poise in their physical being to the gust and roar and storm of the vital life and the potentialities of their vital being. This is done by pouring into and awakening in the consciousness of the tamasic physical man the rajasic energy and the urge for power, wealth, enjoyment, expansion and progress. In the collectivity this results in a vigorous and manifold economic, social and political activity and expansive ambitions for conquest and empire over the world. The human instruments of Nature in this first evolutionary task are the strong dynamic and ambitious Marshal and Merchant personalities and leaders.

This evolution of civilisation from Tamas to Rajas and the domination of rajasic ego over the society has positive as well as negative consequences for human society and history. It brings out certain dynamic powers and faculties which remained undeveloped during the earlier periods. But it may also lead to much conflict, war, destruction, inequality, strife, tension and misery. There is also a great danger in this phase of evolution. A strong, aggressive and successful rajasic ego, when it is not sufficiently chastened by sattwic and spiritual values tends to develop an unheeding arrogance. In its ambition to conquer and master the world or forces of Nature for its own rajasic needs and desires it may be misled into self-destructive paths violating the laws of Nature. When this happens, Nature sends warning signals either through external calamities or through the sattwic voices of mentors. But if the rajasic ego dominating the civilisation persistently refuses to listen, then Nature allows that civilisation to perish as one of her failed experiments.

Legends in ancient traditions, supported by the latest research on ancient civilisations, indicate that our human race has passed through many cycles of civilisation, and our present historic cycle is only one among many which have passed. There is at present a growing body of evidence that there were many prehistoric civilisations which had perished due to natural or man-made causes. Some of them seemed to have reached advanced levels of social organisation, science and technology before

they perished. Most scholars consider natural disasters like earthquakes and the rise in sea level to be the cause of destruction of these civilisations. But it could also be due to man-made causes like wars or self-destruction caused by persistent violation of the inner and outer laws of Nature. When we read some of the descriptions of the war-scenes in the Mahabharata, it seems that the epical civilisation possessed highly sophisticated Weapons of Mass Destruction, some of which could destroy entire clans in a second. The holy Koran mentions a prehistoric civilisation which was destroyed by the gods because of the sinful nature of its people. According to an ancient Hopi legend, our human race or the world had already gone through four cycles of evolution and our present human civilisation is the fifth. All the four previous civilisations were almost destroyed at the end of each cycle. The first one perished due to the misdeeds of its people and the other three due to natural causes. And the legend warns that the fate of our present civilisation depends on how its people respond to the Creator's will and plan. Here the function of Sattwa in Nature's management of human evolution comes in.

Nature uses the quality of Sattwa to awaken the physical and vital being in man to higher values, aims and laws of life, potentialities of his higher mental being, and finally awakens the sattwic ego to its highest spiritual self. This is done by pouring into and awakening in the physical and vital being of man the sattwic urge for light and knowledge, ethical and aesthetic refinement, the religious aspiration and longing for the permanent, ultimate and the absolute Reality. In the collectivity this leads to a vibrant and varied cultural activity in religion, philosophy, ethics, art and literature. The human instruments of Nature in this higher evolutionary task are the Mentor-personalities, the thinker, poet, artist, saint and mystic.

The Growth and Decline of Civilisations

The fate and progress of a civilisation depends on how creatively that civilisation, or to be more precise, the leaders of that civilisation respond to the progressive rajasic and sattwic impulsion of Nature. A civilisation may respond creatively to the rajasic impulsion of Nature, and develop a strong, vigorous and prosperous economic, social and political life, with effective science and technology. But if the civilisation does not respond sufficiently to the sattwic impulsion of Nature towards higher values like peace, harmony, unity, truth, beauty and goodness, it may either destroy itself through wars and conflicts or rapidly exhaust its creative energy in an orgy of greed and enjoyment, and as a result, relapse into some form of tamasic barbarism.

On the other hand, a civilisation may respond creatively to the sattwic impulsion in Nature and very inadequately to her rajasic impulse. In this case, the civilisation may develop a lofty and luminous cultural life, creating great ideas and ideals or works of art and literature. But it will be inefficient and weak in its economic, social and political life; it will be lacking sufficient vital energy and strength to defend

itself from barbaric irruptions from within or invasions from without or to create an efficient, prosperous and equitable outer life for the whole community. Whatever cultural progress or economic prosperity is achieved by the civilisation, it will be confined to a small elite aristocracy while the large majority of the communal mass wallows in poverty and ignorance.

Those civilisations which respond to the rajasic and sattvic impulses in a more balanced way endure longer than others and make lasting contributions to human progress.

In a psychological perspective, our human history is nothing but the result of the shifting domination of the triple qualities of Nature and their corresponding egos in various combinations. The next step would be to examine our present historic cycle of human civilisation in the light of the principles we have discussed so far.

(Concluded)

M. S. SRINIVASAN

Mind and body are not our real self; they are mutable formations or images which we go on constructing in the drive of Time as a result of the mass of our past energies. For although those energies seem to us to lie dead in the past because their history is behind us, yet are they still existent in their mass and always active in the present and the future.

Neither is the ego-function our real self. Ego is only a faculty put forward by the discriminative mind to centralise round itself the experiences of the sense-mind and to serve as a sort of lynch-pin in the wheel which keeps together the movement. It is no more than an instrument, although it is true that so long as we are limited by our normal mentality, we are compelled by the nature of that mentality and the purpose of the instrument to mistake our ego-function for our very self.

Neither is it the memory that constitutes our real self. Memory is another instrument, a selective instrument for the practical management of our conscious activities. The ego-function uses it as a rest and support so as to preserve the sense of continuity without which our mental and vital activities could not be organised for a spacious enjoyment by the individual.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Upanishads [Part One, 1981 Ed.], p. 120)

TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of March 2004)

LOVE IN THEIR LYRICS: DREAM AND ACTION

SRI AUROBINDO pursues God with an intense passion in *I have a hundred lives*, one of the early sonnets. In his later sonnets the passion leaves him, making room for a soul of emotion shaping itself out in experiential stuff. In most of Sri Aurobindo's sonnets, experience is recorded in a kind of action narrative, which is in sharp contrast with the leisurely emotion of Tagore. While Sri Aurobindo is dynamic, Tagore is dreaming about his beloved Lord in a leisurely manner:

I have ever loved thee in a hundred forms and times,
Age after age, in birth following birth.
The chain of songs that my fond heart did weave
Thou graciously didst take around thy neck,
Age after age, in birth following birth.

When I listen to the tales of the primitive past,
The love-pangs of the far distant times,
The meetings and partings of the ancient ages,
I see thy form gathering light
Through the dark dimness of Eternity
And appearing as a star ever fixed in the memory of the All.

We two have come floating by the twin currents of love
That well up from the inmost heart of the beginningless.
We two have played in the lives of myriad lovers
In tearful solitude of sorrow,
In tremulous shyness of sweet union,
In old old love ever renewing its life.¹

The talk of rebirth or many lives links him with Sri Aurobindo. Instead of the quick-flowing lines of Sri Aurobindo's sonnet, we have here a slow-moving dream of past lives. The phrase 'chain of songs' is typically Tagorean, because he has always wished to seize the Divine through his songs. From birth to birth, the songs have formed a 'chain of songs', a song sequence consisting of various tunes of joy and sadness. There is a leisurely nostalgia in lines 6 and 7, which speak of Tagore's constant involvement in the love stories of medieval and ancient India.

Sri Aurobindo's sonnet, *I have a hundred lives*,² has a suppressed glow of emotion

in its action-oriented lines. Instead of the traditional nostalgia, we have here a memory of the future. Sri Aurobindo enjoys looking forward. Tagore's beautiful phrase 'twin currents of love' is also applicable to Sri Aurobindo, who too knows that his love is a two-way street. There is a strong resolution to pursue his beloved in lives to come and to grasp him at last. His 'insatiable' heart is throbbing with a white fire of love. The image of the hunter stresses the note of a glorious chase. God's hands are also keen on holding human hands. The image of the 'eternal way' is expressive of the quest of the individual, who is here a hunter of Light. Who hunts whom? Both are hunters and the hunted. The human is God's proper home. The poet knows that even the very little things in Nature are God's favourites. Why not touch the Lord's favourites till the great moment of union arrives? Both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo are certain about the response from the other side.

*

It is refinement that gives an elevating touch to love poetry. The finer taste always moves beyond the immediate occasion, beyond the mundane and the familiar, seeking an unseizable mystery. That is precisely the strength of Tagore, who is a love poet of the middle world. His lyrics are fairy tales with hidden symbols:

There is a looker-on who sits behind my eyes. It seems he has seen things, in ages and worlds beyond memory's shore, and those forgotten sights glisten on the grass, and shiver on the leaves. He has seen under new veils the face of the one beloved, in twilight hours of many a nameless star. Therefore his sky seems to ache with the pain of countless meetings and partings, and a longing pervades this spring breeze,—the longing that is full of the whisper of ages without beginning.³

There is a prescient love in Tagore pressing him all the time. He enjoys the pain like a seeker of light, but expresses it more as an aesthete than as a spiritual poet. He speaks repeatedly that he will meet one day the Life within him of which he has known only in glimpses. Its fitful breath has come upon him, making his thoughts fragrant for a while. A queer emotion gives birth to the following lines:

I will meet one day the Joy without me that dwells behind the screen of light—
and will stand in the overflowing solitude where all things are seen by their creator.⁴

This is not exactly the voice of the Spirit, but a deliberate prescience of a future glory. That is why Nolini Kanta Gupta cautions us in his essay, *Mystic Poetry*: "To equate mysticism and spirituality is not always happy or even correct."⁵ But then,

who will deny the beauty and originality of Tagore's mystic love poetry? Sri Aurobindo, who has mapped the zones of human consciousness, is certainly the best judge of the nature of every emotion, mundane or divine. Standing at the summit of spirituality, he is able to see all the varieties of emotion, which lead to the supreme Godhead:

Love comes to us in many ways; it may come as an awakening to the beauty of the Lover, by the sight of an ideal face and image of him, by his mysterious hints to us of himself behind the thousand faces of things in the world, by a slow or sudden need of the heart, by a vague thirst in the soul, by the sense of someone near us drawing us or pursuing us with love or of someone blissful and beautiful whom we must discover.⁶

The passage reads like an interpretation of Tagore's mystic love poetry. In fact, it may be used on the jacket flap of any edition of *Gitanjali*. Yet, the love lyrics of Tagore are quite different from Sri Aurobindo's own practice. Except for *The Dream Boat*, there is no trace of the Tagorean poetic style in Sri Aurobindo. Even in *The Dream Boat*, the quality of agony is more Aurobindonian than Tagorean because of the control over the psychic sadness. In Tagore, the theme usually produces a kind of romantic anguish, as in Poem no. 16 in *Crossing*. There is another variety from Tagore in the following lines:

In the night the song came to me; but you were not there.

It found the words for which I had been seeking all day. Yes, in the stillness a moment after dark they throbbed into music, even as the stars then began to pulse with light; but you were not there. My hope was to sing it to you in the morning; but, try as I might, though the music came, the words hung back, when you were beside me.⁷

Sri Aurobindo's love lyrics are less popular than Tagore's, because the experiences come from deeper layers of consciousness. All the mature sonnets are records of yoga put in that particular poetic form. Even if nobody had written about his life, he has done it himself in his lyrics and sonnets. And the love they speak of is of another kind, which we can only guess:

I who have felt the hungry heart of earth
Aspiring beyond heaven to Krishna's feet.⁸

He has become my substance and my breath;
He is my anguish and my ecstasy.⁹

This is the characteristic intensity of Sri Aurobindo's emotion, which grows further in intensity in the speeches of Savitri in his cosmic epic. The poet's mind is settled on God. He loses himself in the deep ecstasy of His presence. The heart has become the radiantly unfolding lotus of the spirit. Love has gone beyond the highest power of the normal human emotions. That is why Sri Aurobindo's love lyrics demand a special kind of audience.

(To be continued)

GOUTAM GHOSAL

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I would be happy to share with your readers my experiences with words and the incidental correspondence with the Chambers Dictionary.

During the mid-sixties, when I was a lecturer in the department of mathematics at the Darjeeling Government College, some of us teachers often played word-making games. And whenever a question arose, a dictionary was brought in from the College library, generally, the Chambers 20th Century Dictionary, to decide on the point in question.

One day, during a game, one of the players supplied the letter M after the already formed ABYS, and looked askance at the next person. "But a word is already formed!" I said. Readers would know that in this game, the person who completes the word loses. All were in doubt about my observation. An assistant professor, a very brilliant person who later became an intimate friend, sought to correct me by saying that there is ABYSS and ABYSMAL, but no ABYSM. I, however, maintained my ground. A dictionary was brought in to pronounce the verdict. And ABYSM was there!

The assistant professor did not fail to congratulate me warmly.

Readers may recall that the word ABYSM occurs on the very first page of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*:

The abysm of the unbodied infinite
A fathomless zero occupied the world.

The dictionary that we consulted was the Chambers 20th Century Dictionary, 1963 edition.

Another day, under CADGY, I found FOLICSOME.

I brought the matter to the notice of those who were there and said it should have been FROLICSOME. My colleagues were intrigued that an error, however silly, could have crept into a dictionary of such high standing. They urged me to write to the editor of the dictionary, William Geddie.

A few days later, I came across, under EXPULSE, the letter n, indicating that it was a noun. I wrote again to Geddie, pointing this out and observing that the error may have been caused due to a false association with IMPULSE, which is a noun. I dealt at length with the verb EXPULSE, and its noun form, EXPULSION, and said that although the word IMPULSION does exist, it was not another form of IMPULSE. I did not miss the opportunity to raise some questions on linguistics and regretted that Sanskrit roots, though given many times, are not always given; and that sometimes even a mention would be appropriate.

Soon after, I received a kind reply from the editor of the dictionary, A.M. Macdonald, acknowledging both misprints and assuring me that the corrections would

be made. The letter is rich in content, dealing with linguistic points, including Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit inflexions.

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter of 8 May [1965]. We are grateful to you for pointing out the misprints under *cadgy* and *expulse*, and we shall be glad to correct them the next time we reprint.

The fact that Latin *pulsum* is given at *compel*, *expel*, *impel*, and not at *dispel*, *propel*, *repel* seems to me to have no explanation except lack of consistency. I think Mr. Geddie felt unconsciously that it did not matter whether he gave *pulsum* or not. In his youth Latin was an essential part of a good education in this country, and I am afraid he sometimes took it for granted that users of his dictionary would know more Latin than, in fact, they do nowadays.

In Latin, as in Sanskrit and other Indo-European languages, a number of stems are used to form parts of the verb. In Latin there were three altogether, one being the stem of the infinitive (*pellēre*) and one the stem of the supine (*pulsum*). The Latin supine actually corresponds *in form* to the infinitive in classical Sanskrit; e.g. the Latin supine (*g*)*nōtum* from (*g*)*noscere*, to know, corresponds in form to Sanskrit *jñātum*, to know.

We usually find that the English verb is formed from the infinitive stem, and the corresponding noun from the supine stem. This is because Latin nouns were formed from the supine stem. English examples include:—*compel*, *compulsion*, *expel*, *expulsion*. *Dispel* is an oddity in that there is no noun *dispulsion*.

Sometimes in Latin a second verb was formed from the supine stem—e.g. *pulsāre*, *expulsāre*, *compulsāre* (the two last are post-classical Latin)—and we find *expulse* and *compulse* in older English, though they are no longer in use today. We do, however, use *repulse* (there was no Latin *repulsāre*).

I hope this is the information you wanted. The definition of *expulse* reads: “(obs.) to expel forcibly, eject”, with only a comma before “eject”—showing that the “eject” is not intended to be a separate meaning, and that the “to” applies to it as well as to “expel forcibly”. However, I think we have room for “to eject” and we may as well put this in when we are making the essential alteration....

Not a month had passed that I found under SPEED the meaning VELOCITY, and under VELOCITY, one meaning was SPEED. This was followed by RATE OF CHANGE OF POSITIONS. I wrote to Mr. Macdonald stating that RATE OF CHANGE OF POSITIONS was not very meaningful, since any instance of speed or velocity involves change of an infinite number of positions which cannot be counted or calculated. It would be better to say TIME-RATE OF CHANGE OF DISTANCE TRAVELLED, under SPEED, and then simply, SPEED IN A GIVEN DIRECTION under VELOCITY. Very soon I got the second letter from Mr. Macdonald thanking

me for pointing out that the words SPEED and VELOCITY required more accurate definitions and assuring me that these would be taken care of in the next reprint.

Years later, at the Calcutta Bookfair, I found the 1983 edition of the dictionary. Looking into it I found that the changes had actually been implemented. I readily purchased a copy. I wrote to the new editor expressing my happiness. I also availed of the opportunity to ask about ONOMATOPOESIS and some of its allied forms. Quick came the reply from the Reference Editor, Catherine Schwarz.

The answer to your query on the spellings onomatopoesis and onomatopoesis lies in the transliteration of the original Greek *ὄνοματοποίησις* into English, and whether the route taken was direct or via Latin.

The direct transliteration from Greek into English gives onomatopoesis; that through Latin gives (the Greek oi becoming, regularly, æ in Latin) onomatopœesis, so onomatopœesis, then onomatopœisis, and hence onomatopoesis.

Your assumption that onomatopoeic is used more often than onomatopoeic is probably correct, but there is unlikely to be much difference in the frequency of these forms.

It was interesting to hear from you again, with the copies of your earlier correspondence with Chambers.

So much then, about my correspondence with Chambers. Allow me to close by extending my warm regards to all word-lovers.

Yours sincerely,
ASHOK K. RAY

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THE LAKE DISTRICT—A POET'S PARADISE

BACK in my room from the breakfast table, I suddenly remembered the words of my professor, Dr. Batabyal of Rabindra Bharati University. While lecturing on Coleridge, he suddenly asked in a high-pitched voice, the context I do not remember, that if *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was valued at five pounds, what was the value of the whole British Empire? Coleridge sparked the name of other Lakists in my memory.

Whether it was a school of hypochondriacs, as Jeffrey said, or the soul of Wordsworth's moral being, as the poet himself said, it is a fact that the Lake District of England influenced the creation of a number of great poets, including, to some extent, Manmohan Ghose and his younger brother, later known throughout the world as Sri Aurobindo.

The train took three hours to reach Oxenholme. One has to catch the train from there for Windermere.

Reaching the hotel by cab, I ran to its rear side overlooking the vast lake abounding in water which stretched on both sides of a hillock beyond the entranced eyes. My attention was drawn to a number of swans, gulls, teals and terns, flying over the lake, floating and resting on it. They were the cynosure of all the visitors. Watching the birds was the beginning of my journey to the lakes.

In the evening, I moved round the roads and bridge, full of shops with memorabilia, restaurants and hotels. In the small lanes people were chatting, drinking or moving with familiar steps. I felt as comfortable as in a small, cosy Indian hill town. The lake was beautiful under the starry and moonlit evening sky.

Cumbria, the second largest county in North-West England, was formed in 1974 out of the former counties of Cumberland and Westmorland. Covering an area of 6808 square kilometers, Cumbria incorporates the lakes, dales and fells. 17 kilometre-long Windermere is the largest lake of England. It has the highest mountain, Scafell Pike (1978 metres), besides other hills.

As I was cruising the lake with others in a big launch the next morning, the dales and fells on both sides of the lake charmed me as they had charmed the Romantics, William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Robert Southey, S. T. Coleridge and others. Big passenger launches, many ticket counters and tourist offices were surely not there at that time, but small boats used to sail there, carrying the imaginative and philosophic Nature poets. Reminiscing about his childhood days, Wordsworth wrote in *The Prelude*:

When summer came,
Our pastime was, on bright half-holidays,
To sweep along the plain of Windermere
With rival oars;...

They enjoyed,

...an island musical with birds
That sang and ceased not;...

Wordsworth was born in Cumberland and finally settled there with an affection for the lakes. Coleridge wrote his best when he was with or near Wordsworth. At one time the two poets and Dorothy, their inspiration, met daily at the lakes. They were, in Coleridge's phrase, "Three persons and one soul".

How it intoxicated the Indian poets, Manmohan and Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghose of St. Paul's School, London, a hundred years later! Manmohan wrote to his poet-friend Lawrence Binyon on 10 August 1886 from Keswick that the Lake District and Derbyshire were "One of the loveliest counties in England..." (Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicle*, Book 4, p. 145).

The two brothers stayed there during the holidays and walked in the valleys. Sri Aurobindo reminisced later, "Manmohan used to have at times poetic illness. Once we were walking through Cumberland. We found that he had fallen half a mile behind, walking at a leisurely pace and moaning out poetry in a deep tone." (*Ibid.*, p. 147)

From Ambleside I took a bus and went to Grasmere. There stands Dove Cottage, in a serene atmosphere, where William Wordsworth lived with his family, from 1799 to 1808. The garden, which once was tended by the poet's loving hands, is still there. It is a two-storeyed house, still maintained as it had been. A guide took us round every room and showed us all the furniture used by the poet. There is a museum dedicated to the poet in a nearby house. That too we visited. On display were many statues, photos, manuscripts, which bore the sensation of the poet's touch. There were photos and manuscripts by other fellow-poets. The house and the museum created a nostalgic atmosphere.

One would have liked to spend an hour more but the charge was rather on the steep side.

While returning, I remembered having read a story about the presence of Wordsworth in a subtle body in Rydal Mount, another cottage with an appearance similar to Dove cottage, on the fringes of Ambleside, six years after he was gone. In that house the poet had lived for long with his sister, his wife and his sister-in-law. It is also open for public view.

Mary, a young girl, who was taken there to live with the poet's widow in 1856, felt the poet's presence in a room where Dorothy Wordsworth had lived.

"I can still recollect the childish feeling... that a presence still haunted it," wrote Mary, now Mrs. Humphrey Ward, in *A Writer's Recollections*, published in 1819. (*Cumbria and Lake District Life*, Carlisle, U.K., April, 2003)

52 years later she again lived there, joined by her daughter, Dorothy, whose weird story of beholding the poet sitting in his old armchair in the dead of a moonlit

night, was recounted by her mother in her book mentioned above.

Let us hear what exactly Dorothy had said, "I slept soundly, but woke quite suddenly, at what hour I do not know, and found myself sitting bolt upright in bed looking towards the window... I saw perfectly clearly the figure of an old man sitting in the armchair by the window.

"I said to myself—'That's Wordsworth!'

"He was sitting with either hand resting on the arms of the chair, leaning back, his head rather bent as he seemed to be looking down, straight in front of him with a rapt expression. He was not looking at me, nor out the window. The moonlight lit up the top of his head and the silvery hair and I noticed the hair was very thin. The whole impression was of something solemn and beautiful and I was not in the least frightened. As I looked—I cannot say when I looked again, for I have no recollection of ceasing to look or looking away—the figure disappeared and I became aware of the empty chair.

"I lay back again and thought for a moment in a contented way 'That was Wordsworth!'"

I became nostalgic again. If he lives in Rydal Mount still, he must be visiting Dove Cottage also from time to time!

The Lake District is a nice place to remain for three or four days and enjoy the serene nature. One may hire a boat, cruise in a launch, visit the aquarium, hire a cycle and move round places or simply walk through the dales and fells. Bird-watchers have the chance to see the rare and beautiful ospreys in flight or plunge-diving with outstretched talons and catching a big fish from the Doddwood Osprey View Point or Bassenthwaite Lake, where they migrate from far-away South Africa in Spring.

There are a number of other places to visit, like Beatrix Potter's Hilltop, the Art Gallery and the Museum. One may spend a night or two in the countryside in the deep of quiet nature.

While coming I had less trouble than while leaving. Five times I had to change trains due to misinformation and uncertainty about the movement of trains, as some repair work was going on, they said. I was given to understand that such things happened often. But the people were friendly. They helped. I reached London City Airport only 15 minutes prior to the scheduled departure time of the flight. I was specially allowed to run across the small runway and helped to get into the plane, which was roaring, ready to run and fly.

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Among the Not So Great by Prabhakar (Batti). Published by Sri Mira Trust, 2003. Pages: 276. Price: Rs. 80.00.

READERS of *Mother India* will be happy to know that Batti's stories of old Ashramites have been compiled into a book. These stories which were serialised under the title *Among the Not So Great* (as distinguished from Dilip Kumar Roy's *Among the Great*) created a stir in the Ashram. People who never cared for the magazine rolled up their sleeves and read it in the evenings. Regular readers were enthused by this sudden spurt of inspired writing, though a few serious ones pursed their lips in dis-approval and said, "Such things should not have been written. It reflects badly on the Ashram." But everybody without exception had a good laugh, for that is one thing you cannot deny—the humour. For once, or maybe after a long time, (I can only remember Amal Kiran's talks in *Light and Laughter* to match), humour has broken through on the Ashram literary scene. I was myself wondering whether we were heading for a humourless spiritual community when this phenomenon disproved it. For quite some time, the standardised story of the spiritual seeker read somewhat like this—"X heard a talk on Sri Aurobindo or Y saw the Mother's photo in a book, his soul responded and he left promptly for Pondicherry without thinking of his job and family, but then everything got arranged miraculously so that he could devote his life to the Divine." The story generally ended there and the reader assumed that everything went off well. One was never told that the real trouble began after that. Or rather, the real adventure began after the first euphoric spell in the mental and vital regions, when the subconscious fumes rose up and engulfed the poor sadhak. None is spared this ignominy and battle with the lower nature. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have said this time and again, discouraging prospective candidates and shooing off ignorant neophytes.

It is here that Batti catches up with the generation of sadhaks who settled in the Ashram in the twenties, thirties and early forties. He himself came to the Ashram in 1945 at the age of nine. The Ashram went through a sea-change in the forties with the invasion of children. The Mother started a school for them in 1943 and soon physical education was introduced in a big way. Senior sadhaks like Rajangam donned their shorts and played tennis. Yogananda shaved his beard and became a lifeguard for sea swimmers. Pavitra and Nolini ran races with the Green group children. The young grew up with the old as if they were one big family under the Mother's care. After their education, the young men rubbed shoulders with their seniors in the field of work. The elders had meanwhile matured further, developed idiosyncrasies, human weaknesses and sometimes laughable characteristics. At the same time, the inner fire had grown deeper and set an example for those who could feel the embers within them. There is an underlying reverence for them throughout Batti's narration of what

is the real, laughable or even the negative side of their characters. He makes us laugh, but also strikes a deeper chord in our being. Poornananda walks about like a live wire, but he scrapes the rust off every metal rod in a godown and is ready for more work. Yogananda, another bundle of highly inflammable stuff, beats up Dhirananda with a *khadam* when the latter questions the Avatarhood of Sri Aurobindo. The same man daily scours the countryside on a rickety old cycle to collect lotus flowers for the Mother. Manibhai, the weirdest yogi night-watchman that ever was, professes that not a leaf can fall without the Mother's permission. Perhaps the most touching story is that of Kiron Chaudhuri, the father of the Ashram Hand Made Paper factory, who designs a primitive contraption to produce paper pulp. You fall off your chair reading about it, but at the end of the story you wonder and appreciate the man's fire and genius. Batti has taken his pick from this category of sadhaks, except for two, Nishikanto (the poet) and Sunil Bhattacharya (the musician), whom he places verily among the great. The rest conveniently fall under the general title "Among the Not So Great", though, indirectly, he speaks of their greatness.

Batti's stories might be disappointing for those who expect the Ashram to be full of great yogis like Nolini and Pavitra, but they are perhaps the best answer to people who denigrate the Ashram because of the imperfections of the sadhaks. He has deliberately chosen the more inconspicuous and humble lot to prove his point, the ones you meet daily on the road and who are part of the humdrum life of the Ashram. He portrays them exactly as they were, without sparing their oddities and defects of character. At the same time, he shows how the Yoga goes on behind the apparent "ordinariness" of human temperament, how the thin streak of gold runs through the rock of physical nature. One is reminded of Sri Aurobindo's humorous correspondence with Nirodbaran:

Looking around and at oneself, one heaves a sigh and says—What disciples we are of what a Master!

As to the disciples, I agree!

And we are to be divinised and made the nucleus of a greater work? My God! No, Sir, I am doubtful about your success; but wish that at least 2 or 3 may be there so that looking at them we may exclaim—By them humanity is conquered! Really, I wish you had chosen better stuff—perhaps somebody like Krishnaprem.

Yes, but would the better stuff, supposing it to exist, be typical of humanity? To deal with a few exceptional types would hardly solve the problem. And would they consent to follow my path—that is another question? And if they were put to the test, would not the common humanity suddenly reveal itself—that is still another question.

Sri Aurobindo agrees that he could have chosen better stuff, but with so many “ifs” and “buts” that Nirodbaran must not have felt uncomfortable at all about his own selection. Indirectly, it makes us, the present residents, feel a little comfortable. Then, the question as to whether we are fit for such a great yoga, or rather, the objection that we are surely not, becomes irrelevant. What seems more important is to accept what we are, without pretending to be what we are not, and put ourselves at the Mother’s service. For that is what this first generation of sadhaks did, without ever having any second thoughts. They served her unstintedly for about half a century. Surely, we have a lot more to learn from them than we are generally ready to admit.

RAMAN REDDY

This Ashram has been created with another object than that ordinarily common to such institutions, not for the renunciation of the world but as a centre and a field of practice for the evolution of another kind and form of life which would in the final end be moved by a higher spiritual consciousness and embody a greater life of the spirit. There is no general rule as to the stage at which one may leave the ordinary life and enter here; in each case it depends on the personal need and impulsion and the possibility or the advisability for one to take the step.

* * *

This is not an Ashram like others—the members are not Sannyasis; it is not mokṣa that is the sole aim of the yoga here. What is being done here is a preparation for a work—a work which will be founded on yogic consciousness and Yoga-Shakti, and can have no other foundation. Meanwhile, every member here is expected to do some work in the Ashram as part of this spiritual preparation.

* * *

“Dedication of life” is quite possible for some without their staying here. It is a question of inward attitude and of the total consecration of the being to the Divine.

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, pp. 847-48)