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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>	
LIBERATION (Poem)	... 439
NA KINCHIDAPI CHINTAYET	... 440
MEDITATION	... 443
<i>The Mother</i>	
FROM <i>PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS</i>	... 445
‘LOVE—PITY—SYMPATHY—SERENITY’	... 446
‘GOVERNMENT WITHOUT PARTY’	... 447
<i>Nolini Kanta Gupta</i>	
OUR EDUCATION	... 449
<i>Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)</i>	
FEBRUARY 29, 1960	... 460
GOLDEN DAY, 29 FEBRUARY 2004	... 463
<i>Narad (Richard Eggenberger)</i>	
WIND-SONG (Poem)	... 463
<i>APJ Abdul Kalam</i>	
ADDRESS AT SRI AUROBINDO BHAVAN, KOLKATA	... 464
<i>Debashish Banerji</i>	
NIRODBARAN’S SURREALIST POEMS	... 466
<i>Arabinda Basu</i>	
CONSCIOUSNESS—A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH	... 467
<i>C. C. Dutt</i>	
SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN’S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT	... 474
<i>Abani</i>	
THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS	... 477
<i>Prema Nandakumar</i>	
THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY	... 478

<i>Richard Hartz</i>		
	SRI AUROBINDO AND THE PROBLEM OF POETIC TRANSLATION	... 486
<i>Amita Sen</i>		
	MONSIEUR AND MADAME FRANÇOIS MARTIN IN PONDICHERRY	... 491
<i>Carel</i>		
	THE DUTCH TOWN PLAN OF PONDICHERRY	... 501
<i>Maggi</i>		
	ALSO MY FALL (Poem)	... 506
<i>Nolinikanto Sarkar</i>		
	BETWEEN THE ARRIVAL AND THE DEPARTURE	... 507
<i>B. G. Pattegar</i>		
	HASTEN, BUT SLOWLY!	... 519
<i>Goutam Ghosal</i>		
	TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO	... 521
<i>Chunilal Chowdhury</i>		
	CONVERSATION BETWEEN KARNA AND KUNTI	... 527
BOOKS IN THE BALANCE		
<i>Manoj Das</i>		
	<i>Review of NIRODBARAN: DIVINITY'S COMRADE, edited by HEMANT KAPOOR</i>	... 531

LIBERATION

I have thrown from me the whirling dance of mind
And stand now in the spirit's silence free;
Timeless and deathless beyond creature-kind,
The centre of my own eternity.

I have escaped and the small self is dead;
I am immortal, alone, ineffable;
I have gone out from the universe I made,
And have grown nameless and immeasurable.

My mind is hushed in a wide and endless light,
My heart a solitude of delight and peace,
My sense unsnared by touch and sound and sight,
My body a point in white infinities.

I am the one Being's sole immobile Bliss:
No one I am, I who am all that is.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 133)

NA KINCHIDAPI CHINTAYET*

THE cessation of thought is the one thing which the believer in intellect as the highest term of our evolution cannot contemplate with equanimity. To master the fleeting randomness of thought by regulating the intellectual powers and thinking consecutively and clearly is an ideal he can understand. But to still this higher development of thought seems to him the negation of human activity, a reversion to the condition of the stone. Yet it is certain that it is only by the stilling of the lower that the higher gets full play. So long as the body and the vital desires are active the mind is necessarily distracted and it is only when the body is forgotten and the vital part consents to quietude that a man can concentrate himself in thought and follow undisturbed the consecutive development whether of a train of reasoning or a train of inspiration. Not only is this so, but the higher faculties of the mind can only work at their best when the lower are quieted. If the accumulations in the chitta, the recording part of the mind, are continually active, full as it is of preconceived ideas, prejudices, predilections, the great mass of previous *sanskaras*, the reflective mind which is ordinarily called the reason is obstructed in its work and comes to false conclusions. It is essential for the faculties of the reason to be freed as far as may be from this ever increasing accumulation of thought-sensations good and bad, false and true which we call mind—*manas*. It is this freedom which is called the scientific spirit. To form no conclusions which are not justified by observation and reasoning, to doubt everything until it is proved but to deny nothing until it is disproved, to be always ready to reconsider old conclusions in the light of new facts, to give a candid consideration to every new idea or old idea revived if it deserves a hearing, no matter how contradictory it may be of previously ascertained experience or previously formed conclusion, is the sceptical temper, the temper of the inquirer, the true scientist, the untrammelled thinker. The interference of prejudgment and predilection means bondage and until the higher mind has shaken off these fetters, it is not free; it works in chains, it sees in blinkers. This is as true of the materialist refusing to consider spiritualism and occultism as it is of the religionist refusing to consider Science. Freedom is the first requisite of full working power, the freedom of the higher from the lower. The mind must be free from the body if it is to be purified from the grossness which clogs its motions, the heart must be free from the obsessions of the body if love and high aspiration are to increase, the reason must be free from the heart and the lower mind if it is to reflect perfectly,—for the heart can inspire, it cannot think, it is a vehicle of direct knowledge coloured by emotion, not of ratiocination. By [a] similar process if there is anything higher than the reason it can only be set free to work by the stillness of the whole mind not excluding the reflective faculties. This is a conclusion from analogy, indeed, and not entirely binding until confirmed by expe-

* The title is a quotation from the Bhagavad Gita (6.25): “one should not think of anything at all”—Ed. note in CWSA.

rience and observation. But we have given reason in past articles for supposing that there is a higher force than the logical reason—and the experience and observation of Yoga confirm the inference from analogy that the stillness of the mind is the first requisite for discovering, distinguishing and perfecting the action of this higher element in the psychology of man.

The stillness of the mind is prepared by the process of concentration. In the science of Rajayoga after the heart has been stilled and the mind prepared, the next step is to subjugate the body by means of *asan* or the fixed and motionless seat. The aim of this fixity is twofold, first the stillness of the body and secondly the forgetfulness of the body. When one can sit still and utterly forget the body for a long period of time, then the *asan* is said to have been mastered. In ordinary concentration when the body is only comparatively still it is not noticed, but there is an undercurrent of physical consciousness which may surge up at any moment into the upper current of thought and disturb it. The Yogin seeks to make the forgetfulness perfect. In the higher processes of concentration this forgetfulness reaches such a point that the bodily consciousness is annulled and in the acme of the *samadhi* a man can be cut or burned without being aware of the physical suffering. Even before the concentration is begun the forgetfulness acquired is sufficient to prevent any intrusion upon the mind except under a more than ordinarily powerful physical stimulus. After this point has been reached the Yoga proceeds to the processes of pranayam by which the whole system is cleared of impurities and the *pranasakti*, the great cosmic energy which lies behind all processes of Nature, fills the body and the brain and becomes sufficient for any work of which man is actually or potentially capable. This is followed by concentration. The first process is to withdraw the senses into the mind. This is partly done in the ordinary process of absorption of which every thinking man is capable. To concentrate upon the work in hand whether it be a manual process, a train of thought, a scientific experiment or a train of inspiration, is the first condition of complete capacity and it is the process by which mankind has been preparing itself for Yoga. To concentrate means to be absorbed; but absorption may be more or less complete. When it is so complete that for all practical purposes the knowledge of outward things ceases, then the first step has been taken towards Yogic absorption. We need not go into the stages of that absorption rising from *pratyahar* to *samadhi* and from the lower *samadhi* to the higher. The principle is to intensify absorption. It is intensified in quality by the entire cessation of outward knowledge, the senses are withdrawn into the mind, the mind into the *buddhi* or supermind, the supermind into Knowledge, *Vijnana*, *Mahat*, out of which all things proceed and in which all things exist. It is intensified in quantity or content; instead of absorption in a set of thoughts or a train of intuitions, the Yogin concentrates his absorption on a single thought, a single image, a single piece of knowledge, and it is his experience that whatever he thus concentrates on, he masters,—he becomes its lord and does with it what he wills. By knowledge he attains to mastery of the world. The final goal of Rajayoga is

the annulment of separate consciousness and complete communion with that which alone is whether we call Him Parabrahman or Parameshwara, Existence in the Highest or Will in the Highest, the Ultimate or God.

In the Gita we have a process which is not the process of Raja-Yoga. It seeks a short cut to the common aim and goes straight to the stillness of the mind. After putting away desire and fear the Yogin sits down and performs upon his thoughts a process of reining in by which they get accustomed to an inward motion. Instead of allowing the mind to flow outward, he compels it to rise and fall within, and if he sees, hears, feels or smells outward objects he pays no attention to them and draws the mind always inward. This process he pursues until the mind ceases to send up thoughts connected with outward things. The result is that fresh thoughts do not accumulate in the chitta at the time of meditation, but only the old ones rise. If the process be farther pursued by rejecting these thoughts as they rise in the mind, in other words by dissociating the thinker from the mind, the operator from the machine and refusing to sanction the continuance of the machine's activity, the result is perfect stillness. This can be done if the thinker whose interest is necessary to the mind, refuses to be interested and becomes passive. The mind goes on for a while by its own impetus just as a locomotive does when the steam is shut off, but a time must come when it will slow down and stop altogether. This is the moment towards which the process moves. Na kinchid api chintayet:—the Yogin should not think of anything at all. Blank cessation of mental activity is aimed at leaving only the sakshi, the witness watching for results. If at this moment the Yogin entrusts himself to the guidance of the universal Teacher within himself, Yoga will fulfil itself without any farther effort on his part. The passivity will be confirmed, the higher faculties will awake and the cosmic Force passing down from the vijnana through the supermind will take charge of the whole machine and direct its workings as the Infinite Lord of All may choose.

Whichever of the two methods be chosen, the result is the same. The mind is stilled, the higher faculties awakened. This stillness of the mind is not altogether a new idea or peculiar to India. The old Highland poets had the secret. When they wished to compose poetry, they first stilled the mind, became entirely passive and waited for the inspiration to flow into them. This habit of yogic passivity, a relic doubtless of the discipline of the Druids, was the source of those faculties of second sight and other psychic powers which are so much more common in this Celtic race than in the other peoples of Europe. The phenomena of inspiration are directly connected with these higher faculties of which we find rudiments or sporadic traces in the past history of human experience.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 23-27)

(This essay was written probably around 1910. The word 'supermind' occurs in a different sense here than in Sri Aurobindo's later writings.)

MEDITATION

What exactly is meant by meditation in Yoga? And what should be its objects?

THE difficulty our correspondent finds is in an apparent conflict of authorities, as sometimes meditation is recommended in the form of a concentrated succession of thoughts on a single subject, sometimes in the exclusive concentration of the mind on a single image, word or idea, a fixed contemplation rather than meditation. The choice between these two methods and others, for there are others, depends on the object we have in view in Yoga.

The thinking mind is the one instrument we possess at present by which we can arrive at a conscious self-organisation of our internal existence. But in most men thought is a confused drift of ideas, sensations and impressions which arrange themselves as best they can under the stress of a succession of immediate interests and utilities. In accordance with the general method of Nature much is used as waste material and only a small portion selected for definite and abiding formations. And as in physical Nature, so here the whole process is governed by laws which we rather suffer than use or control.

The concentration of thought is used by the Rajayogins to gain freedom and control over the workings of mind, just as the processes of governed respiration and fixed posture are used by the Hathayogins to gain freedom and control over the workings of the body and the vital functions.

By meditation we correct the restless wandering of the mind and train it like an athlete to economise all its energies and fix them on the attainment of some desirable knowledge or self-discipline. This is done normally by men in ordinary life, but Yoga takes this higher working of Nature and carries it to its full possibilities. It takes note of the fact that by fixing the mind luminously on a single object of thought, we awaken a response in general Consciousness which proceeds to satisfy the mind by pouring into it knowledge about that object or even reveals to us its central or its essential truth. We awaken also a response of Power which gives us in various ways an increasing mastery over the workings of that on which we meditate or enables us to create it and make it active in ourselves. Thus by fixing the mind on the idea of Divine Love, we can come to the knowledge of that principle and its workings, put ourselves into communion with it, create it in ourselves and impose its law on the heart and the senses.

In Yoga concentration is used also for another object,—to retire from the waking state, which is a limited and superficial condition of our consciousness, into the depths of our being measured by various states of Samadhi. For this process contemplation of the single object, idea or name is more powerful than the succession of concentrated thoughts. The latter, however, is capable, by bringing us into indirect but waking communion with the deeper states of being, of preparing an integral Samadhi. Its

characteristic utility, however, is the luminous activity of formative thought brought under the control of the Purusha by which the rest of the consciousness is governed, filled with higher and wider ideas, changed rapidly into the mould of those ideas and so perfected. Other and greater utilities lie beyond, but they belong to a later stage of self-development.

In the Yoga of Devotion, both processes are equally used to concentrate the whole being or to saturate the whole nature with thoughts of the object of devotion, its forms, its essence, its attributes and the joys of adoration and union. Thought is then made the servant of Love, a preparer of Beatitude. In the Yoga of Knowledge meditation is similarly used for discrimination of the True from the apparent, the Self from its forms, and concentrated contemplation for communion and entry of the individual consciousness into the Brahman.

An integral Yoga would harmonise all these aims. It would have also at its disposal other processes for the utilisation of thought and the mastery of the mind.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 445-47; first published in Arya, October 1914 in the series The Question of the Month.)

Wanton waste, careless spoiling of physical things in an incredibly short time, loose disorder, misuse of service and materials due either to vital grasping or to tamasic inertia are baneful to prosperity and tend to drive away or discourage the Wealth-Power. These things have long been rampant in the society and, if that continues, an increase in our means might well mean a proportionate increase in the wastage and disorder and neutralise the material advantage. This must be remedied if there is to be any sound progress.

Asceticism for its own sake is not the ideal of this yoga, but self-control in the vital and right order in the material are a very important part of it—and even an ascetic discipline is better for our purpose than a loose absence of true control. Mastery of the material does not mean having plenty and profusely throwing it out or spoiling it as fast as it comes or faster. Mastery implies in it the right and careful utilisation of things and also a self-control in their use.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 716)

FROM *PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS*

December 2, 1912

So long as one element of the being, one movement of the thought is still subjected to outside influences, not solely under Thine, it cannot be said that the true Union is realised; there is still the horrible mixture without order and light,—for that element, that movement is a world, a world of disorder and darkness, as is the entire earth in the material world, as is the material world in the entire universe.

*

December 3, 1912

Last night I had the experience of the effectivity of confident surrender to Thy guidance; when it is needful that something should be known, one knows it, and the more passive the mind to Thy illumination, the clearer and the more adequate is its expression.

I listened to Thee as Thou spokest in me, and I would have liked to write down what Thou saidst so that the formula in all its precision might not be lost,—for now I should not be able to repeat what was said. Then I thought that this care for conservation was again an insulting lack of confidence towards Thee, for Thou canst make of me all that I need to be, and in the measure in which my attitude allows Thee to act on me and in me, Thy omnipotence has no limits. To know that at each instant what must be surely is, as perfectly as is possible, for all those who know how to see Thee in everything and everywhere! No more fear, no more uneasiness, no more anguish; nothing but a perfect Serenity, an absolute Confidence, a supreme unwavering Peace.

THE MOTHER

(*CWM*, Vol. 1, pp. 8-9)

‘LOVE—PITY—SYMPATHY—SERENITY’

[Notes found among the Mother’s manuscripts]

LOVE: For the Being, because he is the Being independent of all contingencies and individuals.

PITY: One no longer feels suffering for oneself, but only for others.

SYMPATHY: To suffer with the world, to share suffering (to suffer with).

SERENITY: Perfect knowledge of the state in which all suffering disappears (individual experience).

*

LOVE: For the being in his entirety without distinction of good or evil, light or darkness.

PITY: For all weakness and all bad will.

SYMPATHY: Towards effort, encouragement, collaboration.

SERENITY: Hope in the ending of suffering (knowing one’s individual experience, one logically infers that it can be generalised and become the experience of all).

*

LOVE: Without distinction of past, present or future.

PITY: For the life of pain.

SYMPATHY: Understanding of everything, even of evil.

SERENITY: Certitude of the final victory.

*

Three active attitudes, one passive attitude; three external relationships with the all, one inner relationship. A state to be maintained throughout the whole meditation: Serenity in love, sympathy and pity.

THE MOTHER

(CWM, Vol. 2, p. 29)

‘GOVERNMENT WITHOUT PARTY’

THE MOTHER’S TALK OF 25 MAY 1970

WHAT must be done to pull the country out of its difficulty? Sri Aurobindo has foreseen all the troubles and he has given the solution. Just now we are approaching his Centenary; it seems arranged, you know, divinely arranged, because this would be a wonderful occasion to spread his teaching all over the country: the teaching, the practical teaching, his teaching about India, how to organise India, the mission of India. It seems to me that taking the Centenary as an occasion, his teaching could be spread all over the country with a little more organising—so that his ideas get spread. Those people who are interested can take it up and teach it, hold meetings and give the light and the knowledge to the people. It is a wonderful occasion. And it is only this that gives a clue to all these difficulties.

About all that has happened and all that is happening now, he has said clearly that to go back to it is useless. We must give the country its true position, that is, the position of relying on the Divine. Naturally, this is at the other end of what people try to believe now. But Sri Aurobindo explains it in such a way that even those who are against it can agree. You understand? He has found a way of saying it which can be understood by everybody. That’s the only solution, as far as I can see; it is the only solution. All the rest will mean complication, contradiction and fighting.

Just now we have two years in front of us to organise a kind of demonstration of what he was teaching. And this is above politics, you see. It is not a question of party, it’s not that: because some are for it, others will naturally not be. It is above all politics. It is to organise the country beyond politics. And it is the only way. In politics it is always fight and ugly fight—ugly. And it has become so bad. He was telling me always that things would become worse and worse, because it is the *end* of this age. We are entering into an age where things must be organised differently. It is a difficult time because of that.

Because we know what will come, we can help to make it come sooner and with less turmoil. There is no hope in going backwards; it would make things last endlessly. We must go forward, absolutely, and go beyond, beyond party. And nobody can explain that better than Sri Aurobindo, because he was so much, *so* much beyond party; he saw the advantages and disadvantages of all parties and he stated them exactly.

If you read carefully what he has written—so much—you will find the answer to all these questions. And at the same time you will know that you will have the full support of the Divine Power. The Power that was behind him is behind this transformation. It is time for transformation. We can’t cling to the past.

The best way to go beyond politics is to spread the message of Sri Aurobindo. Because he is no more a political element wanting to take power; there are only his

ideas and ideals. And, of course, if people could understand and realise his programme, the country could be very strong, very strong.

Those who understand the teaching can take up the work of organising and spreading it.

But Mother, unless Mother's children come into the government...

(*Mother laughs*) They will break. And they themselves will feel so restricted.

If there is a man who feels like going in for politics, that is different; but I think the others will be stronger without being inside.

But the government will be there in any case. If Mother...

But they must be political people in temperament.

Politics is always limited by party, by ideas, by duties also—unless we prepare a government that has no party, a government that admits all ideas because it is above parties. Party is limitation; it is like a box: you go into the box (*Mother laughs*). Of course, if there were some people who had the courage to be in the government without a party—“We represent no party! We represent *India*”—that would be magnificent.

Pull the consciousness up, up, above party.

And then, naturally, certain people who couldn't come into political parties—that! that is truly working for tomorrow. Tomorrow it will be like that. All this turmoil is because the country must take the lead, must go above all these old political habits. Government without party. Oh, it would be magnificent!

THE MOTHER

(CWM, Vol. 15, pp. 426-28)

Never forget that you are not alone. The Divine is with you helping and guiding you. He is the companion who never fails, the friend whose love comforts and strengthens. The more you feel lonely, the more you are ready to perceive His luminous Presence. Have faith and He will do everything for you.

27 September 1951

The Mother

(CWM, Vol. 14, p. 9)

OUR EDUCATION

A CONSIDERABLE movement is visible nowadays against the existing system of education in our country. The education imparted here is not worth its name. Education is that which develops our faculties, life's vigour and manhood. But the education of our country consists only of learning by rote a few unintelligible *mantras*, a few meaningless prattles and of forgetting them again after some time. It stands only for "passing examinations", and the aim of "passing" one examination after another is only to acquire the technique of earning more and more money. Such an arrangement went on quite well so long as its immense hollowness had not come to the notice of anyone or perhaps it was not felt necessary to take notice of it. But today our eyes are opened and we realise, to our utter dismay and amazement, that "passing examinations" does not necessarily mean earning "money"! Hence the doubt has surfaced that education may not after all mean passing of examinations.

However, the charges levelled against the education of our country may be summed up as something stupendously unreal. No other example can perhaps explain better than the one given by Srijut Pramatha Chowdhury to demonstrate beyond doubt the unreality or falsity of this education which is not only ludicrous in nature but frightful as well. A Law student explains Immovable and Movable Properties as follows: Immovable property is that which does not move, e.g., a hill; and Movable property is that which moves, e.g., a river!! We are unable to appreciate adequately this pretentious erudition even with a double note of exclamation.

We therefore find it quite possible that far from being a means of acquiring knowledge, education may even destroy the little common sense that man possesses. However, the example cited above may be an extreme one or an exception, but there is nothing to doubt about the fact that there are some innate defects at the very root of the educational system which gives birth to this kind of thing. We read only for the sake of reading, we never think even by mistake whether there exists or there should exist a relationship between the reading and the truth, reality, world and life. We have simply discarded this basic truth that the flowering of knowledge comes through common sense, that the fulfilment of knowledge is attained only when it combines with common sense. The domain of knowledge devoid of common sense is only a fool's paradise!

But why have things come to such a pass? Whence have come this unreality, this lack of common sense in the system of education in our country? We hear people saying from all corners that it is the foreign language and the alien ideas emanating from this foreign language that are responsible for this situation. The reason why we lack familiarity with the material world and its objects is that between objects and our mind there stands a wall, a curtain which represents this foreign idea, this foreign language. Instead of the names which make the objects easily familiar to us, which make them appear before our eyes with concrete forms as soon as we hear them, we

see, we hear the names imported from another country. We want to be accustomed from the very outset to the forms which others have seen, others have thought of, discarding the forms with which we have a daily familiar intimacy. That education which introduces the child to his own “*bāp*” [father] with the word “father” and makes one mad for *Daisy*, *Celandine* instead of *Bakul*, *Shefali*, is nothing but rank falsehood and so no wonder that its results would be a big mare’s nest. Therefore, if we want to reform our education, if we want to make it real, we will have to eschew, first of all, this foreign pressure and take refuge in our indigenous form, name, idea and language. The Bengalees must learn through the Bengali ways of thinking, and if not possible through the thought, then they must learn through the Bengali language all the more because if the language is indigenous then the thinking automatically becomes indigenous. Have we not been acquainted with this world through the language that came to our lips along with the breast-milk? What else can help to build a living relationship with the world?

The truth of these views expressed by those who are in favour of making the vernacular the medium of instruction at the outset of educational reforms cannot be denied in any manner. But, we still feel that this truth is by and large a truth on the surface, it is not going to touch the very root of the problem. For, language is a thing external to man and the amount of emotion it generates is also external to him. But if a change has to come in man, however little it may be, it will come from inside to outside and not otherwise. That our educational life is artificial is not so much because of a foreign language and foreign ideas, but because of the presence, even from beforehand, of an artificiality or its seed within ourselves, within our psyche. Man himself was artificial from the beginning and, therefore, everything in him grew artificially. Foreign language and foreign ideas have facilitated this artificiality, they have just made it more evident, they have not, truly speaking, created it. We also feel that had we remained sincere from within, then that very sincerity would have found expression even in a foreign language and in foreign ideas. Christ was not wrong when he said: “There is nothing from without a man that, entering into him, can defile him but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.”

In one of his articles entitled “*Bāngālir Mastiṣka O Tāhār Opovyavahār*” [The Brain of the Bengalees and Its Misuse] S. J. Prafulla Chandra Roy once threw some light on the fact that there existed a sort of indigenous artificiality in our education and practice even before the inception of the English education. Being indigenous, it was as much a thing of our inner heart as it was dreadful. When we wrote volumes after volumes to explicate the word ‘*Atha*’ (Now) in the phrase ‘*Athāto brahmajijñāsa*’ (Now, therefore, the enquiry into Brahman), when we racked our brains day in and day out, year in and year out over the knotty problem as to ‘whether the vessel holds the oil or the oil holds the vessel’, we cannot boldly say that we then had very solid common sense. Therefore, the shortcoming that makes us sore with the modern education is a very ancient one, it has penetrated into our bones and marrow, and it is for

this reason that it has been able to hold such sway over us.

This shortcoming is fairly ancient and therefore we shall first dwell on it from the standpoint of history. 'Dreamy East'—this is the term they use to denigrate us. We are day-dreamers, that is to say, we indulge in dreams, we build castles in the air, we remain engrossed in lofty ideas and in the heights of argumentation leaving aside the real, the concrete, i.e., the material world and the hard realities of life. This is something which may or may not belong to our nature, but there is no doubt that once we did get overwhelmed by its influence and even today we are suffering from its consequences. The culture that was prevalent in our country during the Vedic age and during the era of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* was practical and not materialistic as you would call it. The battle of Kurukshetra dealt the first blow to the root of that culture. From the day when the Kshatriya power of the country was almost decimated, our life took a new course, a new veil fell upon it. Even after accepting wholeheartedly the need and usefulness of the kingdom of dharma and the brahministic ideology brought about by Kurukshetra, we must say that brahminism weakened the genius of the Kshatriyas, that dharma was established in a depressed atmosphere that discredited Karma. We are not raising here the questions as to whether, had there been no Kurukshetra, we would have become as ultra-materialistic as Europe or even an uglier *asura* than Europe or whether we could have kept intact the divine spiritual riches representing the glory of India. What we mean to say is that as in the heart of evil there lies the seed of good, similarly, in the heart of good also there lies the seed of evil. After the battle of Kurukshetra, Lord Buddha dealt the second blow on the action-oriented intelligence of India and her materialistic pleasures. The practice of asceticism of the Buddhists lifted the soul of India to a different level weaning it away from this world and this life. And last in the line came Shankaracharya with his philosophy of Mayavada—'the most unkindest cut of all'. With this weapon, he severed even the thin umbilical cord of relationship that existed between the worldly truth and the truth of the soul in the spiritual practices of India. Thenceforth we became engrossed with the *akṣarabrahma* alone, and, not only did we forget that the *kṣara* too was Brahman but we also learnt to deny it decrying its reality.

The soul-force of India thus gradually started recoiling into itself holding in check the outer knowledge in its attempt to awaken the inner wisdom. Then came the foreign pressure, the subjection to foreign rule only to help this trend and to continue this movement. The more the alien hand took control of active life, the more the domain of the life-force became restricted for us and we tried more and more to cling forcefully to this inner world as though to make good the loss. We could not see any more with our eyes open, and we tried to see what could be seen with eyes closed. It is not that one cannot see anything with one's eyes closed, but certainly not with eyes closed due to weariness or pressure from outside.

Nor do we intend to say that the whole of India had become averse to work, inclined to meditation or that she had lost completely the joy of life and creation. No,

it is not that. In a magnanimous soul like that of India, it is not at all surprising that the waves of a tremendous activity, of a vibrant dynamic life surge up from time to time even in her state of inertia, even in her ages of depression. Besides, it has also to be regarded as fairly natural that there always exists in some part or other a tenuous subterranean flow of that life and activity. But, on the whole, the fact is that, looked at from the standpoint of India's soul, we find the stamp of the other-world, of the beyond upon it becoming gradually deeper and deeper wiping off all signs of this world, of this mundane existence. It has belittled the world while working for the world, it has forgotten to partake of the joy of this worldly existence in a simple and easy manner. This will be understood if one compares this trend with the evolutionary trend of Europe. We are not raising the question as to whether this trend of Europe is ideal or not. If we do not get the nectar, what shall we do with wealth alone? This is true. But, for the sake of the nectar, is there any necessity of vilifying wealth by using terms such as illusion, delusion, infatuation, hell and so on. If one has the skill—*karmasu kauśalam* (skill in works) then even this wealth, these worldly objects can provide us with the nectar.

Now, all that we want to say is that our modern education has developed by establishing this sort of extremely other-worldly ideology that is ingrained in this country. We have considered Karma [action] as an obstacle to liberation, and in trying to erase this Karma, we have, in fact, succeeded in learning how to evade it. We have, in our brains, sharpened the instruments of subtle logical arguments for solving the problems of the world, or else, forsaking all sanity and all works we have gambolled in bacchic emotions and feelings and, in the end, have fallen utterly unconscious. When this is the state pervading the country, then there is no wonder that whatever education, whatever culture that has sprouted in its midst will only be artificial. In its alien covering this artificiality has fortunately come to our notice, though in its indigenous garb we could not recognise it—here lies all the difference.

Leaving apart India as a whole, we shall now say something about Bengal. This is because it seems to us that this artificiality in education is not so much evident in other provinces as it is amongst the Bengalees. Besides, there is a speciality in the artificiality of the Bengalees. A question comes up in the very first place. Indeed, the Bengalees have never been able to effectively deny the world, reject work. The cult of Shakti or the Mother-Power of the Bengalees is a thing peculiar to Bengal. For what fault then have the Bengalees, despite being sadhaks of Shakti, lost the knowledge of reality in such a manner? The answer is: the emotionalism of the Bengalees. The Bengalees have not invoked Shakti through work; they have done it through emotions. While worshipping Shakti, they have wept and got lost crying out '*Mā*', '*Mā*'.

It is because of this excessive emotionalism that the Bengalees have so easily turned towards the foreigners. We shall not say anything about the Muslim era. Nowhere in India has the influence of the British, of the West, come about and spread as swiftly and as effortlessly as it has in the heart of the Bengalees. No one else can

become a true copy of an Englishman as a Bengalee can. The Bengalees have thus revealed the plasticity and the state of instability of their heart. Emotionalism, fickleness and restlessness of heart rush towards ever-new attractions. In order to keep Bengal awake, active and joyous, they want new and newer stimulants. That is why they become so easily intimate with the new—*samvandhamābhāṣanapurva-māhuḥ* (convey your greetings before forging a relationship with someone) and this is very true for them.

Now, what is the natural consequence or the natural mode of expression of this vital exuberance, of this emotional effervescence, of this imaginative enchantment? It is verbosity—the joy of speaking. As a result, the Bengalees got enamoured of the English through the English literature and language. The beauty and the novelty that they perceived in the English language, in its ‘*vāk*’ [expression] struck the heart of the Bengalee before anything else and it is from this that all the changes and innovations have come in the domain of his imagination, in the arena of his life. The Bombayites are not like the Bengalees; they possessed some practical knowledge, that is why they borrowed commerce and politics from the British and looked at the English education and culture from this angle. I cannot say from which angle exactly the Madrasis looked at this English education and culture but certainly not from the angle of literature. But the Bengalees are born litterateurs, that is, to exchange words is, as though, their whole life and work and religion; it is through this aspect that they turned towards the British and recognised them.

Indeed, it has become rather proverbial that the Bengalees are glib in talking—they have right from their birth the gift of the gab. And Bengali literature too is a proof of it. Pompous words, ornate sentences, i.e., arranging only words upon words decoratively—this constitutes the bulk of Bengali literature. Instead of making the meaning absolutely clear, presenting the inner experience, the inner realisation in a living manner, the Bengalees prefer an ostentatious display of language:

কথা গোঁথে গোঁথে নিতে করতালি

(wreathing words with words to elicit applause)

Even the ancients could seize upon this temperament of the Bengalees—that is why the *Gauriya*-style [Traditional Bengali style] has earned so much celebrity. The *Gauriya*-style stands for a gaudy display of words i.e., eloquence. Madhusudan created his vast sea-of-words only to assuage the tongue of the people of *Gaur* [Bengal]. In order to illustrate how to parade one’s finesse in manipulating words or how to enchant the mind through the artistry of words, we refer you to Vidyapati—if we go to the early period of Bengali literature, and to Satyendranath—if we come right down to contemporary times.

The Bengalees have no direct acquaintance with the material object; they rest content tagging only a name on the object. They can recognise a thing only through

its name, a thing without name is indistinct, incomprehensible to them. In Western psychology, human beings have been classified according to the predominant sense-organs of a man, for example, the visual type, the auditory type etc. Amongst these, the Bengalees may be categorised as the verbal type—as fluent speakers. To put it differently, a particular section of the people require a form, a figure or something, which can be held before their eyes for understanding or for realising a thing. Even to understand or make them understand a theory, they require an outer form of that theory—these are the people of the visual type. There is another class of people who understand things with the help of sound, cadences of music (auditory type). Then again, there is yet another class of the people who require an element of scent or smell (olfactory type). Some understand through the eyes, some through the ears, some still through the nose; but the Bengalees understand through their tongue—not sight, nor smell, nor hearing, they require speech or denomination.

Neither by sight or hearing, nor by contact or touch but it is by name that the Bengalees identify a thing. It is not by relating a thing to another but by relating the name of a thing to that of another that the Bengalees want to build their world. The Bengalees will hesitate to accept these words of the Western poet—

What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet—

but their own poet, at the very first stroke of his pen, made Sri Radhika utter these words at the very outset—

সই কেবা শুনাইল শ্যাম নাম?
কানের ভিতর দিয়া মরমে পশিল গো
আকুল করিল মোর প্রাণ।

*

শ্যাম নামে আছে কত মধু গো —

(Dear Mate! Who made me hear the name—Shyam?
Through the ears it entered in my heart's core
And made my whole being restless.

*

O! So much sweetness is there in the name—Shyam.)

That some of our godheads have a hundred names, some even a thousand names, is an indication of how deeply the Bengalees—nay, the whole of India more or less—have perceived the glory of a name. The godhead to whom we accord as many names

as possible becomes as though more living to us and as though we understand him all the more clearly.

Speeches, words, names—all these are necessary; it may also be admitted that they have an intimate, an inextricable relationship with knowledge, even with material knowledge. But though a name is the identity of an object, it is not the object itself. In spite of the fact that this distinction is axiomatic, we tend to forget it very easily in actual practice. Once we put the label of a name on a particular object, we think that we have understood the object fully, we have grasped the object itself. It is thus that we, forgetting the object or the thing and leaving it aside, continue to live with its shadow and it is with this shadow that we deal. It is thus that verbosity results inevitably in unreality. It is for this reason that our logicians and pundits consider the absence of common sense as the sure sign of a philosopher, of an erudite scholar. It is for this reason that our poets and litterateurs keep themselves aloof from concrete realisation and it is for this reason also that our politicians believe that through public meetings and speeches, through agitation alone, the country will be liberated. Our students are indeed inheritors of this character and of this mentality of the collectivity.

The reason behind the fact that our education, the education of the Bengalees, has turned out to be artificial may be traced in these three lines or movements of the *sadhana* of our life. That we have become separated from life, from action, from the reality is primarily because of our desire to rush only towards heaven, towards the Impersonal Self while considering this earth, this body as something inferior and, secondly, because of creating an intoxicating dreamy world brought forth from our passionate feelings and emotional outbursts and taking a plunge into it and remaining engrossed in it. Thirdly, it is due to the excessive attachment to words rather than to the objects themselves. These three together made our inner being, our inner initiation false and, as a consequence, foreign ideas and the foreign language could succeed so easily in making all the institutions that are expressions of that inner being and all the education that is the basis of that initiation, all the more artificial and all the more inane.

Therefore, in order to change and reform the system of education, what is needed first and foremost is to change and reform these three inner movements. If those who want to introduce Bengali in place of English in the University rest satisfied with this introduction alone, then we do not expect it to be specially effective. Even then, we will be doing the same thing as we are doing now, but we will vomit out in Bengali instead of in English—this may be the only difference. Even if we say that education has to be imparted in pure Bengali, in the Bengali of the Bengalees, inasmuch as the Sanskritised Bengali is to us as false as English, even then it cannot be said forcefully that we will be able to acquire or augment our knowledge of reality. If the sense of reality is not aroused within, then even the very simple and plain words will expose that very falsehood, that very artificiality. What is most important is the thing within; if we can become true there, then the true sense will find expression even through the

foreign idea or the foreign language. Of course, it has to be admitted that for awakening the true spirit of the Bengalees, the ways of thinking and the language of the indigenous Bengalees are an easy means—but we consider it as secondary, it is not of primary importance.

The whole being of the Bengalees has to be taken hold of and given a solid jerk—the type of relationship they have with the world and the manner in which they deal with it have to be changed radically. They have to know the world through work instead of through words; they have to examine each object tangibly instead of just hearing or saying its name. The pressure they have so far put on the tongue and throat has to be removed and spread instead to the muscles of all parts of the body. In other words, the verbal type has to be led towards the kinaesthetic type—the Bengalees have to learn how to work, how to use their hands and feet. It is not by exerting oneself physically or by the sweat of one's brow that one earns only one's livelihood, these hold good for acquiring knowledge also. It is thus that the world and the object and the reality become true and living and clear; it is thus that the thing that hides behind the name becomes perceptible and the idea, having been settled and condensed, lends a physical form to the meaning.

But, for that matter, we do not believe that the Kindergarten system is the only panacea for the educational reforms—that our children will acquire practical knowledge if they see in their school courtyard someone acting like a peasant, imitating his gestures of reaping paddy in the field or someone acting like a dog barking. Nor do we believe that our education will become realistic if we supplement our reading of books by practical classes and our lectures by seminar-work—it is not that. Making education realistic means harmonising and integrating it with the whole gamut of life's activities. Education stands for the growth, flowering and fulfilment of life. The unfoldment of the eyes of Life—this is called education. Cut off from this life and estranged from its activities our students have been kept imprisoned in an artificial hothouse or in a stagnant institution. They have no interaction with the outside world and life, nor have they any planning for their inner life. The school for the youth of ancient Greece was in its entirety the gymnasium, the baths, the festive courtyards, the parks and promenades, and along with them all the institutions of civic life. So was it in ancient Rome too. In the student community of modern England and America also we find an attempt to keep education animated and well-nourished pursuing it amidst such life-currents, amidst a living contact with things all around. And we have instances to show that such a thing was there also in our ancient sylvan India. When the seeker came to the Rishi to have the knowledge of Brahman, the Rishi instructed him to tend cows (*Satyakām-Jābālā Conversation—Chhāndogya Upaniṣad*). We can look down upon it as forced labour for the master but there is no doubt about the fact that this was only a part of the educational system of that age.

True education is always that which is related to practical life. When we walk through life involving ourselves in its multifarious activities or dealing with its varied

objects, various problems and solutions as well as various thoughts and ideas crop up in our mind. When we relate them to life and when they bear fruit, we then acquire a wealth of rich and varied ideas and experiences—these in fact constitute education, for true education is not possible by any other means. There are three stages or steps in education. As there are five sheaths in the human body, so also we can say that there are three sheaths in education. Firstly, word or speech—this is only an outer cover, a material support. Secondly, meaning or sense—words strive to express, to seize this inner meaning, this essence. But there is a deeper level to this inner meaning also which is the third stage in education—it is the feelings of the heart, the realisation of the soul. Our education teaches only words, as we have seen in Hamlet—‘words, words, words’; sometimes a faint presence or a shadow of the second stage is visible in a few seekers. But our education has failed to rise to the third stage. True education, living education is that alone which shapes, which evolves responding to the needs of the inner being, according to the movement of the soul’s quest.

Besides, there is an intimate and inextricable relationship between life’s field of work and the inner being’s quest for Truth, between the movements of the body and the rhythms of the soul—with the help of the one and remaining within the one, the other becomes enriched, conscious, well-formed and harmonious. Education too is nothing else but a sort of spiritual science. As it is in spiritual science—

*naisā tarkena matirāpaniyā
na medhayā na bahunā śrutena—*

(This wisdom is not to be had by reasoning,
nor by brain-power, nor by much learning—)

so is it in education—it does not become complete with the gymnastics of mind, intelligence, reasoning or memory alone. As in spiritual science one has to perform some rites and ceremonies, so too in education one needs to fulfil some formalities in order to give a form to the instrument and sharpen it in the midst of all the activities of life.

But, for that matter, one should not misunderstand that the ideal of our education is materialistic, utilitarian or that we intend to banish from our system of education the abstruse or abstract thinking, reasoning or the traditional wisdom. We are not even that kind of pragmatic or down-to-earth people who are against reasoning for the sake of reasoning, thinking for the sake of thinking, reading for the sake of reading. We do not express the view that every thought has to be translated into action, each idea into force, each name into material object or that the thought, the idea or the word which we do not thus get in a physical form is baseless or meaningless. The object of meditation has to be attained mainly through meditation, the object of mind mainly through mind. But that is not the point; the point is this “attainment”, this

“realisation”. The thing is that what we “attain”, what we “realise” is always an “object”; but, there is no such compulsion that it has to be a “material object”. The whole question is the means, the method of education—the way we learn.

Every single thing, be it abstract or concrete, has two parts or aspects: outer and inner. The instrument of education, i.e., our mind, representing the faculty with which we apprehend a thing, has also two parts—partly an outer and partly an inner. Unreal education is that in which we try to grasp things with the surface mind—then we obtain only the outer aspect of a thing. Real education is that in which we perceive the inner aspect of a thing with the deeper part of the mind. To perceive things with the inner mind is called “attainment”, “realisation”, and it is on this count that we have termed education a spiritual science.

Our endeavour towards this realisation, towards an inner perception is helped by our physical efforts, our application in work and our trying to gain mastery over life. We learn to see with our inner being in the very same manner in which we are accustomed to seeing things with our physical eyes. If the physical sense of reality in a person remains obscure, his intellectual sense of reality and even his spiritual sense of reality too turn out to be vague. Shankaracharya had indeed a profound realisation of the Impersonal Brahman and notwithstanding what was in his conscious mind, this spiritual realisation found a pure expression and a safe refuge in a physical reality, though unconsciously, by his stupendous accomplishments in his active-life.

Education has to be founded upon the urge for action and attempts have to be made to build the mind on the inspiration of life. Without a large capacity of life and the energy of a free vital, the mind, the intelligence can never become competent, vigorous and dynamic. As a matter of fact, the virus of disease entered in our education, in our mind, the day when our vitality started to be on the wane; the day when the Kshatriya-spirit dwindled, the decline set in and the true brahministic genius disappeared. The vast and profound ocean of life began to dry up exposing immense expanses of sand with one or two dying, slow and slender streams here and there. As a man bereft of vitality becomes a carrier of various diseases and overwhelmed by them loses his common sense and stuffs his brain with a heap of thoughts, worries, imagination and fancies which are baseless and without head or tail and further makes a mountain of a mole-hill owing to a decline in the capacity of his nerves, turns his pain into agony and waits only for death after a good deal of lamentation, so, the whole body of the collectivity of our country became such. We lost our vitality, capacity to bear life and at the same time, the balance of our life-institution too was lost. There was no trace of any system to direct us as to what to do, where, how and to what extent.

We must acquire mental excellence, we must also have sharp intelligence, lively ideas. But they must take their stand on the strength of the vital, on the vast integral *ānanda* of life; then and then only will they be stable, cohesive and harmonious. ‘*Agnim ile purohitam*’—we invoke the Fire whose seat is there before us in the

forefront, the Fire who is the embodiment of life's energy. It is this Fire who calls down all other gods, urging them to manifest and it is through the energy of this Fire that Knowledge and Gnosis, Ila and Saraswati, awaken.

Our mind is sick, that is why ill health has crept into our education. To make our mind sound and healthy, we must make the whole of our life full of joy and vigour, we must awaken in us the godhead of integral life. This is the initiation that lies at the root of education and it is for our educational reformers to see how we can get this initiation.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(From *Education and Initiation*. Translated by Amarnath Dutta from the Bengali Original, *Shikkha O Dikkha*. Courtesy: SACAR, Pondicherry.)

Prayer and meditation count for so much in yoga. But the prayer must well up from the heart on a crest of emotion or aspiration, the Japa or meditation come in a live push carrying the joy or the light of the thing in it. If done mechanically and merely as a thing that ought to be done (stern grim duty!), it must tend towards want of interest and dryness and so be ineffective.... You were doing Japa too much as a means for bringing about a result, I meant too much as a device, a process laid down for getting the thing done. That was why I wanted the psychological conditions in you to develop, the psychic, the mental, for when the psychic is forward, there is no lack of life and joy in the prayer, the aspiration, the seeking, no difficulty in having the constant stream of bhakti and when the mind is quiet and intuned and upturned there is no difficulty or want of interest in meditation. Meditation, by the way, is a process leading towards knowledge and through knowledge, it is a thing of the head and not of the heart, so if you want dhyāna, you can't have an aversion to knowledge. Concentration in the heart is not meditation, it is a call on the Divine, on the Beloved. This yoga too is not a yoga of knowledge alone, knowledge is one of its means, but its base being self-offering, surrender, bhakti, it is based in the heart and nothing can be eventually done without this base. There are plenty of people here who do or have done Japa and base themselves on bhakti, very few comparatively who have done the "head" meditation; love and bhakti and works are usually the base; how many can proceed by knowledge? Only the few.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, pp. 533-34)

FEBRUARY 29, 1960

HOW THE DAY PASSED

(Some Facts and Impressions)

PREPARATIONS had been going on for long to make this day memorable both outwardly and inwardly. The first recurrence, after four years, of the date on which the Supermind had manifested in the subtle physical atmosphere of the earth, it was expected to mark a deeper and wider victory of the Supramental Light in terrestrial life. Arrangements were afoot to render external circumstances symbolic.

Golden satin was spread everywhere. The Mother would walk on golden satin, golden satin would hang on the walls, it would drape her chair, it would decorate the balcony from which she gave *darshan* in the morning. Golden satin would also shine out in the room which was being prepared, with sheets of stainless steel curving along the roof and forming arches along the walls, for the great occasion in the afternoon when hundreds upon hundreds would file past the Mother to receive from her hands a material token of the day.

“The Golden Day”—that was how February 29 was to be called. And the Sun of that morning was the Mother’s own face as it smiled from the balcony and as it glowed within the waiting hearts below—the light of divinity shaped to a human perfection for the aching depths that were earth’s agelong need of Grace. The street was packed: so huge a crowd of disciples and devotees had never before gathered there. For several minutes the Mother kept looking down, passing her gaze over each upturned countenance, and then she lifted her eyes to unknown heights from where she seemed to draw a new luminous life for manifestation amidst men. A quiet power reigned over us—vast, massive, penetrating.

At 10 a.m. the Mother played her own music on the electric organ lately received from America. The courtyard around the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo was filled with listeners. Note on confident note unfolded, building a pattern of mantric sound—a wide call that would not relent, a pull that appeared to take us individually to the breast of a mighty love, a sweep that carried in it a promise unfailing. With a multitude of variations on its triumphal theme, sometimes prolonging a joyful ringing strength, sometimes twinkling out short enticing notes in the bass, the music pressed forward on a path which seemed interminable in its progression. Here was a harmony which would not take any final form—not because it lacked the power of resolution but because it developed from one flawless moment to another in a sequence manifesting in time the inexhaustible richness of eternity. It was the music of a supreme Beginning that was also a divine endlessness.

That is why, when it actually came to a close, it did so with long lingering chords separated by small sounds seeking to develop the movement but breaking off

as if the Mother wanted simultaneously to continue and to stop. Then, at last, after one more sustained burst, she curbed the music and, with a few short notes seeming to escape her hold, it ceased.

The Mother was so absorbed in transmitting what was pouring through her that she herself hardly heard anything in detail. The detailed hearing was done only on the next day when the tape-recording was played back.

A little after she had stopped playing, the Mother communicated the words which came to her apropos of the name given to the 29th. She wrote them out and they were put up on a board near the Samadhi-courtyard:

29.2.60

The Golden Day

Dorénavant, le 29 février sera le jour du Seigneur.

Henceforth the 29th of February will be the day of the Lord.

It must be noted that this declaration was not meant to be made widely public. When the Mother was asked whether a block could be prepared of the written message and published in one of the front pages of *Mother India*, she said: "It is only for the people who are here. I don't want to spread to the world what may look like a religious proclamation."

Late forenoon and early afternoon were an eager anticipation of the event fixed for 4 o'clock. A little before that hour the Mother came down and took her seat. The long procession started of Ashram inmates and of visitors from near and far, some from countries as far as Japan and America. But there was no sense of crowding or of hurry. Everything went on peacefully. A hush was over all, and a quiet intensity within. As one approached nearer and nearer the hall where the Mother was sitting, one experienced a strange pressure upon one's head as if a silence were descending ever more deep into one's being and creating a calm receptivity for the gift the Mother was about to give.

There she was—all golden, a smile on her lips and her eyes wide and shining. They looked steadily for a moment into each one's eyes, while her hand put into ours with a slow and deliberate power the bright symbol-medal struck for the occasion. She was passing with willed intimacy something that was manifesting on this day.

All around, the stainless steel, lit up by hidden bulbs, made a radiant temple. Garlands of marigolds added a touch of Nature to man's artistry. Silent stood on either side of the Mother a few sadhakas. A little girl sat on a stool beside her. One left the Mother's presence with a living sense of a new birth. It was as if she made one for ever her spiritual child, a member of the divine world that had been secretly born four years ago and had been growing since then. One had the feeling that one carried home within one's body a miniature sun-glow—seed and core of a future that

was more than human.

The round symbol-medal bore on its obverse, in the centre, a square within which a lotus rested on wavy water-lines. Outside the square, shooting in all directions from it, were twelve rays. The reverse held in its middle the Mother's well-known emblem: a stylised lotus, with a small circle in its midst, around which stood a first family of four petals and, beyond it, a second of twelve. Above the emblem was carved "29-2-56" and, below, "29-2-60".

The medal was meant to be given personally and in no other way. Only those who passed before the Mother could receive it. None who failed to do so would have it. The Mother had taken this decision from the start. But she had also declared that nobody would be denied permission to come and take the precious gift. The divine doors were thrown wide open to the world.

Two thousand five hundred and fifteen medals were distributed. Those who were aspiring to have them and yet for some reason or other could not appear for them had to go without them. Perhaps, if their aspiration keeps burning, they will get them four years hence, accompanied by whatever new token goes with that occasion.

All inmates and visitors were welcome in the evening at the Dining Hall to collect each a small dainty plastic bottle containing honey.

At about 7 the trees in the Samadhi-courtyard sprang to fairy life, decorated as they were with hundreds of tiny bulbs, some round, some bell-like, gleaming in many colours. People sat in meditation around the flower-strewn Samadhi under this soft blossoming of light.

At 8.30, in the Playground, 108 coloured slides were shown: "The Mother in Her Private Chamber." It was an exquisite series, transporting us into closeness with her in all her moods sublime or sweet, dynamic or poised, busy or restful,

Near to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven.

With these pictures imprinted on one's soul ended the Golden Day, as viewed by human eyes. What exactly it brought can be disclosed only by the Mother. We shall know it when she tells us what she has written now, just as she has told us now what she had put into words four years ago on the day on which she and Sri Aurobindo made the Supermind a universal power in the physical universe, the all-fulfilling Supernature a natural part of earth's history.

K. D. SETHNA

GOLDEN DAY, 29 FEBRUARY 2004

It passed with light and delight. Everytime the Divine was invoked, the Mother appeared in full. Not a moment passed without some touch by Sri Aurobindo. Even before the invocation was complete, the divine qualities became manifest. They showed their presence by a sudden sweetness pervading the whole being.

AMAL KIRAN

WIND-SONG

O, THOU gentle wind
Who wakes the buds of spring
And spills on earth the sweet perfume
That Heaven's flowers bring,

Caress the winter's fields
To fragrant blossoming
With zephyr harmonies benign
Make the lyres sing.

O fierce wind of the west
Blow our sins away
Soothe the torn earth's troubled breast
With healing breeze, we pray.

Thy violent storms abate
Thy gales of anger cease,
All human error dissipate
With thy soothing air of peace.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

**ADDRESS DELIVERED AT 125TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATIONS OF THE MOTHER AT SRI AUROBINDO
BHAVAN, KOLKATA BY SHRI APJ ABDUL KALAM,
PRESIDENT OF INDIA, ON 27TH FEBRUARY, 2004**

Religion Transforming into Spirituality

I AM indeed delighted to participate in the 125th birth anniversary celebrations of the Mother. My greetings to the organisers, distinguished guests and devotees. When I am in the midst of this gathering, I am reminded of certain events which took place in the life of the Mother. When she was between the age of 11 and 13 through a series of psychic and spiritual experiences she became aware of the existence of God and her possibility of uniting with Him. This thought, along with the practical methods of fulfilling this mission, was given to her during her body's sleep by several teachers, some of whom she met afterwards on the physical plane. At that time she had no knowledge of the Indian philosophies and religions. But she would call the unknown force Krishna. She was aware that it was with him that her divine work was to continue. As soon as she saw Sri Aurobindo she recognised in him the well-known being whom she used to call Krishna and that was enough to explain why she was fully convinced that her place and work were near him in India. I am reminded of the famous words of the Mother. I quote:

"I belong to no nation, no civilisation, no society, no race, but to the Divine."

"I obey no master, no ruler, no law, no social convention, but the Divine."

Her spirit continues to be here and her words provide us the direction for religion graduating into spiritual force.

Now I would like to share with you some of my experiences after my visit to various religious institutions.

What I learnt from religions

During the last 20 months, I have travelled to almost all the parts of the country. The message I have received from my extensive travels in the country is that most Indians, energetic and middle-aged, young and innocent,—they all look to religion for solace and safety. The religions are like exquisite gardens, places full of surpassing beauty and tranquility, like sacred groves filled with beautiful birds and their melodious song. I truly think that religions are beautiful gardens. But they are islands. They are enchanting islets, veritable oases for the soul and the spirit. But they are

islands nevertheless. However, if we can connect all these islands with love and compassion, in a ‘garland project’ for the new millennium, we will have a prosperous India ahead of us, a billion people, through India millennium mission and even for our planet.

Creator’s message

God has created the human being with a brain and a thinking faculty. He has commanded His creation that the faculty must be used with reasoning to reach His image. This is the mission of human life. Science is the best boon God has bestowed upon mankind. Science with reasoning becomes the capital of the society. In whatever field we work, be it science, technology, medicine, politics, policing, theology, religion or judiciary, we have to remain in the service of the common man whose well-being is central to all human knowledge and endeavour.

Conclusion

Every religion has a central component—spirituality that is driven by compassion and love. Rationality and logic are intrinsic to science and spirituality. A spiritual experience is the goal of a deeply religious person whereas a major discovery or an invention is the goal of a scientific mind. If both the aspects are unified, amalgamated in our own patterns, we can transcend to that level of thinking in which unity is a cohesive aspect. For this environment the two major components—Science and Spirituality,—have to interact. A Peace prayer can be the foundation for both.

Peace Prayer

“O Almighty, create thoughts and actions
in the minds of the people of the nation
So that they live united.

O Almighty, bless the people
To take a path of life with righteousness
as righteousness gives the strength of character.

Help all religious leaders of the country to
give strength to the people to combat the divisive forces.

Guide the people to develop an attitude to appreciate different
ideologies and transform enmity among individuals,
organisations and nations, into friendliness and harmony.

Embed the thought 'Nation is bigger than the Individual'
in the minds of the leaders and people.

O God, bless the people to work with perseverance to
transform the country into a peaceful and prosperous nation
and promote world peace."

I wish the 125th Birth Centenary celebrations of the Mother all success.

NIRODBARAN'S SURREALIST POEMS

(Continued from the issue of April 2004)

SELF-BORN MAIDEN

FROM the heart of the sea rose the Self-born One
Blue-sky-clad, ankle-tressed
Moonstone-radiant, celestial maiden of Light.
In each step overflows
Lightning-urgent Beauty's load.
In her footstep's track
A scattering of the nectar of a swollen wave's
Hundred dance-mooded anklet's jingle
Saturates earth's tranquil drowse.

She placed round my neck a garland of pearls
Marked my forehead with a coral-kiss;
A basket of stars from the liberated sky
Placed on my heart—unmixed gold.
What can I give to her, nothing is mine—
I offer only a sacrament's indigent tears.

(To be continued)

DEBASHISH BANERJI

CONSCIOUSNESS—A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

(A lecture delivered at an international seminar on *Science and Philosophy—An Exploratory Approach to Consciousness* held at Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata in 2003. The lecture has been lightly touched up by the author for the purpose of publication in *Mother India*.)

CONSCIOUSNESS is usually taken to be a response to a stimulus from the environment, an interpretation of data by... by what? By mind? The materialistic theory of consciousness holds that consciousness is the result of energy in matter. It is nothing more than matter's reaction to itself or in itself, a response of inconscient substance to touches upon it, a response of organised inconscient chemical substance to touches upon it, a record of which that inconscient substance through some sensitiveness of cell and nerve becomes inexplicably aware. This may explain sense and reflex action but it cannot account for thought, will and feeling. No materialist, I think, will say that mere nervous and brain activity can account for a scientist's concentration on a problem in Nature, a philosopher's intricate reasoning, a painter's vision of line and colour and perspective, a musician rendering in melodious and harmonic sound a musical phrase. "There is no parity, kinship or visible equation between the alleged cause or agent on the one side and on the other the effect and its observable process. There is a gulf here that cannot be bridged by any stress of forcible affirmation or crossed by any stride of inference or violent leap of argumentative reasoning."¹

The idea that consciousness is only response to stimulus is a very limited idea. There are many operations of the mind, which are not prompted by any stimulus from outside itself. When a scientist wishes to make a model of explanation of data given for research, he is engaging in a subjective activity. A poet writes a sonnet without necessarily being excited by any stimulus from the natural world outside himself. A philosopher wishes to determine the nature of causality independently not only of any external stimulus, but also of observation of natural phenomena. Even a common man on the street when he cannot explain a fact says, apparently without even thinking, 'But there must be a cause.' This would indicate that there are activities of the mind, which are of a different kind than response to stimulus and its impact on the brain. But in these kinds of activities the brain is certainly active. The relation between mental activity and the brain cells is a subject which need not be discussed here. What I would like to point out is, when the brain is inactive some activities which may be described as mental may and do continue. A man is hit by a motorcar on the road, falls down with a vague impression of pain at the back of the head and passes out. Kind people take him to a hospital where he is in a coma for, say, three days, at the end of which he wakes up and asks, 'Where am I? Why am I here?' When questioned by the staff of the hospital he says, he only remembers being hit by something and falling down and nothing else!

A news item entitled, *Scientist says mind continues after brain dies*, written by Sarah Tippet was put out by Reuters from Los Angeles dated Friday June 29, 2001. A British scientist studying heart-attack patients says he is finding evidence that suggests consciousness may continue after the brain has stopped functioning and the patient is clinically dead.

The research, presented to scientists at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) resurrects the debate over whether there is life after death and whether there is such a thing as the human soul.

These studies are very significant in that we have a group of people with no brain function... who have well structured lucid thought processes with reasoning and memory formation at a time when their brains are shown not to function. Sam Parnia, one of the two doctors from Southampton General Hospital in England who have been studying so called near-death experiences (NDEs), told Reuters in an interview:

“We need to do much larger-scale studies but the possibilities are certainly there to suggest that consciousness or the soul keeps thinking and reasoning even if a person’s heart has stopped, he is not breathing and his brain activity is nil.”

He said he and his colleagues conducted an initial year-long study the results of which appeared in the February issue of the journal, *Resuscitation*. The study was so promising that doctors formed a foundation to fund further research and to continue collecting data.

During the initial study, Parnia said, sixty-three heart-attack patients who were deemed clinically dead but were later revived were interviewed within a week of their experiences. Of those, fifty-six said they had no recollection of the time they were unconscious and seven reported having memories of those, four were labelled NDEs in that they reported lucid memories of thinking, reasoning, moving about and communicating with others after doctors had determined their brains were not functioning.

The point I want to make next is that consciousness persists even when the mind does not function and there is no sign of life. Sri Ramakrishna very often used to have what is called in Indian psychology *samadhi*. Many people witnessed these phenomena and there are authentic records of this fact of Sri Ramakrishna’s trances. It is on record that even respiration and heartbeat were stopped. But he was sitting erect, oblivious of his surroundings and after some time which varied on different occasions, he used to come back to normal consciousness and he spoke to people and behaved in the ordinary way he had conducted himself before the experience of *samadhi* occurred. It is not only Sri Ramakrishna who used to have *samadhi*, many people have had this experience reported by eyewitnesses and cases are not wanting even today. This suggests that consciousness is independent of the body, the vital principle and the mind. The question is, what is its relation to the physical-vital-mental complex that is called man? Consciousness is self-existent and self-luminous.

Self-existent because independent of matter, life and mind, Self-luminous because it is not revealed by any thing other than itself. This is what is known in Samkhya, Yoga and Vedanta philosophies as *cit*, pronounced as *chit*. It is considered to be immutable and universally spread out. It is also dynamic and both a power of knowledge and a power of action. It can put out of itself ideas, feelings and activities not always of the mental type because, as we have already said, it is independent of mind. It arranges itself in a hierarchical system of different levels in some of which it can appear to be less conscious than it is in its essence. Mental consciousness is one of these levels and so is vitality. On one level it appears as subconscious, which however does not mean that there is no consciousness there but that it is only not as conscious as we mentally recognise. Sri Aurobindo cites a most remarkable example of the subconscious activity of consciousness. He mentions the case of a maidservant who used to work in the home of a professor of Hebrew. The learned professor sang Hebrew songs and recited Hebrew poetry. The maidservant went on doing her daily chores. Amazingly she could repeat the words of the songs and the poems without even knowing the first letter of the ancient tongue.

Just as there are levels of Consciousness below the mind, so there are levels above the mind. The Mandukya Upanishad speaks of four levels of the Atman rendered in English as Self. These are 'waking', in which the self knows the external world, 'dream' in which it knows its inner subjective things, 'dreamless' sleep in which it is aware neither of the external nor of the internal objects. Nevertheless it is described as All-Knower and Lord of all. Here consciousness must have a different dimension than it has when it is aware of the objective and the subjective worlds. Mind does not function here and even dream experiences are absent. But when a man, after having a sound dreamless sleep wakes up he not only feels wonderfully fresh and energetic but also remembers that he was in a state of dreamlessness, the state in which mental operations are conspicuously absent. It is not necessary here to say anything about the Fourth level of the self or more correctly the Self, i.e., the native inalienable status of the Self, which is the essential Consciousness.

We have already said that mind and life are levels of Consciousness, which is, as already stated, dynamic. Consciousness is Consciousness-Force; Chit is Chit-Shakti. Can it be said that the physical level of consciousness is also a level of Consciousness? It appears to be an impossible idea but in this view of consciousness, matter is that in which consciousness lies dormant and unmanifest. Modern Physics has reduced matter to condensed energy but the energy is not said to be conscious. It has not been possible to demonstrate the emergence of consciousness from material unconscious energy. The appearance of intelligence in and from non-intelligent material energy is not conceivable. I think perhaps it is not possible to entertain the idea of consciousness emerging out of unconsciousness purely on scientific grounds. Truly speaking, the natural sciences do not and cannot have anything to say about consciousness, even of the lowest instinctive kind. Science deals with what is quantifiable and measurable

but consciousness is not subject to quantity and measure. Science can measure the operations and effects of consciousness but not consciousness itself. Man is mind living in a physical body and not merely an assemblage of separate parts glued together artificially but a natural organism. Science is not capable of studying man as a whole, far less explain the organism in which the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Physics, Physiology or Biology have not yet been able to explain when a stimulus from the environment carried from the nervous system to the brain becomes what is called awareness or knowledge. Subjective experience cannot be accounted for by objective methods of explanation. The nerves themselves are not aware of the currents of stimuli carried along them and when knowledge occurs it is not of the currents of stimuli but of something, sun or horse or a man or a picture or a piece of music etc. Not only can the operations of mind not be explained by pure brain activity but even all is not known about how the brain functions. Natural science itself may not have any direct evidence about what is called mind. But in the very nature of the case there cannot be any such evidence because the mind is not a sensible thing. The duality or difference between mind and body is still what it was to Descartes. Even scientists who are oriented towards materialism cannot deny this. Monod has spoken of the frontier, which is still almost impossible to us to overcome as it was to Descartes. He has pointed out that brain and spirit are ideas no more synonymous today than in the 17th century. And he goes on to admit that physiological implementation has so far been unable to help us. Barry Commoner, the well-known biologist, points out that the complete experience of modern Physics does not support the precept that all complex systems are explicable in terms of properties observable in their isolated parts. He has also pointed out that the property of self-duplication which is uniquely associated with the intact living cell is not explained by properties of those separate constituents such as DNA which participate in the process.²

Even apart from the question of mind and brain, what is called vitality or life-force is also a mystery to natural scientists whether physicists, psychologists or biologists. The great biologist, J. S. Haldane, for example, admitted many years ago that mere physico-chemical processes, which are tested and found to be true by scientific observation and experiment, could not explain many processes of life. He did not say that there was something which he had to admit to explain those un-explained processes because he had no evidence for any such thing, and as a scientist he was perfectly right in his attitude. But again there cannot be any evidence of vitality or life-force, available to the senses because the force itself is not sensible. The means of knowledge, as Sri Aurobindo says, must be commensurate with what is to be known.

By practising certain disciplines which may be generally described as yogic, such evidence can be obtained which would prove the existence of vitality, a kind of reality different in nature from matter, which is the stuff of nerves or brain. Yoga provides the means by which knowledge of non-sensible realities can be known. The

question of Consciousness is still more difficult because it is the reality even though it is not mental. As said before, Consciousness in its essential nature is self-existent and self-luminous. The problem is its relation to the mind, the vital and the physical. Mind has already been described as a level of Consciousness; we can extend the idea that consciousness is, on a certain level, also in vitality. Hathayogins can master various capabilities, which can withstand normal physical effects by sheer application of vital force to the body. I myself have witnessed a Hathayogin chewing and swallowing a glass tumbler without the least effect on his body. He swallowed a quantity of Nitric acid which should have made his body very ill but went on speaking to us as if he had consumed nothing. I had a distant relative, a Hathayogin, who after digging a fairly deep pit in the ground, went into it and had it completely sealed and stayed there for a few hours after which he came out perfectly healthy and smiling. Now, from a yogic point of view, it is possible not to take oxygen from outside and yet continue to live. In fact, certain exercises of breath control have the effect of lessening the number of inhalations or exhalations without the least bit of ill effect on the body; on the contrary they enhance the vital energy and thereby improve health and vigour.

In point of fact, this is possible because at the root of these hathayogic practices is a connection of vitality and consciousness. Is it possible to extend the idea that Consciousness is the basic reality which is the source of all things in the world? I am going to say something now, which will be perhaps considered an old wives' tale. I heard this from the late M. M. Gopinath Kaviraj who was among the great Sanskrit scholars of contemporary India and was equally versed in Indian and Western philosophies. His guru, Srimad Vishuddhananda Paramahansa, told a band of disciples that everything is in every thing, *sarvam sarvātmakam*, that is to say all is the nature of all. Sri Aurobindo's formulation of this idea is, each is in each, each is in all and all is in each. One of the disciples of the Paramahansa who was a lecturer in Chemistry in Varanasi and was in the audience demurred and said that it just could not be true. Vishuddhananda asked him to go out and pluck a leaf from a tree and give it to him. He took it in his hand and after a while half of it turned into stone. And the rationale is that elements of anything are present in everything else. Sri Aurobindo too has pointed out in his philosophical work, *The Life Divine*, that the chemical composition of diamond and coal is the same and if a person who is not a scientist, but who knew the process, can change one into the other. My purpose here is not to tell a seemingly incredible romantic story. It is to point out that not only is it possible to know the structure of matter without knowing physics but also to produce physical effects by the power of consciousness. My purpose is to suggest the idea that by the practice of certain disciplines, by concentration of thought or will, the structure of material things and the operations of physical energy can be known and be acted upon without the help of any mechanical means. I myself witnessed a very similar incident. A material object was turned into another and after a while re-turned to what it was before. I

have a healthy scepticism and an open mind. I have known a number of cases of physical illness, albeit minor ones, being cured by mind or consciousness. One may doubt that the curative power was mind or consciousness. But this is certainly true that no medicine was administered. I do not think that Vishuddhananda took recourse to collective hypnosis. The leaf-stone was analysed in the laboratory by the chemistry teacher and found to have elements common to leaf and stone, though in varying proportions. In the examples of curing illness there was not, could not be, any question of hypnosis because the patients were perfectly conscious and in one case the sick person cured himself by sheer power of will. My real point is that consciousness is inherently present in everything, which we find already declared in a verse of the Katha Upanishad. "He is the secret Self in all existences and does not manifest Himself to the vision: yet is He seen by the seers of the subtle and perfect understanding"³ and of course Self is Consciousness. In this passage we have both the metaphysics and the epistemology of Consciousness!

It may very well be asked whether there is, truly speaking, any way of substantiating this notion of Consciousness. Needless to say that it cannot be done by the methods of knowledge that we usually have at our disposal. It is my contention that Yoga can explore consciousness systematically and discover ways of knowing which are usually unknown and unutilised. Yoga is scientific in that it is based on observation and experiment. It has the same relationship with the states, operations and hidden springs of the surface and deeper consciousness of our subjective being and nature as the natural sciences have with the forces of Nature like steam and electricity.⁴ Yoga is normally taken as a means of obtaining knowledge of the Self, which is said to be the essential Reality of man, and according to certain systems, of achieving union with God also. I am here presenting Yoga as an organon of knowledge and action and enjoyment but primarily of knowledge. Let us take some examples. Hathayoga takes as its chief means the vital principle and studies in detail its nature and the way in which it functions in the nervous system. It is based on perfectly ascertainable principles the knowledge of which is obtained by repeated observation and experiment. The results of the knowledge attained by a Hathayogin can be demonstrated in ways that seem to be miraculous. Rajayoga utilises the general mental consciousness as its chief means of practice. By the proper practice of it remarkable results may be achieved. All mental activity can be completely stopped without the Yogi becoming unconscious. In fact his consciousness becomes enhanced, his intelligence becomes keener and his control of natural forces becomes extraordinary. The result of the practice of certain disciplines enables the Rajayogin to read other people's minds. This again is an actual fact of which there are many instances. I am not mentioning here the more rationally baffling results, which are nonetheless true and real. There is no such thing as a miracle. It's a name given to phenomena whose laws are unknown to ordinary people. A miracle to an ordinary person is an ordinary fact to a yogi.

Consciousness is self-manifest and manifests everything in which it is involved,

that is to say, that though it is present, it is in some levels of its involvement like matter, unmanifest; in plants and insects and lower animals, instinctively present; in higher animals approaching intelligence; and in man rationally intelligent. It may be mentioned here that consciousness obviously does not work if the brain is damaged. It is because it is involved in the brain, which it uses as an instrument. And if the instrument is damaged the user of the instrument cannot function properly.

To know directly the nature of consciousness as I have tried to delineate it, one must take recourse to Yoga, which is practical psychology. Philosophy deals in abstract concepts but lacks sufficient data on which to build a true view of the world and that of man who lives in that world.

William James in his celebrated essay, *Does Consciousness Exist?* answered his own question in the negative and reduced it to a function, denying that it is an entity. While he did not explain what he meant by entity, he used the term ‘stuff’ which may be taken to mean the material of things. It is not only an entity but the Entity. Science deals with facts and Consciousness is the ultimate Fact, the Principle of principles, which is self-existent and self-luminous and has become every thing. But the natural sciences deal with matter and its states and its elements and physical energies. Their means of enquiry are sense and reason, which do not and cannot have an entry into the realm of consciousness. We cannot arrive at direct knowledge of consciousness by theorising about it but must base such knowledge on sound fact. Yogic psychology is a gateway to that knowledge by direct experience.

The problem of Consciousness is a problem for Consciousness. A piece of stone or an oak tree or an orangutan does not ask what is consciousness. The tree and the animal have it in a rather obscure way. It takes a certain development of consciousness to wonder about it and ask what it is. To ask if consciousness exists or what is its nature is to engage in conscious activity. It is self-manifest and manifests everything and the manifestableness of things suggests that they are akin in their nature to what manifests them.

ARABINDA BASU

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SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from the issue of May 2004)

THE rational man is distinguished from all other animals by his search for a rule of his life, for the principle underlying his self-development. There is nothing mechanical about this development and he knows himself to be its master. "...he can initiate an intelligent evolution which he himself shall determine or at least be in it a conscious instrument..." He knows that he can by his effort transcend the present limits of his faculties. Of course, like everything in this world, man's self-development is also a part of Nature's evolution. At a certain stage in that evolution there becomes apparent the soul in things. In man this soul turns its conscious mind inwards seeking to know the hidden Law of Nature's work in him.

"This turning of the consciousness upon itself... which man represents has been the great crisis... in the terrestrial evolution of the soul in Nature." There have been other crises before, and there is the great crisis ahead in the awakening of the super-mind. But at present the *manomaya purusha* is at work in order to arrive at some intelligent ordering of man's life in view of the supreme crisis in front of him. The rational intellect is not man's only means of knowledge. He has many others, instinct being an important one amongst them. But the intellect alone can detach itself from the work, can watch it, study it, alter and improve it. It can look through the outward appearance and see the truth concealed behind.

Reason was installed as the sovereign power in human affairs when man cast away all blind conventions of the former age. Since then Religion has been its only serious rival; but it has had ultimately to give way. Some lesser forces like imagination, emotion, the ethical and the aesthetic need have also disputed the sway of rationalism but they too have been as unsuccessful as Religion. Still it is felt vaguely that a deity more powerful than Dame Reason has appeared in the field.

Some say that this new deity is the secret Will-in-Life. Reason is useful only as far as it serves this Will. Life-forces alone can evolve and create; they must not be repressed or cramped by Reason. In fact, there is a profounder and greater power of knowledge—intuition—"which is more deeply in the secrets of existence". Reason's method is too analytical, it depends too much on division and artificial classification to be our sole guide. With the coming of a subjective age, man is beginning to feel that his sovereign godhead is his soul.

Reason's highest power is disinterested seeking after knowledge—knowledge for its own sake. It may be utilised for a particular end afterwards, but if right from the start we have this utilisation in view, then we certainly limit our gain and distort the truth by casting it in a particular mould. We know that the ordinary man uses his reason to serve some utility. But even the thinking man limits his reason to the working

out of something preferred or desired; he ignores or denies all that is not useful to him. But just as some people are subject to the tyranny of prejudices and preferences, so there are others who are subject to the tyranny of ideas and ideals—political, religious, economic or other. Under the influence of these ideals they evolve systems of life, but all human systems have, generally speaking, failed in the end. It is because there has been at their root only a confused or partial application of reason. Reason has no light of its own, it has to grope its way along. Still its achievements are tremendous in the field of Philosophy and Science from Plato and Aristotle to Newton, Darwin and Einstein. Man may well be proud of his performances in this line, but on looking more closely, we find that vast depths of Truth lie unexplored below the surface, in which lie the real springs and the mysterious powers of existence. Will the intellect unaided ever discover them? Its limitations are obvious. It has no self-illumination that would enable man to visualise, as a whole, the Truth of all truths. It is obliged to divide and subdivide knowledge, to classify more or less artificially and to build up systems only to discard them after a while.

We can, of course, keep our reasoning faculty as an aid in every-day life—restricting its work to observing and criticising things. Or, we may allow it to withdraw from the world and devote itself to higher action entirely. But this higher action would, then, amount to dwelling in a world of abstractions and of losing all power of guiding man in the field of life. Sri Aurobindo says that thinkers and poets and artists when they abstract themselves in this fashion find themselves entirely at sea when they seek to grapple with practical life. The two chapters in *The Human Cycle*, entitled “The Office and Limitations of the Reason” and “Reason and Religion” elaborate points that have been indicated already in the chapter just reviewed.

The Spirit that secretly dominates all stages of man's development is the sovereign master of his being. As long as this Spirit is unmanifest the intellect appears to guide him. But directing man in his earthly functions is not its only work; it also teaches him to look within himself and discern high from low, pure from impure; it guides man in his pursuit of Good, Beauty and Truth, and teaches him to exceed himself. The intellect has, we know, an outward and downward look on our overt common life; but it has also “an upward and inward eye and a more luminous functioning by which it accepts divinations from the hidden eternities”. Unfortunately in transmitting these subtle divinations it gives them an intellectual form. The result is that ideas that come from an exalted plane where knowledge and force are one, can act down below only by division and analysis and fail to bring about harmony. In every sphere of life and action the intellect presents before us a number of differing principles and proceeds by compromise, conflict, or combination, leading to nothing stable or harmonious. Yet, says Sri Aurobindo, through it all the width and wealth of our nature go on increasing and we get nearer to our awakening into the greater consciousness.

The very nature of man's intelligence is such that his progress from ignorance

to Knowledge has to be piecemeal, slow and wavering, he has to contrive continually some new harmony between the various elements of his being. He is now a puritan and now a hedonist, now a free-trader and now a protectionist, now for autocracy and now for democracy. He is throwing out a constant variety of types under the stress of the Spirit within the intellect working as an efficient secretary—but through it all “accumulating stock of self-experience”.

Intellect has a double function—one is pursuit of truth for the sake of Truth, knowledge for the sake of Knowledge, without any further motive—the other is “coloured by the passion for practice, the desire to govern life by the truth discovered”. There is no pitfall in the first path, it is only when the practice or application to life comes that human intelligence stumbles or takes a false step. It is not difficult to understand why. In concerning itself with action, the intellect becomes partial and makes itself the servant of something other than the pure truth. Even if it remains impartial, the truths or ideas discovered by it fall under the control of forces other than itself.

The fact is that man’s intellect is an imperfect light, an unreliable guide. It can be employed and has always been employed to justify any idea, any theory of life, any system of society or government; Reason’s jugglery in philosophy, religion, politics, aesthetics, ethics and economics is well-known. The truth is hidden from the rationalist first because he is always convinced that his reasoning is correct and the reasoning of the other side is incorrect—secondly because he is convinced that whatever failing there may be in man’s intelligence today, collective reason will triumph one day and found life on a sound rational basis. Sri Aurobindo discusses both these articles of faith. We shall be content with quoting a few characteristic lines: “Its limit is reached, its function is finished when it can say to man, ‘There is a Soul, a Self, a God in the world and in man who works concealed and all is his self-concealing and gradual self-unfolding. His minister I have been, slowly to unseal your eyes... until there is only my own luminous veil between you and him. Remove that and make the soul of man one in fact and nature with this Divine...’”

(To be continued)

C. C. DUTT

THE DIVINE MOTHER ANSWERS

(Continued from the issue of May 2004)

(13)

Mother Divine,

You have said: "To eat without working produces a great disequilibrium."

I was only waiting for the operation after which I would take up some physical activity as well as some material work. But due to the aggravation of Eczema I could not undergo the operation. But the Eczema goes on aggravating and I find myself in a vicious circle. I pray to You to take me out of it.

What shall I do now? Shall I at once take up some work in the Garden Service or shall I reduce my food to a minimum? I would like to hear a word from You.

With pranams,

27-5-70

Your child
Abani

*Take up a work you like
Eat according to your hunger
But, most important,
keep faith.*

Love and blessings

Take up a work you like.
Eat according to your hunger.
But, most important,
keep faith.

love and blessings
The Mother

(To be continued)

THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of May 2004)

8. Draupadi's Compassion

It is characteristic of the *Bhagavata* to teach us silently the ways to overcome the proliferation of hatred in this world. Certainly it is easy enough to say that love is the only medicine for our ills. But we find it very very hard to practise it in everyday life. Our ancients knew that love had to be cultivated somehow, anyhow by man. They made people who had suffered most carry this message of love for humanity. It is only when a person who has actually endured the cruelties of fellow human beings and the vagaries of fate speaks of love as the nectarean medicine for our times, that the words carry conviction for future generations. Subramania Bharati sang:

“Love thy enemy, my heart!

We have seen that at the centre
Of smoke, there is fire;
Our Lord who is love incarnate
Resides in the midst of enmity.”¹

The *Bhagavata* places this message at the very beginning of the main narrative. Usually the *Mahabharata* leaves us with the idea of Draupadi as a heroic woman who would not allow an insult to go unchallenged and unavenged. This has made her appear rather unbending and even a seasoned scholar like C.V. Narasimhan sees her only as a vengeful fury:

“In a sense the heroine of the epic is Draupadi, but from the beginning she is subjected to misfortunes which make her character seem somewhat harsh because of her continuous cries for vengeance. She is the victim of the bully Duhshasana when in his weakness Yudhisthira gambles her away. There is a tradition (to which the Poona edition of the epic does not give support) that she refused to tie in a knot her long tresses, by which Duhshasana dragged her to the middle of the court, until he was killed. Because of her beauty she becomes the victim of the sinful Kichaka and, when he insults her in public in the court of King Virata, she cannot rest until she succeeds in having him killed by Bhima. Again, when Ashvatthama kills her five sons in the course of one terrible night, she appeals to Bhima who takes off after the fleeing Ashvatthama to satisfy her desire for revenge.”²

The Draupadi we see in the *Bhagavata* is different. She is poised in her distress, noble. When Ashvatthama destroys the five Upa-Pandavas, even Duryodhana is not happy and is full of displeasure (*jugupsa*). Draupadi utters no vengeful words but merely weeps and is quite overwhelmed with grief. Arjuna senses the depth of her

sorrow and tells her that he will kill Ashvatthama. Arjuna and Krishna pursue Ashvatthama who releases the Brahma missile, though he has but partial knowledge about it. Arjuna is forced to counteract it with his Brahma missile that results in a terrible conflagration. Agreeing with the views of Krishna (*matam ca vāsudevasya*), Arjuna withdraws both the missiles and holds Drona's son captive. Krishna urges Arjuna to behead Ashvatthama to fulfil the promise to Draupadi, but the Pandava hero rejects the suggestion and takes Ashvatthama to Draupadi. What happens now renders us speechless. Is this the Draupadi who is considered to be a shrieking fury by Mr. Narasimhan?

“Seeing Ashvatthama in that condition—tied up like an animal and hanging his head ashamed of his own despicable act—the noble Panchali was overcome with pity. She made prostrations to the captive, as he was the son of their venerable teacher Drona. Unable to bear the sight of Ashvatthama in bondage, she cried out in great consternation: ‘Release him! Release him! He is a Brahmana and also a venerated elder, being the son of our teacher! In the form of his son, here stands before you Dronacharya himself...’ ”

Draupadi who has lost her sons knows well what a terrible fate it is to have to be subjected to *putra-śoka*. So she says that Kripī, Drona's wife may be spared a similar fate. “Let not his (Ashvatthama's) mother, the daughter of Gautama and the faithful wife of Drona, weep and wail and have a tear-swept face like myself owing to the death of her offspring.” This is indeed divine compassion. Everyone appreciates Draupadi. Speaking for himself, Bhīma feels execution would only be a favour to Ashvatthama who murdered the Upa-Pandavas just for the sake of murdering them, because of his bloodlust. After all, he knew very well these murders would bring no help to Duryodhana or himself. Arjuna allows Ashvatthama to go, after shearing off his tuft along with his crest-jewel.

The funeral ceremonies for the departed were now concluded. Krishna is about to ascend the chariot when Uttara, wife of Abhimanyu rushes towards him for help. Ashvatthama, unrepentant, had released now the Brahma missile to destroy the babe growing in the womb of Uttara to wipe out the race of Pandavas from the earth. For, the sons of darkness like Ashvatthama have always sought to halt the progress of good on earth:

Intoxicated by a burning breath
And amorous groan of a destroying mouth,
Once a companion of the sacred Fire,
The mortal perishes to God and Light,
An Adversary governs heart and brain,
A Nature hostile to the Mother-force.
The self of life yields up its instruments
To Titan and demoniac agencies

That aggrandise earth-nature and disframe:
A cowed fifth-columnist is now thought's guide...³

Ashvatthama's missile is not only seeking to destroy the foetus in Uttara's womb but is also speeding towards the five Pandava brothers as hell's fire so that the Pandu race could never hope to survive. But evil is not for ever. Krishna immediately swings into action with his Discus. The growing babe is thus saved and the dire flames of the Brahma missile extinguished. Krishna proceeds to ascend his chariot. It is a sublime moment in the *Purana* when Pandu's wife, Kunti Devi, leads her sons and Draupadi to Krishna to bid him goodbye and now her heart releases a prayer as pellucid and divine as the stream at Gangotri. The hymn of Kunti is the first of the great stotras in the *Bhagavata* and unveils the eternal bond between the deity and the devotee through life, through births, through aeons.

Born to the Yadava king Shurasena, she had been brought up by his son, Kunti-bhoja. Sage Durvasa gave her a boon to conceive progeny by summoning any demigod. In her girlish excitement she thought of Surya and there he was! Kunti's saga of sufferings began at this moment. She gave birth to Karna but abandoned him because she thought it was immoral to conceive before marriage. She married Pandu but on his request had to give birth to children by Yama, Indra, Vayu and the Ashwins. When Pandu died, she found it was no peaceful task bringing up her fatherless children. Travelling with them incognito, enduring ever so many tragic situations, finally she witnessed the Kurukshetra when her world crashed around her. Krishna saved the hope of her family by stalling the Brahma missile from hurting Uttara's womb. Now it was time for him to return to Mathura. Will he ever come back to Indraprastha, who knows? After all these mad wars and mutual assured destruction, one dare not think of the future. And Kunti was already very old, she was the aunt of Krishna.

Though older than Krishna, Kunti recognised the manifest divine in Krishna verily like Sumitra in the *Ramayana* who recognised Rama to be incarnate Purushottama. The pellucid prayer from this elderly lady shows how she knew that it was the Supreme that had come down to stop the armed march of the army of hell. It is astonishing how these twenty-six verses in the eighth chapter of the *Bhagavata* have brought not only consolation but positively strengthened the will power of the common man down the centuries. I could be sitting amongst a sparse crowd in a deserted village in India, with darkness engulfing the place. The only illumining point is from a hurricane lamp near the pious gentleman who is retelling this episode of Kunti's prayer. The language is so simple, tuned to the uninitiate and yet frequently there are Sanskrit phrases lifting us up to have glimpses of the drama that took place long, long ago. The prayer is ideal for being recited by us as it brings out the images of the deity and the devotee with crystalline clarity. We begin the prayer and cease to think of Kunti. It is we who are praying to the Lord, it is we who are gaining the assurance of the divine's protection:

“I salute the uncreated original Being, the Supreme Person, the Lord of all, the one transcending Prakriti! Though abiding within and without all beings, none can see Thee directly. How can an ignorant person like me know Thee, the trans-sensual, changeless Spirit, when Thou hast hidden Thyself behind the screen of Maya, Thy mysterious Power? As an ignorant spectator cannot recognise an actor in his theatrical costume, so art Thou hidden from the vision of the ignorant man.”

All we need to know about the Supreme and the manner in which we have descended into an Ignorance that now keeps us away from true knowledge is indicated in this opening part of the prayer. Krishna is the original Purusha who is beyond the manifested creation (*īśvaram prakṛte param*) and when Kunti utters this, not one in the assembly doubts it. For, right now the Lord has exhibited that he stands at the head of creation and is able to change what appears to be an unchangeable Law of Nature.

Though he is so active all the time in charge of the movement of the world, he remains the unseen producer-director of this tremendous drama of life. Of course Krishna is seen as the actor, but usually no one recognises the Purusha behind the actor. Krishna remains Krishna of Gokula and Krishna of Kurukshetra for us. Ignorant human beings that we are, how can we pierce through the veil of Maya with which the Lord has cloaked Himself? We will never know the Purusha as He is, the Existent. It is a glory beyond our mortal frame, though we might engage ourselves in undisturbed tapasya. The impossibility of knowing the unknowable has been brilliantly noted in Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* and *Savitri*. Till our instrument of understanding ceases to be the flawed mind and rises to above-mental levels, we cannot see the Lord in his original form, the *puruṣam tvādhyam*. But how can the Lord keep away from us, filled as he is with love for his creation? So he takes a form that can be seized by us, however partially. According to Sri Aurobindo, this action is referred to as Maya by the Vedic seers:

“Maya meant for them the power of infinite consciousness to comprehend, contain in itself and measure out, that is to say, to form—for form is delimitation—Name and Shape out of the vast illimitable Truth of infinite existence. It is by Maya that static truth of essential being becomes ordered truth of active being,—or, to put it in more metaphysical language, out of the supreme being in which all is all without barrier of separative consciousness emerges the phenomenal being in which all is in each and each is in all for the play of existence with existence, consciousness with consciousness, force with force, delight with delight.”⁴

Kunti is wise, and she knows that as long as one is bound by an infinite ignorance, one cannot envision the Supreme behind the appearance of the handsome figure with the soulful smile, the hero of infinity. When even realised souls have yet to be taught the pathway of bhakti to recognise the Lord and reach him, women who are condemned to the humdrum ways of mortal living and an existence of tragedy and tears, cannot easily achieve understanding. One can hear the sorrow and struggle in time borne by

eternal womanhood in Kunti's statement, "how can we women understand", *katham paśyema hi striyāḥ*? At the same time, the phrase also teaches us the attitude we must have in spiritual life, an attitude of utter humility. Her sobriquets hailing Krishna here are mellifluous and remain ringing in our hearts for long:

*krśṇāya vāsudevāya devakīmandanāya ca
nandagopakumārāya govindāya namo namaḥ*

Kunti speaks of the Lord as lotus-eyed, lotus-navelled, lotus-garlanded. The exuberance of such descriptions have a direct relevance to the Tamil hymns of the Alvars who never tire of using the lotus to envision the Lord:

"What is it I see everywhere—vast lakes
Of large red lotuses on a blue hill?
'Tis the beautiful eyes of my dark Lord,
Chief of the gods and of people on earth!"⁵

Kunti then refers to Krishna's saving her as he had freed his own mother, Devaki, from the prison of Kamsa. In ever so many ways he had protected her sons. Now that he is going away to Dwaraka, she is afraid for her children. She then remembers Krishna's childhood and what a marvellous growing up it was, what a variety of divine deception he practised among the innocent cowherds and cowherdresses!

"When, as a child, Thou didst the mischievous act of breaking the earthen curd pot, Thy mother took a rope to tie Thee to a mortar as punishment. When I think of Thy face at that time, with eyes tremulous in fear and shedding copious tears that washed down the collyrium from them I am wonder-struck and mystified, remembering that Thou art the one of whom even Death is afraid."

Yes, she has heard various explanations about the incarnation of the Lord as Krishna. It is said that he was born to spread the fame of the Yadava race; the askesis of Vasudeva and Devaki is cited by some; some say that Brahma had requested the Lord to incarnate as the wicked had to be eliminated and the burden on earth eased; and there are people who say Krishna incarnated to teach people to adhere to the devotional disciplines of 'listening' (*śravaṇa*) and 'remembering' (*smaraṇa*). The last-mentioned seems the most plausible for Kunti and also underlines the importance of a work like the *Bhagavata*:

"It is those who always hear about, recite, praise, remember, and delight in Thy sportive actions that quickly attain to Thy lotus feet which put an end to the cycle of births and deaths."

As far as Kunti and her sons were concerned they had all along with them Krishna and could do all the nine varieties of devotional services including *smaraṇa* and *śravaṇa*⁶ referred to by Prahlada when addressing Hiranyakashipu. But what will

they do now? It is as if Kunti is pleading with Krishna not to abandon them just because the Pandavas seem to have survived the Kurukshetra war. But it flashes in her mind that this too is an illusion. What is permanent in this ever-changing creation? Not riches, nor fame nor children. The one thing that can help us walk through our days on earth is the steady flame of Krishna bhakti. So she concludes her prayer with this request:

“O dear Lord! Just as the river Ganga is a continuous stream flowing towards the ocean, so may my mind, eschewing all other objects, become a continuous stream of love and attachment, with Thee as its sole object... O master of Yoga! O spiritual guide of mankind, O the Lord of all!—Salutation again and again to Thee! *yogeśvarākhilaguro bhagavannamaste!*”

This is an indication of the major change advised by Narada when Vyasa had struggled with an inner sorrow. Unlike the *Mahabharata*, we are constantly reminded here of Krishna bhakti, and not made to feel helpless in the choice of what is dharma. How can sorrow overwhelm us when our hands are held by Krishna and we receive his bewitching smile (*mandam jahāsa*)? Now Yudhisthira advances towards Krishna and gives vent to his self-pity and proceeds to Bhishma lying on the bed of arrows in the battlefield. There is quite a crowd with them and Bhishma welcomes them all. Once again, the *Purana* takes the chance to teach the world the need for unswerving Krishna bhakti. Bhishma tells Yudhisthira and others that Krishna was the Supreme Being who had helped them. Great tragedies have taken place but this has been due to the spirit of Time (*kālakṛtam*). Henceforth Yudhisthira should cease to weep for what had happened and proceed to heal the wounds of the past. Lying on the dire bed, literally drawing his last breath, the ancient warrior assures the Pandavas that it is all Krishna’s doing and he is the Supreme. Who can question the Play of the Lord?

Quite early in the *Purana* it is made clear that we have no business even to question. What purpose can be served by seeking the roots of the mischief or weeping over spilt milk? Even before we go to the actual beginning of the *Purana* when Krishna delivers it to Parikshita as the latter waits for death, the *Purana* spirit is underlined in the first Skandha by Kunti and Bhishma. They have no illusions about earthly life. They have realised the transcendent power that has put on the cloak of Krishna and Krishna bhakti alone can help them cross the ocean of earthly life. Bhishma says:

“This Krishna is verily the perfect being, Narayana, the origin of all. He is now enacting his divine play, appearing incognito as one among the Vrishnis, and hiding his real nature from the world at large. O King! His greatness is partially perceived only by Bhagavan Siva, the divine sage Narada, and Kapila who is the divine incarnate. None without his grace can understand the greatness of him.”

We need the Lord’s grace even to salute Him. Only those who have already been chosen by the Divine can proceed to choose Him! The Pandavas have had a wonderful time with the Divine, for, unknowingly, they have used him as an adviser,

an ambassador, a charioteer. A charioteer! But Krishna's infinite compassion makes him do all that his devotee wants him to do. It is insinuated in this speech of Bhishma that the Supreme's compassion gets reflected in mortals now and then for he is the soul of all, *sarvātmana*: Bhishma is overwhelmed by Krishna's kindness in coming to him, so undeserving of the Lord's mercy. Perhaps Bhishma is remembering his failure in the Kuru court when Duhshasana had sought to disrobe Draupadi. He tells Yudhisthira:

"O King, see his mercy towards persons having unswerving love for Him! For when I am about to abandon my vital energies and pass away, here has Krishna come by my side, to bless me with his vision. By concentrating one's mind on whom with intense devotion and by reciting whose names and glories with one's lips, a dying aspirant is liberated from the bondage of desire and duty—may that Bhagavan, with His radiant face beautified by his benevolent smile and lotus-like eyes, who is generally realised only in the heart in meditation, remain before my very physical eyes till life leaves my body."

This prayer of Bhishma for looking upon Krishna as the last breath leaves one's body has been repeated by all aspirant souls and many fond legends have grown around this concept. It is said that Shankaracharya sped to Kerala to be with his mother when she was critically ill. Gratified by the coming of Shankara who had now become a spiritual luminary the mother requested him to gain for her a vision of the Divine. Her wish was granted, but it was of three-eyed Shiva, holding his three-pointed lance. She prayed to her son to give a vision of the Supreme who would not have the *terribilita* associated with Shiva. Shankara agreed and soon she gained a vision of Narayana to hold on to as she shed her mortal coils.

The great Vaishnava poet-scholar Vedanta Desika has also expressed such a desire in his prayer, *Gopala Vimśati*:

"May his form with the bejewelled flute
Adorning his sacred lips, enchanting to view,
Peacock feathers framing his locks, curly, cute
With exquisite colour of iridescent sapphire-blue,
Appear in my vision, vivid and bright
As I lie in my bed, with my end in sight."⁷

Krishna stood before Bhishma even thus, clad in his yellow silk. The enormous *Shanti Parva* where we have the glorious 'Sri Vishnu Sahasranama' imbedded as also the advice of Bhishma to Yudhisthira on matters of dharma and administration, is summarised by the *Purana* in a brief passage. After Bhishma's passing Yudhisthira becomes the king and Krishna leaves Hastinapura even as the women of Hastinapura speak among themselves of the greatness of Krishna and the good fortune of his wives like Rukmini and Satyabhama. But the last line of the tenth chapter in which

Krishna finally moves away from Hastinapura is sombre, full of foreboding: “He at last reached the western region even as the sun too was setting in the west.”

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

Notes and References

1. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.
2. *The Mahabharata: An English Version Based on Select Verses* (1996), pp. xxiii-xxiv.
3. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Book Two, canto viii.
4. *The Life Divine*, Book I, ‘The Divine Maya’.
5. Nammalwar, *Tiruviruttam*, verse 39. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.
6. “Hearing about Vishnu, singing about Him, remembering Him, serving Him, saluting Him, being His servant, being His comrade, and surrendering oneself and everything that is one’s own to Him—these are the nine aspects of Bhakti or God-love. If man could be trained to practise devotion characterised by these nine features, that indeed would be the highest education he could have. That is what I have understood.” (*The Bhagavata*, Skandha VII, chapter 5, verses 23-24)
7. Translated by M. K. Srinivasan.

The story of Brindavan is another matter; it does not enter into the main story of the Mahabharata and has a Puranic origin and it could be maintained that it was intended all along to have a symbolic character. At one time I accepted that explanation, but I had to abandon it afterwards; there is nothing in the Puranas that betrays any such intention. It seems to me that it is related as something that actually occurred or occurs somewhere. The Gopis are to them realities and not symbols. It was for them at the least an occult truth, and occult and symbolic are not the same thing; the symbol may be only a significant mental construction or only a fanciful invention, but the occult is a reality which is actual somewhere, behind the material scene as it were and can have its truth for the terrestrial life and its influence upon it may even embody itself there. The Lila of the Gopis seems to be conceived as something which is always going on in a divine Gokul and which projected itself in an earthly Brindavan and can always be realised and its meaning made actual in the soul. It is to be presumed that the writers of the Puranas took it as having been actually projected on earth in the life of the incarnate Krishna and it has been so accepted by the religious mind of India.

These questions and the speculations to which they have given rise have no indispensable connection with the spiritual life. There what matters is the contact with Krishna and the growth towards the Krishna consciousness, the presence, the spiritual relation, the union in the soul and till that is reached, the aspiration, the growth in bhakti and whatever illumination one can get on the way.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 426)

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE PROBLEM OF POETIC TRANSLATION

(Continued from the issue of May 2004)

The Role of Metre

THE practice of metrical translation has long been neglected, almost abandoned. It is easy to understand why. In modern times, there has been a sharp decline in the appreciation of what metrical rhythm and rhyme contribute to poetry. Under such circumstances, a translator may be excused for not finding it worth the trouble to try to reflect these formal aspects of the original work in a translation. Besides, a survey of past failures might seem to suggest that the difficulty of translating poetry is unnecessarily compounded and turned into a virtual impossibility by adding the extra hurdles of a metrical and formal rendering.

Avoiding metre and rhyme is certainly the safest and easiest course for the translator. Often it may be the only practical solution. Yet when the original is a poem and the translation is not, the experience of reading the translation is sure to be very different from the experience of reading the original. An important element—perhaps the most important—is inevitably lost. The translator who fails to take advantage of the resources offered by metre may forfeit the opportunity to communicate the spirit and atmosphere of the original work to the highest degree that is possible in another language.

It is in discussing the question of metre that Sri Aurobindo lets us glimpse most intimately how he himself worked when he translated. In “On Translating Kalidasa”, he relates how the *terza rima* came to him “by an inspiration, & without deliberate choice” as the right form for translating the *Meghadūta* into English.¹ This is an example of the results of a method he described in more general terms elsewhere in the same essay:

The translator’s only resource is to steep himself in the original, quelling that in him which conflicts with its spirit, and remain on the watch for the proper metrical mood in himself. Sometimes the right metre will come to him, sometimes it will not. In the latter case effort in this direction will not have been entirely wasted; for spirit, when one gives it a chance, is always stronger than matter & he will be able to impose something of the desired spiritual atmosphere even upon an unsuitable metrical form. But if he seize on the right metre, he has every chance, supposing him poetically empowered, of creating a translation which shall not only be classical, but shall be *the* translation.²

The secrets of the art of translation have perhaps never been probed with such an acute awareness of the inner dimension of the problem as in this early essay of Sri

Aurobindo's. Though his use of the word "spiritual" is not as precise here as in his later writings, it is apparent that through intuition and experience he had already grasped the essentials of a deeper than the intellectual approach to literature. Thus he had realised that even when one has mastered the nuances of the languages involved and is "poetically empowered" for the task, the elusive goal of poetic translation is scarcely to be attained except by a virtual *sādhana* of self-identification with the source of the original inspiration.

Translation, so viewed, demands above all a creative self-effacement allowing the genius of the author to speak for itself without being hampered by conflicting tendencies in the personality of the translator. Only one who can achieve this transparency, a state of concentrated passivity compatible with and conducive to a heightened working of the mental faculties, can hope to do a true poetic translation.

The result will be something far more living than the literal translator's "honest rendering". The reader will not have to remind himself that the original was a poem; he will feel it in each line. It will differ no less from the "brilliant version" or "successful falsification"³ typically produced by the imagination of the poet who translates another poet's work. Being imbued with the authentic spirit of the original, it will follow it in all essential respects as closely as the differences between the languages will permit.

Sri Aurobindo recognised that more convenient alternatives to this high-pitched ideal may have their legitimate place. He himself adopted a number of approaches at various times and for particular purposes, ranging from the most literal word-for-word rendering to the freest transcreation. But what is especially noteworthy is his explicit formulation of the aim of poetic translation in its purest form, an ideal he held firmly in view while executing the translations that illustrate his theory and method most convincingly.

A coherent system of translation like the one Sri Aurobindo outlined in his essay "On Translating Kalidasa" requires first that we "realise our essential aim"; once that is done, it remains

to define exactly what elements in poetry demand rendering, how far & by what law of equivalent values each may be rendered and if all cannot be reproduced, which of them may in each particular case be sacrificed without injuring the essential worth of the translation.⁴

The essential aim, as we have seen, will be to transmit not merely the letter of the poem but its spirit. But what exactly is this intangible entity called the "spirit"? With as much precision as is possible in defining the indefinable, the question is answered when Sri Aurobindo delves into the inner working of metre.

For in poetry, the spirit is revealed through the rhythm and music of words as much as through their meaning. But if so, since the audible form of the words is the

thing that can least be kept intact in translation, how can the same or a recognisably similar spirit be expressed through the quite different sounds and rhythms of another language?

Sri Aurobindo resolves this doubt, theoretically at least, by showing how spirit is linked to form through several intermediate principles whose contribution to the rhythmic movement determines to a great extent the effect a given metre has on the sensitive reader. This is an insight which underlies all of his metrical translations and some understanding of it is needed for a full appreciation of his achievement as a translator.

Obviously, on the most external level the rhythm and music of a translation cannot be the same as that of the original. Even if the metre is superficially the same, which is usually possible only where the two languages are closely related, the aesthetic effect it produces may be utterly dissimilar depending on other factors. But what are these factors, and could their operation not lead equally to the inverse result, namely, the production of a similar effect through the employment of an apparently dissimilar metre? Successful poetic translation between languages differing radically in their metrical basis, like most of the languages Sri Aurobindo worked with, depends largely on this possibility.

The Elements of Poetic Rhythm

The formal definition of a metre consists usually of a pattern of long and short or accented and unaccented syllables, depending on the language. In most languages and throughout most of the history of literature, the support of such a more or less fixed scheme has been found to be extremely helpful, if not indispensable, for the poet who wishes to raise the rhythmic power of speech much beyond its ordinary pitch. But by itself this is not enough for poetic rhythm.

Sri Aurobindo compares the mechanical structure of a metre to the physical body of a human being. Just as the visible body would be only a lump of inert matter without the invisible vital, mental and spiritual forces that move it and make themselves felt through it, so would the metre of a poem be a lifeless formula if it were not animated by other, subtler elements which express themselves through the sound and rhythm of the words.

First among these elements is that which Sri Aurobindo terms “sensational”, the aspect of verse which gives it its immediate appeal to the ear, consisting technically of the arrangement of sounds and pauses in infinitely variable relation to a recurrent pattern. Deeper than this is the emotional movement which uses the melody and harmony of sounds for its own vivid satisfaction. At a higher level intervenes the poise of the intelligence controlling and sublimating the other two. These first three non-mechanical elements of metre correspond to parts of our normal psychological make-up, though for true poetry something deeper than the surface ear, surface emotion

and surface intellect must be at work in each case.

But this is not all. For after speaking of the intellectual component in metre, “the driver of the chariot of sound”, that which brings “restraint, management, subordination to a superior law of harmony”, Sri Aurobindo goes on:

within this again is the poetic delight in the creation of harmonious sound, the august & disinterested pleasure of the really great poet which has nothing in it of frenzy or rather has the exultation & increased strength of frenzy without its loss of self-control; and within this even is the spirit, that unanalysable thing behind metre, style & diction which makes us feel “This is Homer, this is Shakespeare, this is Dante.”⁵

Here we come to the heart of the matter. Each of the six levels in the metrical movement of inspired poetry—mechanical, sensational, emotional, intellectual, ecstatic and spiritual—has a necessary function and must be taken into account in what might be called integral translation. But the last and highest of these is that on which the others depend for their true significance.

The outward form of the poem, its qualities of style, even its intellectual and emotional content, important as they are, are only instruments for embodying something still more fundamental. This we may call the spirit of the poet. The great poet may or may not be an overtly spiritual man. But behind him, if we accept the Indian concept of the Vibhuti, is a universal power of the Divine whose instrument he is for manifesting some potentiality of the Infinite needed for the fullness of the human evolution.

This power with which the poet’s words are charged, not only in their sense but in their very rhythm, is what the translator has to assimilate and re-express to the extent of his capacity and the possibilities of his language. If he cannot do this sufficiently, the result will fall short of fulfilling the highest function of a translation. For when all details have faded from the reader’s mind, what will remain imprinted there will be the living contact he has been granted with the heart and soul of the poet and of the culture he represents.

This, in essence, is the view of poetic translation which Sri Aurobindo has persuasively articulated and masterfully illustrated in his best work. We may gather from him that the rhythmic movement of the original, if the translator can respond to it, is often more potent than anything else to lift him on its wings and carry him to the source of the poem’s inspiration. This reached, he must descend again into the world of form and re-embody its spirit in the words and rhythms available in his own language.

Sri Aurobindo’s insistence on the discovery of the right metre and its inspired handling is due to his exceptional sensitivity to this subtlest of all aspects of translation. This is part of the secret of his ability to transport the reader almost bodily into the

atmosphere of some of the great poetic creations of the past. To have done this even on a limited scale is surely a landmark in the history of translation and an example for translators to emulate, if they want their art to realise its full potential.

(To be concluded)

RICHARD HARTZ

References

1. *Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 247.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
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4. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
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Bhavani

*Father nor mother, daughter nor son are mine,
I obey no master, served am I by none,
Learning or means I have not, wife nor kin;
My refuge thou, Bhavani, thou alone!*

*Charity I have not learned, Yoga nor trance,
Mantra nor hymn nor Tantra have I known,
Worship nor dedication's covenants:
My refuge thou, Bhavani, thou alone!*

*Virtue is not mine nor holy pilgrimage,
Salvation or world's joy I have never won,
Devotion I have not, Mother, no vows I pledge:
My refuge thou, Bhavani, thou alone!*

(Translation by Sri Aurobindo of a portion of a
Sanskrit hymn by Sri Shankara. *The Translations*, SABCL, Vol. 8, p. 212.)

MONSIEUR AND MADAME FRANÇOIS MARTIN IN PONDICHERY

(Continued from the issue of May 2004)

I

FRENCH SETTLEMENTS IN INDIA BECOME A REALITY

FOR the famous essayist Montaigne, in 16th century France, to have travelled by horse-carriage from one district to another ('département' in French), was like coming to know the world better. "Travel maketh a man," had said Sir Francis Bacon, as an all-time truth for human nature. What an adventurous undertaking it must have seemed at that time, simply to think of a sea-voyage which was bound to last for about a year.... And yet, during the reign of Francis I (1515-1547) two ships had set sail from Rouen with the intention of reaching India—which never happened. They did not come back. No one knew where they disappeared.

But the French seemed quite keen on knowing more about this new country where other European nations had already established some trading posts in one form or another. By 1609 a book was published on a voyage to India,—the first of its kind in French. It was written by François Martin de Vitré during the reign of Henry IV (1589–1610). The author describes the costumes of the people, the laws of this new country, the animals he had seen there. He speaks of the aromatic herbs and spices used in the local food or medicines. He explains in detail a strange malady, a disease that is contracted often by those who came to these lands—namely, scurvy. He also mentions the type of fruits that were eaten in these regions of the world.... Everything appeared so strange, so different from what they were used to in France! And yet, humanly speaking, houses, vegetables, cereals and fruits served the same purpose as anywhere else in the world. We find that the writer's son, Gilles Martin, had a shop where they sold exotic goods. So, we may suppose that they had used their travels to start a family business in Paris.

Did these two Martins have anything to do with François Martin himself? We cannot say. But it is certain that the French East India Company was formed in 1642, forty-two years after the English and that it was re-structured in 1664 by Colbert, who wanted to increase overseas trade during the reign of Louis XIV. François Martin who was looking for a job to meet the expenses at home, approached Monsieur Colbert for help. He was told that the only way was to take a job in the East India Company. It was understood that part of his earnings would be sent to his wife from the Company Office itself. He was sent to Madagascar first, and then, within two years, to India, where much work had to be done. He was certainly the right person: a practical man who knew how to look at a situation from different points of view. It did not take

much time for him to be considered a dependable officer by his colleagues and the employees of the Company. As he had taken the land route to Surat a couple of times to consult the French headquarters there, he had come to know the country well and had become even more indispensable to the foreigners in Pondicherry. His memoirs show how observant he was and sensitive to all that was around him. His thoughts go beyond the mere present. The people of the land were to him simply the human aspect of the work he had in view.

François Martin who had met Sivaji in connection with the French trade from Pondicherry, was sent by the Company in 1683, after Sivaji's death, to buy a piece of land. The Kingdom of Gingee spent much time over negotiations and eventually agreed to sell a village to the French where they could build their houses and their own factory.

On studying the charts and records of the time we can situate it near the present-day Town Hall (Mairie), only approximately—for, no one can imagine what the place was like in those days! The whole topography was totally different: a hundred and fifty-odd-metres-wide beach, hamlets interspersed with bushy woods infested with foxes and snakes, and near the backwaters, inhabited islands like a small Archipelago, where boats were used for communication. The cultivated areas were mostly rice fields. Rows of coconut and palm trees were quite a common sight.

Many people consider François Martin to be the founder of Pondicherry; but it has been established that he was only the founder of the French town here—"It is absolutely certain," says Madame Gaebelé, "that Pondicherry was already an established place with a large enough population when François Martin came to live here with his family. It had separate sectors for the various professions, two mosques and three temples, all of which goes to prove the importance of the place in the 17th century, but its people were mostly Hindus. The memoirs of François Martin himself, confirmed by Professor Jouveau-Dubreuil's work on the subject, agree quite conclusively on that one point: Martin had created the European township here, he was not the founder of Pondicherry."

But, there was in his time a constant interaction with the rest of the inhabitants of the place, so, a proper rapport had to be developed. The existing merchant class wanted to make the most of the foreign traders who used the sea-routes: they had to tap this possibility to the maximum, each one in his own interest.... There were merchants for calico cloth, others for precious stones, or spices and all of them in exchange brought French goods, wine, porcelain, silk, perfumes. Some of these products could also have come in boats from Bengal or Surat. Oil must have been produced from groundnut and other seeds. In the 17th century many people used animal and fish fat for lamps. They had also important connections for dealings in precious and semi-precious stones, lac and corals which had to be imported from the Far-East and only the best were sent to France... The local businessmen were always keen on getting the better deal and vied with each other for using the French boats in Pondicherry.

By 1685, the French East India Company decided to divide its administration into two sectors for obvious practical and political reasons. Their factory in Surat had been secured by 1668, but Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor in Delhi, was trying to extend his sway further South. His armies were constantly approaching the smaller kingdoms in the Deccan: the land route to Surat was becoming more and more dangerous. On the other hand, the Marathas of Gingee were quite a power to reckon with. Golconda, Bijapur and the other sultanates were all similarly affected; the French sympathised with some of them and did not intend to stop their trade in those regions.

Their administration would therefore function in two units. Henceforth, as mentioned earlier, one, in the North, run by Pilavoine from Surat, and the other, in the South from Pondicherry, under François Martin. This unit would include all the French settlements on the Coromandel Coast and the ones further inland, as well as those in Bengal. As all these places had to be looked after from Pondicherry, Martin decided to make of this town a worthy capital for the French settlements he was going to be in charge of.

It would have to be built up from scratch and vie with Surat in the North. The materials to be used were quite other than those in the North; the people and their customs in the South were very different also. That was the problem to be solved. Planning and organising a new township was quite an adventure, a challenge he was ready to shoulder. For the business side, he had his allies and collaborators among the officers of the Company who saw eye to eye with him. But the connection with the others – merchants, soldiers, missionaries, etc. was another very important aspect of the work. He felt that his wife would be able to do that job to perfection if she were with him in India, for Martin decided to build a French factory as impressive as the one in Surat.

He wrote to her saying that it was at last time to make her wish to be with him come true. He was about to take up a new responsibility, the way was unknown to him, they would have to face the problems as and when they occurred and work everything out together.

By 1686, his wife and quite by chance his daughter too were with him in Pondicherry. They worked together constantly, helping to make his dream come true: to bring the complex fraternity of their compatriots and others of the Company personnel together. They wanted to make this place a haven of safety for the French settlers, like a home away from their own motherland.

*

Note 1

In the years that followed, gradually the commercial side had given place to the political but an 18th century record shows that the cargo carried by a French boat

The Phoenix included 1000 bales of cotton, Red Wood, Cane, Pepper and Coffee from the Isles of Bourbon.

A historical record of ships sailing out of France shows that:

in 1741 —	out of 16 ships from France	6	were directed towards India
in 1742 —	”	7	” 2 ”
in 1744 —	”	9	” 4 ”
in 1745 —	”	8	” 2 ”

Note 2

Having started their business from early 16th century (1509), the Portuguese were already well-established in their trade with India. But they could not stop the harassment created by the Dutch and the English boats on their way to the East. Eventually, in 1592, the English privateers brought a Portuguese vessel to their harbour in Dartmouth. Only then did the merchants come to know for the first time what were the Indian goods these people were secretly importing. Out of the 150 thousand pounds from the sale of that cargo the Queen got the largest share. The catalogue gave a good picture of the wealth of the East—spices, drugs, silks, calicos, quilts, carpets and colours... That was the beginning of English trade in India. Eight years of experience led to the formation of the British East India Company in 1600.

II

MADAME MARTIN COMES TO INDIA

A woman in her forties, with grandchildren to fill her older days, Madame Martin found this new turn in her life rather sudden—to say the least. She, of course, wanted it to happen but when the time came, the physical details became poignantly clear. However, the preparations for the departure with her daughter Marie were under way when they busied themselves to find sufficient information regarding the place they were going to. The East Indian Company Office in Paris instructed them about everything they would need for their stay in Pondicherry, but warned them that they were to represent the king and the country. The decorum to be maintained in the house of the elected Governor had to equal that of royalty. They had to appear in the eyes of the natives as real princesses! So everything in their wardrobe had to do justice to France.

They were to board a ship, the *Royale*, at Port Louis in the north of France,

where the earlier director, M. Pilavoine, was to meet them and be with them till they reached Surat in India. On the 22nd of April the ship set sail and they had many questions to ask. Pilavoine told them about François Martin, his loyalty and perseverance, the strange habits of the people, the heat and the type of houses they would be living in.... Marie found it difficult to imagine that they were going to stay in a place so little known to most French people!

Often, a certain M. Deslandes joined them. He was also working with Martin and the conversation became lively—other questions, more answers, more stories came to light.... Once Governor Baron in Surat had sent Pilavoine and Martin to unload cargo from a boat caught in the sandbanks. When they came to the spot they found the masts of the ship were almost touching the ground. But the rescue squad was asked to wait while the Bishop and the priests on board knelt down in prayer. Within an hour the masts slowly straightened up and the captain could manage to steer the boat towards the deep sea. During the journey the two women were naturally given special attention; they sat at the captain's table along with Pilavoine and the four missionaries who were travelling by the same ship to India. Madame Martin who was a religious-minded person enjoyed their company, but knew instinctively that being part of a privileged group had its duties, one of which was to look after the needs of the other people.

The crossing of the equator from south to north was an important occasion and called for an elaborate ceremony. If the ship was doing the journey for the first time, it had to be re-baptised. The *Royale* had already gone through this equator-christening earlier, so the crew had only to prepare for the get-together after lunch. The conversation on board for a few days was centred entirely on this event. Everyone was curious to know what the crew would come up with this time for the celebration. Those who had already experienced this initiation on other voyages told the other passengers what it was all about. Monsieur Pilavoine, who had seen this on several occasions, said each ship had its own way of merry-making. What Deslandes had been through on his first journey across the equator was worth listening to. In fact, everyone was quite excited about the forthcoming ceremony!

When the great day dawned, all the passengers positioned themselves as ordered by the crew: the priests, Pilavoine, Deslandes and the ladies stood with the captain, a little apart, the others had to stand as they were told... on the other deck.... Then a most weird set of characters trooped in and went round, happily showing off their fancy dress! They had decked themselves out in the funniest way possible—some had a saucepan for a hat, a ladle for a cigar and so on. They had used anything they could lay hands on in the kitchen or the hold to design their costumes for that special day. It was simply meant to make the others laugh; but it showed at the same time what they thought of those who lounged in their deck-chairs smoking cigars, while the sailors slogged all hours of the day to make the journey safe and comfortable. There was no malice in their fun, so everyone had a hearty laugh. The most effective

costume was that of the saintly Hermit who looked more like a Carnival Devil than a monk! Everything he wore was made up of old riggings rotting in the hold—two rusty old hooks to attach the anchor to the ropes stood out like horns on his head, the gospel in his hand was evidently the ‘atlas’ he had picked up from the captain’s cabin and his rosary was a long chain of sailor’s knick-knacks strung together! He walked pontifically up to the priests, blessing them and their entourage while the crew splashed water shouting, “*Vive le Roy*” in a full-throated din. This was their way of sparing the dignitaries from getting wet. The captain and his friends laughed their heads off at the simple-hearted comedy enacted in front of them.

The crew was quite satisfied with the effect and the real ceremony began after that as the monk strutted down the deck to his assistant seated on an upturned barrel. Though his black robe and cowl were less elaborate, his function was more important, so to say. He was evidently a sort of treasurer who had to note down whatever gift the crew received from the passengers that day. The black table in front of him was made of two long planks on which a huge basin was displayed. After the dignitaries the passengers were expected to file past this honest devotee of the deck and leave a gift in the basin—for the crew.... Those who were to receive the ‘crossing of the line’ baptism were given a hearty wetting with specially coloured water from a huge bucket hanging in the middle of a pole held ably by two sailors. Soon the water game became a hullabaloo amid shouts of “*Vive le Roy*”—but everyone present fully enjoyed the joke of the hard-working crewmembers that afternoon. The captain then called them to attention and ordered one and all to change and come to the dining saloon to enjoy a special ‘toast’ for the day... it was a wonderful party and all on board felt happy to be together.

For sailors a sea voyage is common everyday duty. But for those who, like Madame Martin, were on their first voyage by sea, it was like entering a world of wonders where everything was new. The morning prayers in the hall, followed by the sermon, were the only link to her earlier life—and it was a great relief. These religious thoughts made her see the changing colours of the ocean, the sunsets and the stars at night—even the squally weather—in another way. They revealed the infinite variety of the universe. They were to her like a homage to God, the Creator, whose endless bounty had given so much to mortals on earth.

Even before a full fortnight was over, seagulls and other birds announced the approaching shores of Madagascar and the Bourbon Isles. Their ship anchored. Some of the passengers had reached their destination. They climbed down with their bags and baggage.... The captain decided to spend a few weeks there in order to avoid the monsoon out at sea. The Martin ladies were requested to be guests in the house of a French family who welcomed them in their midst very willingly. It gave them a taste of what French colonies of the time were like in reality. They had to stay there most probably till September 1685. Then their ship set sail for Ceylon.

Rich in timber, natural vegetation and elephants, Colombo has always had a

special charm for newcomers. It was at that time a Dutch colony. The ship, after exchanging cargo and completing the usual duties, set sail northwards along the Malabar Coast. At times, some on board wondered if they would ever reach Surat—the progress always seemed to slow down for one reason or another. Either the wind was too high or it was too calm and the ship had to stop again and again waiting for fair weather. But the green forests, the high cliffs of the Western Ghats with their unexpected waterfalls filled the hours for those admiring eyes which knew how to visualise the rich scenery against the strange azure background of the Arabian Sea.

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Eventually it was in February 1686 that they anchored at the jetty near Surat. The ladies on the deck must have sought eagerly that one figure they had been talking about throughout their journey. For, François Martin himself was to be there to receive them.... Yes, there he was. When he introduced them to those around him, they realised how much the others respected him. Madame Martin found him sunburnt and mature; his position and work must have made him appear stern but she knew at heart, that he was as benign as ever. It is said that even after twenty years Madame Martin had retained quite a bit of her charm and beauty, but Marie was no more that little doll of a girl who had said, “Papa, when will you come back home?” that year. She was now a young woman in her twenties who had to connect all that she had heard about her father with the person who stood in front of her. But it did not take long to feel familiar and François Martin noted with characteristic restraint in his diary: “It is not easy to speak of the joy and satisfaction that I felt on rejoining my family, a part of it, after such a long absence.”

The division of the French administration into two parts—one for Surat and one for Pondicherry meant that a whole organisation had to be started from scratch, so Pilavoine and Martin had to check all the cargo ear-marked for the new factory at Pondicherry. The ladies were left on their own, so Marie and her mother busied themselves in the rooms they were given for their short stay in Surat. They had again noticed how much Martin was respected by his colleagues and were proud of him... But everything else seemed unfamiliar—the brown faces of the people, the bullock-carts, palanquins and elephants. The horses, of course, were very impressive, mostly of Persian breed, as in France, but their tall and gaunt riders in gaudy coloured turbans looked more like pictures than real people.... The pell-mell in the streets, the loud voices in which people spoke amused them.... Nevertheless, it was like being in another world where they could not yet reach out to the reality of life around them.

One important development was the engagement of Marie with Boureau Deslandes. After visiting the unfamiliar bazaars mother and daughter managed to buy an enviable enough trousseau. This also gave them an opportunity to see different areas of the city so familiar to the Europeans there. Everyone seemed to have carried

the impression that Surat was a place where people knew how to live. They could not take their minds away from a certain monument. It came back every now and then in their conversation. It was a beautiful palace with white colonnades reflected in the greenish water of a pond that encircled it. They had visited the palace with Martin. It was built, it seems, at the caprice of a legendary princess—and what a priceless caprice!

Surat, according to all these accounts, was the most beautiful city in India: twelve-foot-wide walls surrounded the main township; it had several porches flanked on either side by a tower. Trumpets boldly announced from these the hour of the day. They also served to keep watch over the surroundings.

Bellanger de Lespinay speaks about the picturesqueness of the city. Its palm-lined avenues and numerous fountains gave it a freshness even in the hot summer months of this land. He it is who first wrote about the charming palace with white colonnades reflected so delicately in the greenish water of a pond.

Then there were also the missionaries: The abbot Guyon had published a history of India in 1720, in which he described the roads of Surat paved with porcelain which were artistic beyond imagination. The walls of some houses were decorated with incrustated designs. The bamboo curtains on the windows shut out the harsh rays of the sun better than cloth; in the houses of the rich these were decorated with beads and pearls. The roofs were flat, allowing people to walk about in the cooler breeze of the evening.

The engagement ceremony of Marie with Deslandes went off well. It gave much pleasure to all and sundry. For the two persons for whom it marked a new phase of their life, the day was very significant. Every gesture of goodwill was remembered. Pilavoine and François Martin as the first Governors of the French settlements in South India and Bengal were also about to open a new page in the history of the French in India.

Then at last it was time to leave Surat and Pilavoine's entourage and look forward to a life of their own. They took the boat *Saint Louis* which as usual rounded the Cape Comorin and at last sailed due north along the Coromandel Coast. It was a good occasion to show Madame Martin the main landmarks all along the shore. At first, the pretty little town of 'Tranquebar' occupied by the Danes; then, Porto Novo, the Portuguese stronghold; after that, the famous temple of Chidambaram made of granite blocks placed one over the other, recalling the Roman architecture in Europe; the fort of Tevenanpatnam was seen next, built by the Dutch—renamed afterwards 'Fort Saint David' by the English. The flat landscape of this coast, green with vegetation had a charm of its own, clearly distinct from the other places along the Arabian Sea.

When at last they reached their destination on the 20th of May, it was too warm to go ashore. So they remained on board in the midst of waters sparkling in the afternoon sun. The Catamarans of the fishermen flitted all around them; two or three

miles away in the deep waters were narrow raft-like boats. Some of them had a triangular sail made of hay; the men managed to keep themselves afloat and were carried so fast with the wind that they looked like birds on a strange seascape. This view was worth admiring while the ship lay at anchor in this natural port of the bay till the heat of the sun became less unbearable. After that a string of flat-bottomed boats were seen hovering round the ship. They were waiting to ferry the people ashore. The women were rather unwilling to step into the one chosen by Martin, but with some help they managed to settle in it. The sides were high enough to stop the splashing of the water into the boat. Seeing their pale faces, Martin tried to divert them by telling them about his first ride to the shore when he had actually fallen overboard. The beach was long and difficult to cover on foot, so the ladies were carried in palanquins till they reached the street where the factory was situated.

Madame Martin noticed that the walls had canons fitted on terraced elevations. The house itself though two-storeyed had a thatched roof—it was much smaller than the one they had stayed in at Surat. She understood at one glance that all had to be done here from scratch, but that was for later on. After refreshments, accommodation was arranged somehow for the four of them, and they retired for the night, the last one was now Madame François Martin, the ‘Parisienne’.

Within a fortnight of their arrival, the Governor of Madras sent a delegation of two Englishmen and the third French Consul to pay formal compliments to the Martins for their safe journey from Surat. Speaking of that first most unexpected reception, Martin wrote, “We spent the day in feasting.” The Englishmen had left that very evening and the return visit to Madras was paid by Deslandes, Martin’s son-in-law and two other officers of the Company. “They were well received and given as much formal honour as possible,” noted Martin in his book.

It took Madame Martin about a year to make the place look like a well-organised household. The factory met its regular demands from its own poultry and kitchen garden, where herbs from France were specially cultivated. The Governor received now and then at his table different people from the town—residents or officers of the Company. These friendly meetings created a bond of solidarity between those connected with his work. Whenever a French vessel was anchored here they invited the captains and the crew members by turns—for they had their duty on board—this became the best way to get news from France and to send gifts to their family members at home.

The two women sometimes visited the weekly Tuesday market. They enjoyed these excursions. More than ten thousand people seemed to be around, buying provisions for their homes. Muslins and brocades from the north along with the coarser cotton of the south, gold chains, silver anklets, earrings and pendants, this bazaar had everything, from clay pots to coconuts and vegetables of all sorts! The merchants wrote their accounts on strips of dry palm leaves tied at one end. The French always discovered new ways of using the local material at the factory, which made their

everyday life more interesting. Mother and daughter dropped into the houses of the soldiers every now and then and during the walks they took in the beauty of the setting sun. Most of the soldiers had married girls of Portuguese origin. The young Portuguese women cherished the help brought by the two French ladies to work out their household problems, whether it concerned food or childcare. As Madame Martin was an older person without any prejudice against them, she could advise them on family matters, including typical French likes and dislikes.

There were about a hundred people of European origin living in Pondicherry at that time. Their white-washed houses stood out quite distinctly around the Governor's factory. These expatriates were all brought together and bound by a bond of friendly trust, thanks to the general benevolence of the Governor and his wife. It was certainly their upright life and genuine self-giving which laid the first foundation of the European settlement in Pondicherry. Their success or achievement could not be measured by external historical data. It was essentially based on an intelligent and sensitive approach to the variety of people around them: first, those who were part of the immediate functions of the Company—both French compatriots and natives who served them—some of them as interpreters; secondly, those merchants of different religions and origins whose products were exported; thirdly, the soldiers of the French army, many of whom had settled in Pondicherry; and last, but not the least, the missionaries of two different orders of the Church who had come to establish here a religion which preached goodwill and benevolence.

(To be continued)

AMITA SEN

Usually one works for one's own profit and satisfaction; instead of that, one should work to serve the Divine and express His will.

The Mother

(CWM, Vol. 14, p. 323)

THE DUTCH TOWN PLAN OF PONDICHERRY

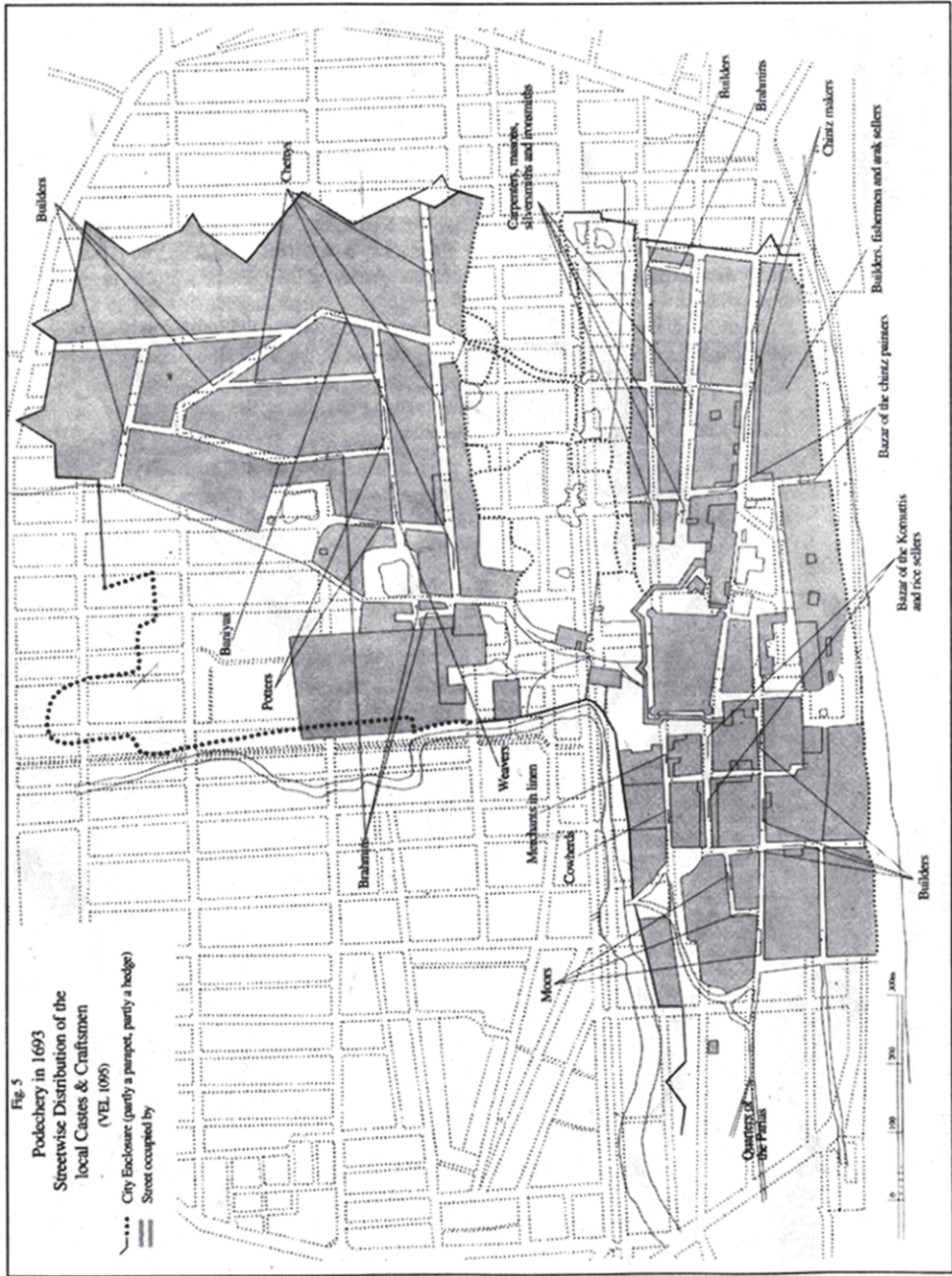
“I AM afraid that my French colleagues will curse me as I have demolished one of their cherished beliefs,” grins Jean Deloche. “But the proofs are irrefutable. The town plan of Pondicherry is Dutch, not French, and also not Indian.” His recent publication, *Origins of the Urban Development of Pondicherry According to Seventeenth Century Dutch Plans* documents this discovery.

French historians always held that the modern gridiron plan of Pondicherry originated in the period between 1724 and 1735, and that its urban spirit of ‘order and regularity’ expressed a successful achievement of ‘l’esprit français’, the French Cartesian mind. Some Indian historians consider that Pondicherry was built according to the principles of the ancient Hindu treatises of architecture, particularly the Shilpa Shastra, and that the town plan is a classic example of the *prastara* type of Vedic town. But a detailed analysis of the Dutch plans of Pondicherry dating from the end of the seventeenth century (1693-1694) preserved in the National Archives at The Hague, the Netherlands, established beyond doubt that the orthogonal street pattern of the town is a creation of the Dutch. Their survey plans of 1693 detail the irregular street pattern that existed in the then French settlement. In the plans drafted in 1694 by the Dutch town-planner Jacob Verbergmoes one finds the design of a large new town, with a very regular geometric layout, rectangular blocks of houses, separated by straight streets and intersecting at right angles. This great urban project of the Dutch East India Company was later adopted by the French who, during the first half of the 18th century, systematically carried out the extensive straightening of the streets into the planned grid.

“Here at the *Institut Français* we had always wondered about the origins of the town,” says Deloche. “But my colleagues Pierre Pichard and Françoise l’Hernault never got very far in their research. Then l’Hernault passed away, later Pichard left and I was left alone.

“We had heard about the existence of the Dutch maps, and the Dutch National Archives had even sent us photos, but the legends were in old Dutch and illegible. Then, one day, Mr. Jan Lohman [a member of Auroville International The Netherlands, eds.] dropped in. When he expressed his interest in old cities, I told him he was a godsend, and that I needed a person who could visit the Dutch National Archives and get me all the details. Six months later I received from him all I needed, in great detail with translations of the legends. And then I discovered that everything which has been published about the French origins of the town of Pondicherry was wrong.”

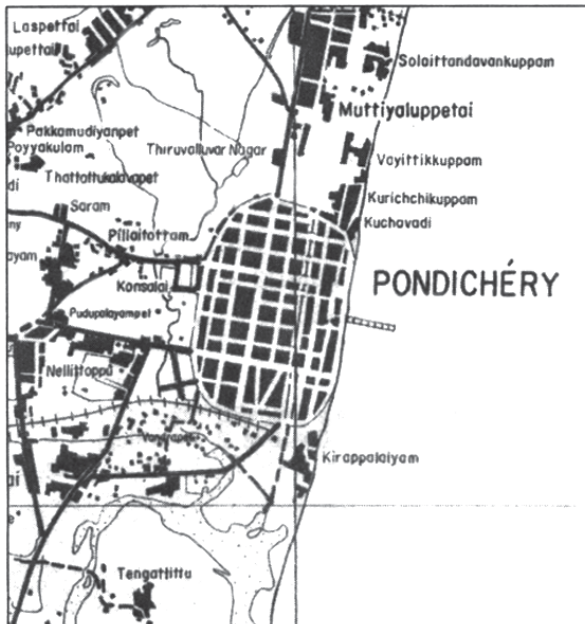
The first Europeans to come to Pondicherry were probably the Danes, who arrived as early as 1653. Old French documents speak about ‘the Danish house’ built with bricks. In 1673, François Martin, who is considered the founder of Pondicherry, arrived. He paid Raja Ram, the ruler of Senji (Gingee), to be allowed to build a fort in Pondicherry. But events in Europe influenced the happenings in the colonies. In



Pondicherry in 1694 according to French plans, overlaid on the present gridiron plan

1688 the Nine-Year War started. England, Spain, Brandenburg and the Dutch Republic had allied themselves against France. In September 1693 the Dutch conquered Pondicherry, took François Martin prisoner and sent him back to France. Pondicherry would remain in their possession for five and a half years. During that period, the Dutch enlarged the territory under their control by purchasing a few villages from Raja Ram and planned a new town, based on a grid pattern. However, following the Peace Treaty of Rijswijk between the warring parties in 1699, Pondicherry was returned to the French and François Martin came back. “But the Dutch didn’t want to surrender the entire territory,” recounts Deloche. “They argued that the treaty of Rijswijk provided for the return of the city and the fort, but said nothing about the villages the Dutch had bought from the ruler. Finally François Martin had to pay the Dutch to get rid of them.”

The Dutch had developed a unique trading system. They would purchase cloth in India, sell it in Indonesia, and from there bring spices back to Holland. “From all accounts it appears that the Dutch were intending to turn Pondicherry into their main trading post on the Coromandel Coast,” says Deloche. “They must have been very active for half of the new town was built when they left. The northern part was occupied by weavers, who constituted about 3/4th of the town’s inhabitants. They planned the city in such a way that each street was built for a specific caste or profession. The map shows streets for weavers, merchants, farmers, artisans, and Brahmins....



The map of Pondicherry showing its gridiron layout

“If I had any doubt left, the findings in the recent book *Dutch Town Planning Overseas during VOC and WIC Rules (1600-1800)* written by the Dutchman Ron van Oers, clinched the argument,” says Deloche. “Van Oers has studied all Dutch colonial settlements, and notes that they were preferably built on a strict geometrical design. He writes, ‘Where the Dutch could use it, they preferred this pattern. Symbolic of an ordered, well-managed society, hierarchical but democratic, it was emblematic for the hard-working, God-fearing Dutch Calvinists.’ Van Oers makes but a brief reference to Pondicherry, but shows that its town plan is similar to that of other Dutch colonial towns.”

“Very likely the Dutch surrendered the plans they had made of the city to the French,” continues Deloche. “For the first French town plan is a copy of the Dutch plan. Even the division of the city into ‘the white town’ and ‘the black town’ is a creation of the Dutch who wanted the white people to stay on the seashore and the Indians to the west of the canal. The French simply continued this policy. In the beginning of the 18th century, for example, they asked all the Muslims to move to the roads leading to Cuddalore. And that is probably the reason why in that area of the town you find three diagonal streets instead of the grid pattern.”

As the French started to turn Pondicherry into a big centre, a rampart was built around the city in 1724. “They had already implemented the Dutch plan. And now they made a big wall around it, rounding-off the corners. In 1820, when there was no longer any need for the rampart, they flattened it and turned it into the boulevard surrounding Pondicherry. And that is how Pondicherry got its oval shape.”

Pondicherry, said the French documents of the beginning of the 18th century, is becoming a beautiful town with straight streets ‘according to the ancient plans’. But nowhere was it mentioned that the ancient plans were Dutch. For the Dutch did not leave any particular monuments. “Probably, they simply didn’t have time,” concludes Deloche.

CAREL

(Courtesy: *Auroville Today*)

ALSO MY FALL

Not a moment of peace.
Not a moment of quiet.
Where has your silence gone to this night?
Flashes of past and words of tomorrow,
Tales of disaster and all the world's sorrow
That move me to tears, not the kind I enjoy.
It's all maya I know, the adversary's play.
I know. But what good does that do
If I in my folly have let go of you!
But if in my folly I have loosened my grip
How is it that you me have let slip?
Acrobat with no net, I'm launched into space
And I try to catch hold in a desperate race.
I'm alone, with no one to catch me up here in mid-air
And I fall and I fall with arms stiff and outstretched.
I let go, with closed eyes join my hands: Lord let it be so.
Then out of the dark depths I am tenderly fetched
And pulled into Light
And to your peace am restored.
You are my net and my safety O Lord...
Lord you are my all.
You are also my fall.

MAGGI

BETWEEN THE ARRIVAL AND THE DEPARTURE

(Nolinikanto Sarkar, a man of versatile talents,—singer, poet, writer, editor, actor and above all a notable wit—had been in contact with Sri Aurobindo from an early age, either directly or indirectly. In his long life, spanning ninety memorable years, he had been very close to most of the famous people of Bengal of his time including such stalwarts as Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, Barindra Kumar Ghose and Kazi Nazrul Islam. The Mother gave him permission to join the Ashram in the year 1948 with his entire family. He worked in the Ashram Press and taught Bengali in the Ashram School, charming all around him with his irrepressible ready wit and humour. On the serious side, his mantric hymn on Sri Aurobindo, Kanakajyoti kalebara dhari, set to a sublime tune by Dilip Kumar Roy, is a phenomenal achievement. The following excerpts from his Bengali autobiography Asa Jaoar Majhkhane have been selected keeping in mind what will be of particular interest to the readers of Mother India.)

THERE was no mistake in the date of my arrival. I came to this earth on 28th September 1889. The eminent astrologer who had cast my horoscope had also fixed the date of my departure. But I have somehow managed to bypass that fateful sixty-fifth year and reach my present milestone of a nonagenerian... When I was born, the two great luminaries of Bengal, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee were both alive but moving towards their setting, whereas the eastern sky was brightening with the advent of Rabindranath Tagore, the new sun in the firmament of Bengali literature.

Ishwarchandra died on 29th July 1891. His funeral pyre burnt not only in the burning ghat of Nimtola, it burnt in the heart of the entire population of Bengal. There are many memorable accounts of the passing of this great soul, but I would like to mention the one recorded by Kuladacharan Brahmachari in his book *Sri Sri Sadgurusanga*. Saint Bejoykrishna Goswami was in his Ashram in Dhaka with all his disciples. Kuladacharan writes: “July 29, Wednesday. Around one o’clock in the afternoon Sri Bejoykrishna Goswami suddenly looked up with a start and stared at the north-western sky, exclaiming all the while, ‘Oh, how beautiful, how beautiful! How many yellow banners are flying! The whole sky is bright with a golden light. There are beautiful heavenly maidens everywhere. They are fanning Vidyasagar, the ocean of virtues. The apsaras are entertaining him with their music and dance. They are all accompanying the great soul on his journey to heaven. O, sing the name of Hari!’ Soon we got the news that Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar had left his body earlier on that day.”

This account may seem incredible to a rational materialist. But I believe it. I

have had the good fortune to come in close contact with many great men blessed with this kind of inner vision ...

*

It was the year 1893. I was four years old. 1893 is a memorable landmark in the spiritual history of India. On February 2 of this year Sri Aurobindo returned to India from the West to fulfil his mission of liberating India as well as the world, and on May 13 of this very year, Swami Vivekananda carried the spiritual message of India to the West and gave the clarion call in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago: *śrinvantu viśve amṛtasya putrāḥ*.

The next year on April 8, 1894, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee left his body. Soon after his passing, Sri Aurobindo wrote seven articles in the Bombay Weekly, *Induprakash*, under the pseudonym 'By a Bengali'. From July 16 to August 27, 1894 they appeared serially in the *Induprakash*. These articles make it amply clear that Sri Aurobindo had acquired sufficient knowledge of the Bengali language and its literature even during his stay in England. In the course of writing on Bankim Chandra, Sri Aurobindo had touched upon many other eminent writers of Bengal, such as, Ram-mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Ishwar Chandra Gupta, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Akshaykumar Dutta, Rajendralal Mitra, Dinabandhu Mitra, Rajnarain Bose, Hem Chandra Bannerjee, Kaliprasanna Ghose, Nabin Chandra Sen, Kamini Roy, Swarnakumari Devi, *et al.* He had given a detailed analysis of and insight into Bankim Chandra's works and compared him favourably with well-known European novelists. In certain respects he did not hesitate to give a higher station to Bankim Chandra. Not only the genius of Bankim Chandra, he had also acknowledged the genius of Michael Madhusudan and accorded it due respect.

In *Our Hope in the Future*, the last article published in the *Induprakash*, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Bankim and Madhusudan have given the world three noble things. They have given it Bengali literature, a literature whose princelier creations can bear comparison with the proudest classics of modern Europe. They have given it the Bengali language. The dialect of Bengal is no longer a dialect, but has become the speech of Gods, a language unfading and indestructible, which cannot die except with the death of the Bengali nation and not even then. And they have given it the Bengali nation; a people spirited, bold, ingenious and imaginative, high among the most intellectual races of the world, and if it can but get perseverance and physical elasticity, one day to be high among the strongest. This is surely a proud record. Of them it may be said in the largest sense that they, being dead, yet live. And when Posterity comes to crown with her praises the Makers of India, she will place her most splendid laurel not on the sweating

temples of a place-hunting politician nor on the narrow forehead of a noisy social reformer but on the serene brow of that gracious Bengali who never clamoured for place or for power, but did his work in silence for love of his work, even as nature does, and just because he had no aim but to give out the best that was in him, was able to create a language, a literature and a nation. (SABCL, Vol. 3, p. 102).

*

In the year 1906 we felt a new trend in the thought process of the nation. From Baroda Sri Aurobindo (then Aurobindo Ghose) came to Calcutta. Many articles appeared in various newspapers eulogising him. He had resigned his lucrative service in Baroda to accept the poorly paid position of Principal of the newly established National College. Two unique periodicals made their appearance in 1906 itself: the *Bande Mataram* in English and the *Yugantar* in Bengali. From our village, our Shrishda subscribed to the *Yugantar*. We became its avid readers. To our young minds the *Yugantar* revealed the true nature of the nationalist movement. Until now by nationalism we had understood the swadeshi movement, that is, rejection of foreign goods—not to use white sugar, not to wear clothes made in England, etc. The *Yugantar* spoke of many other things. It spoke of the end to the British rule in India. It hinted at an armed revolution. In some of the articles we read each letter was like a spark. Two serialised essays, *Mukti Kon Pathe* (Which is the Path to Freedom?) and *Bartaman Rananiti* (The Present Strategy of War), indirectly suggested that we should prepare ourselves for an armed revolution. Sri Aurobindo's fiery articles in the *Bande Mataram* were most inspiring ...

*

Sri Aurobindo, Barindra Kumar Ghose, Upendranath Banerjee, Debobrata Basu (later known as Swami Prajnananda) and Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar used to write for the *Yugantar*. Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya was the manager. Soon enough the baleful eye of the Government fell on this publication. In July 1907 the police raided the *Yugantar* Office. The warrant was against the editor. But who was the editor? The laws of the day did not make it compulsory to print the editor's name in the body of the journal. Finally, Sri Bhupendranath Dutta, the younger brother of Swami Vivekananda, was recognised as the editor of the *Yugantar*. The magistrate, Mr. Kingsford, sentenced him to one year's imprisonment with hard labour. The printer got two years. Next, the Governmental ire turned on the *Sandhya* and the *Bande Mataram*. The comments that Sri Aurobindo used to make in the editorials of the *Bande Mataram* were not music to the ears of the rulers. Moreover, the British publications, such as *The Englishman*, made it a point to incite the Government against Sri Aurobindo.

In the *Bande Mataram* Sri Aurobindo had boldly declared:

We want absolute autonomy free from British control... A free national Government unhampered by foreign control... Absolute Swaraj—self-government as it exists in the United Kingdom.

No leader ever dared to utter such words in those days.

The British were looking for an excuse. In the editorial of one of the issues of the *Bande Mataram* they smelt conspiracy. The periodical did not carry the name of the editor. Yet Sri Aurobindo was accused of sedition as the writer of that article.

Some time back, Bepin Chandra Pal was the prime mover of the *Bande Mataram*. He was still closely associated with it. He was a truthful, religious man, respected for his integrity. He would surely know who the author of that editorial was and he would not lie. The Government summoned him as a witness. The case came up for trial. The accused, Sri Aurobindo, and the witness for the prosecution, Bepin Chandra, were both present in the court. The Government pleader showed the article to Bepin Chandra and asked, “Do you know who has written this article?” Bepin Chandra kept quiet. The question was repeated. Bepin Chandra was silent. “Is Aurobindo Ghose the author of this editorial?” Bepin Chandra maintained his silence. For contempt of court Bepin Chandra was sentenced to six months’ imprisonment. And Sri Aurobindo was set free on September 23, for lack of evidence. Rabindranath Tagore wrote his famous poem “Namaskar” and felicitated Sri Aurobindo:... “He who came on the earth with the lamp of God in his hand, which king can ever punish such a Divine Messenger?”...

The very day that Sri Aurobindo was released, the trial of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, the much revered editor of the *Sandhya*, began. But this trial did not last long. On the very first day during the hearing, Brahmabandhav had declared that he did not accept the jurisdiction of a British court. He was a sannyasin. It was beyond the power of the British to imprison him. The prophecy of this saintly man proved to be true. While awaiting trial he fell ill. He was transferred to the Campbell Hospital for treatment. There he breathed his last on October 27, 1907. Incidentally, Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya was a great admirer of Sri Aurobindo. His seer’s eye had already recognised the future yogi. His famous essay on Sri Aurobindo is regarded as a masterpiece of Bengali literature.*

We read about these exciting events of the day in various newspapers and felt deeply stirred. We learnt that during Sri Aurobindo’s trial the courtroom was overcrowded, especially by young students who were eager to hear Bepin Chandra Pal’s evidence. Soon there was the inevitable clash between the students and the police. A fifteen-year-old boy, Sushilchandra Sen, shouted the slogan “Bande Mataram”. The magistrate, Mr. Kingsford, ordered that he should be given fifteen strokes of the cane. The *Yugantar* criticised this unjust punishment in the strongest possible terms. It even hinted at retribution.

* see Addendum

It was in this atmosphere that we village lads imbibed the spirit of nationalism. We read the *Yugantar* together. Whatever little we understood of politics we discussed heatedly. We sang patriotic songs. At this time Anukulbabu, a man in his mid-twenties, came to visit his relatives in our village. Although Anukulbabu was much older than us, he treated us as his equals. One day he took me aside and said, "I like your friends. Fine boys! I noticed that you people read the weekly *Yugantar*. What do you think of it?"

"We like it," I said.

"Do you read the letter of Yogakhyapa?"

"Of course! That's what we read first."

He asked, "What do you think of *Mukti Kon Pathe?* and *Bartaman Rananiti?*"

"I can understand something of *Mukti Kon Pathe*, but *Bartaman Rananiti* is not quite clear."

"In *Bartaman Rananiti*, the writer wants to say that when the enemy is very powerful and it is not possible to defeat him in open warfare then he must be attacked in unexpected ways! The only way to drive the British out of India is through this kind of guerrilla warfare."

I was stunned. Drive the British out of India! I asked him, "But who will fight?"

Anukulbabu answered, "Why, all of you. Don't think yourself to be weak. Hundreds of boys like you are preparing themselves. You too must come forward. Are you ready?"

As if a spell had been cast on me, I answered, "Yes, I am ready."

He said, "But for this you will have to give up everything—family, friends, even the attachment for life. If the need arises, you should be able to sacrifice your life without hesitation. Do you think you'll be able to do that?"

"Yes."

Now he asked, "Have you read the *Gita*? *Srimad Bhagavat Gita*?"

"No."

"If you read the *Gita* and follow its teachings, you will not be afraid to die. The *Gita* teaches you to surrender yourself totally to God. Then you will know that you are only an instrument that God uses. You are doing whatever He wants you to do. The more intense your surrender, the more you are freed from all bondages, even the bondage of thought."

I listened in complete silence.

"If you are ready to follow this path, you have to take some vows. One, you will not marry. Two, you will not let anybody know that you have chosen this path. This is the vow of secrecy. Three, the moment the call comes you will go wherever you may be asked to go."

"Will I be called?"

"Without any doubt." He did not say anything more. The same day he went away.

I waited for the call to come.

It was a world of novel thoughts and feelings that I now entered. Although I had not read the *Gita*, I was not unfamiliar with the idea of surrendering oneself to God. When we went to listen to the *keertan* singing, we heard of God being the only refuge. The *Yugantar* too often spoke about surrendering oneself to God. But so far they had been mere words. We did not pay them much attention. We heard them, read them, but they did not touch the soul. Today they made me sit up and think.

Now, where to find a copy of the *Gita*? On making enquiries I learnt that my friend Kshitin's (who grew up to be the famous painter Kshitindranath Majumdar) father had a *Gita* in his house. Kshitin's father, Sri Kedarnath Majumdar, regularly subscribed to all the well-known periodicals and had quite a few almirahs filled with books but he did not allow them to be taken out. One had to go to his house and read them. Since there was no other option, I decided to read the *Gita* in his house. But while looking for the *Gita*, I chanced upon a book of songs, a veritable treasure house, where I came across many Vaishnava songs which I had heard from the *Keertanias*, but had never seen in print. I forgot all about the *Gita* and immersed myself in that ocean of songs.

My new obsession with Vaishnava songs did not interfere with my love for the *Yugantar*. All the essays were exciting, the poems inspiring. The powerful criticisms of the British rule and the sharp comments thrilled us and the fiery poems stirred us. I still remember some of the lines:

My blood dances in my arteries,
My life pulsates awaiting the kiss of death...

Lines such as these made me forget even my Vaishnava poets.

But the *Yugantar* was not coming regularly any more. Due to the seditious nature of the articles it contained, the police often raided the *Yugantar* office, arrested the editor, the printer and the publisher. The printing press would be confiscated and temporarily the publication would cease. But after a few weeks it would reappear from a new address. In the course of a single year, the *Yugantar* changed its location at least eight times.

During this period newspapers began to carry news item after news item about the daredevilry of the revolutionaries. There was an attempt on the life of Sir Andrew Fraser, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal... (Later during the famous Alipore Bomb Case, the main accused, Barindra Kumar Ghose, accepted responsibility for that attempt.) On 11th April 1908 a bomb exploded in the dining room of the Mayor of Chandernagore.... But a much more serious incident was reported a few days later A bomb was thrown on the carriage of the much-hated Mr. Kingsford, the erstwhile Chief Presidency Magistrate of Bengal, who had been transferred to Muzaffarpore,

as the Chief Justice. As luck would have it, Mr. Kingsford was not in the carriage, but two English ladies, Mrs. and Miss Kennedy, who were travelling in it, were killed.

The police immediately swung into action. Next morning, on May 1, a young Bengali named Khudiram Bose was arrested from a tea stall near the railway station. A revolver was found on him. On May 2, in Mokamaghat Station a commotion broke out in a compartment of a Calcutta-bound train. Nandalal Banerjee, C.I.D. Inspector, Calcutta, was travelling in that compartment. The incidents of the two previous days were very much on his mind. A young fellow-traveller aroused his suspicion. When he began to question the young man, the latter got down from the train and tried to escape. Summoning some police constables to assist him, the inspector gave chase. The young man produced a gun, but seeing that the situation was hopeless, shot himself dead. He was Khudiram's associate. His name was Prafulla Chaki.

We hardly saw the *Yugantar* any more. Once in a while a copy came to our village. We had to depend on other dailies and weeklies for news of the outside world. Thus we learnt that the police had been very active and had arrested many people. They had raided a garden house in Muraripukur Road and taken eighteen young men, including Sri Aurobindo's younger brother, Barindra Kumar Ghose into custody. From the house No. 48, Gray Street, where the office of the weekly *Navashakti* was located, Sri Aurobindo, Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya and Sailendra Kumar Basu were arrested. There were constant police raids, searches without warrants and arrests all over Bengal. All this news made our young blood boil. Even the old men were agitated. We were told that from their searches the police had unearthed enough bombs, dynamite and other explosives to blow up the entire city of Calcutta. At this time, very unexpectedly, a copy of the *Yugantar* came our way. It was just a single sheet of foolscap paper. It contained only one poem printed in big bold type. It began:

O Mother, even before we could welcome you in, the Rakshasa has destroyed the sacred pitcher. Awake, O my Warrior Mother, once again let us worship your feet.

Between May 4 and May 19, 1908, all the arrested persons were produced before the Alipore District Magistrate, Mr. L. Birley. Led by Barindra Kumar, many of the accused made statements about their actions. Their purpose was to make their countrymen aware of their noble aim and work. Perhaps in the prison itself they had planned their statements—what to reveal and how much to reveal. But then one of their associates, Narendranath Goswami, commonly referred to as Naren Gosain, became a government approver and was ready to reveal all.

Meanwhile, the newspapers began to publish a detailed account of the trial of Khudiram Bose. Ultimately, he was sentenced to death and was hanged in Muzaffarpore jail on August 11, 1908. On that day, many of us youngsters fasted, not drinking even a drop of water, as a sign of mourning. I remember some of the

wise old men predicting to our parents that we too would soon find ourselves in jail.

Eagerly we used to wait for information of the Alipore Bomb Case, haunting the houses of those who subscribed to newspapers and periodicals. The papers were full of the evidence of the approver, Naren Gosain. He had let out many secrets. The magistrate, Mr. Birley, transferred the case to the court of the Sessions Judge. After a few days all the newspapers carried a banner headline: Naren Gosain assassinated in Alipore Jail.

We learnt the details later. For his safety and comfort, Naren Gosain had been separated from the other prisoners and lodged in the prison hospital. One of the accused, Satyendranath Basu, was suffering from a severe attack of bronchitis, he had to be hospitalised. After a few days another accused, Kanailal Dutta, developed an excruciating pain in his stomach. He too went to the hospital. On August 31, 1908 they sent word to Naren Gosain that they too wanted to turn government approver and so would like to consult him. As soon as Naren approached Satyen, the latter brought his gun out. Naren tried to escape and began running. Satyen fired. One bullet hit him in the leg and he fell down. At once Kanailal came upon him from another side and emptied his revolver into the body of Naren Gosain. (It was a mystery how they had managed to get the weapons inside the jail. Many theories have been advanced but nobody now knows for certain.) Later, when Kanailal was asked why he had kept firing even after Naren Gosain was dead, and did not save a bullet for himself, Kanailal made that historic utterance, "I wanted to make absolutely sure, because in our unfortunate country traitors do not die." The alarm bells were sounded. The guards came rushing. A court was set up in the prison itself. Both Satyen and Kanailal were sentenced to death. On November 10 and on November 21 respectively of the same year, Kanailal and Satyendranath were hanged.

In our little village we fasted to express our great respect for these two martyrs.

From the Magistrate's Court, the Alipore Bomb Case came to the Court of the Additional Sessions Judge Mr. C. P. Beachcroft. The accused were thirty-seven in number. The Prosecuting Attorney, Mr. Norton, had three other eminent lawyers to assist him. Among them was the Public Prosecutor of Alipore, Asutosh Biswas. The lawyers for the defence were Byomkesh Chakraborty, Kumudnath Chaudhury and many others. But after defending the case for a while, both Mr. Chakraborty and Mr. Chaudhury stepped down. Then the eminent barrister, Sri Chittaranjan Das, headed the team of the defence lawyers.

In the court of Mr. Beachcroft the trial began on February 12 and ended on May 6, 1909. These four months saw a series of verbal duels, some of them highly entertaining, between Mr. Norton and Sri C. R. Das. Norton's main target was Sri Aurobindo. He was determined to prove Sri Aurobindo's guilt and to that end he produced so-called evidence and precedents galore. And C. R. Das was equally determined with his brilliant counter arguments to prove Sri Aurobindo's innocence. What Sri Chittaranjan Das had said about Sri Aurobindo in his summing up will

always be regarded as a masterpiece in the history of law cases. His words were not merely the arguments of a lawyer but the utterance of a rishi to whom the future was revealed. In a strident tongue he declared:

Long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India but across distant seas and lands.

Mr. Justice Beachcroft pronounced his judgement on May 6, 1909. He sentenced Barindra Kumar Ghose and Ullaskar Dutta to death by hanging. Seventeen other accused were sentenced to imprisonment, ranging from one year to transportation for life. Sri Aurobindo and the rest were declared innocent and set at liberty.

When Barindra Kumar and Ullaskar bowed before Sri Aurobindo to bid him their last farewell, Sri Aurobindo said, "*Phansi hobe na.*" (There will be no hanging.) When the case went to the High Court on appeal, the death sentence was reversed and Barindra Kumar and Ullaskar were sentenced to transportation for life.

Immediately after he was released, Sri Aurobindo brought out two weekly magazines, the *Dharma* in Bengali and the *Karmayogin* in English. I subscribed to the *Dharma*.

*

I would like to record an event here which, although it occurred some forty years after the Alipore Bomb Case, will not be entirely irrelevant.

I had gone to Calcutta from Pondicherry and was staying with a friend. There I received an invitation card from one Mr. Kamal Chandra Chandra. The Shankaracharya of Saradamath was going to speak on Sri Aurobindo at The Sri Aurobindo Institute of Culture which Mr. Chandra had established in his house. As a member of the Ashram I was invited to attend the function.

I cannot say I was not surprised. A sannyasin who followed the teachings of Adi Shankaracharya was not expected to be attracted to the views of Sri Aurobindo. All the more so, if he himself happened to be a leader of the Shankaracharya sect. Sri Aurobindo has said many things against the Mayavada of Shankaracharya, which certainly were not appreciated by the Mayavadins. Hence my surprise. But at the same time I was curious to hear the Shankaracharya of Saradamath.

On the appointed day I went quite early to the house of Mr. Kamal Chandra Chandra. A few of my acquaintances were already there. Soon the Shankaracharya arrived. Rather short in stature, holding the mace of his office, he was accompanied by a few saffron-robed sannyasins and some other disciples. The host, Mr. Chandra,

welcomed him with due respect and escorted all of them to the conference chamber. All of us stood up and greeted him with folded hands.

After resting for a few minutes the Shankaracharya began to speak. At this distance of time it is not possible to report him verbatim. But some of the salient points that I remember, I shall narrate in my own words. He said:

It was the year 1908. I was a student then. I lived in Maharashtra. All of us young men were then followers of Balgangadhar Tilak. Our political thinking was influenced by his speeches and writings. As much as we revered Tilak Maharaj, so much was our reverence for Sri Aurobindo. If I give you just one example, you will realise how high our regard for Sri Aurobindo was. In those days we used to read the *Gita* regularly. In the *Srimad Bhagavat Gita*, wherever the word *Bhagavanuvacha* (said the Lord) occurred, we struck out that word and substituted for it in ink the words *Aurobindo Uvacha* (said Sri Aurobindo). This was what Sri Aurobindo meant to us.

He continued:

When the trial of Sri Aurobindo and the others was going on in the Magistrate's Court in Alipore, an appeal was published in the newspapers by Sarojini Ghose, Sri Aurobindo's sister. She had requested her countrymen to donate generously to meet the expenses of the trial. There was an address where the money could be sent.

After collecting some money, a friend of mine and I went to Calcutta. We had with us a letter of introduction from a well-known patriot. We located the address and handed over our small collection together with the letter of introduction to the people present there and offered our services. We were welcomed with open arms. Within a few days we were on terms of intimacy with the members of the household. We were also given a few minor responsibilities.

Everyday after finishing our work, we used to go to Alipore to attend the hearing. From the Magistrate's Court the case was transferred to the Court of the Sessions Judge, Mr. Beachcroft. The witnesses were examined and cross examined. The case reached the stage where the prosecution and the defence would do their summing up before His Honour pronounced his judgement. At this time one day a long, brown envelope was delivered to our donation collection office. On opening the envelope we found that it contained only two type-written foolscap papers. There was no covering letter, no sender's name or address. These papers contained in serial order some legal points about the Alipore Bomb Case. At once we took the papers to the house of Mr. Chittaranjan Das, the barrister who was defending Sri Aurobindo.

On reading the document, Mr. Das appeared greatly astonished.

"Who has sent it?" he asked.

We answered, “There was no communication in the envelope. Only these two sheets. But what do they contain?”

“They contain everything. To get all these facts and legal points would have meant at least a week’s hard work of searching through law books and going through all the evidence. Whoever has sent these papers is, without doubt, a very clever and highly qualified lawyer. But who is he?”

We returned to our office from Mr. Das’ house and began to speculate. Who had sent those typed sheets? What we gathered from Mr. Das’ words was that unless somebody was thoroughly conversant with the case it would not have been possible for him to obtain such vitally important information. The whole affair was strange. And stranger still was the fact that the sender, who was evidently our well-wisher, was unwilling to disclose his name! After much rumination we arrived at a conclusion—surely, Mr. Beachcroft himself had sent those papers. We were convinced of it.

We had heard that Sri Aurobindo and Mr. Beachcroft had appeared for their I.C.S exams together. By some quirk of fate these two fellow-students met again in the Alipore Court—one in the prisoner’s dock and the other on the chair of the judge. The final curtain of this strange drama came down with the classmate acting the role of the judge declaring ‘not guilty’ the classmate taking the role of the accused.

On that occasion, Srimad Shankaracharya spoke in a tone of deep devotion about Sri Aurobindo and told us of many such hitherto unknown incidents that happened in those memorable days.

(To be continued)

NOLINIKANTO SARKAR

(Translated by Aniruddha Sircar)

Addendum:

AUROBINDO IN MANASAROVAR

Have you seen Aurobindo, immaculate, white? The hundred-petaled lotus blooming in the Manasarovar, the sacred lake of the Mind of Mother India?

It is not the lily or the daffodil growing wild in the unkempt backyard of the foreigner without any perfume, only a show, a luxury of colours; unusable in the pooja of our household gods; worthless in our ritual sacrificial yajna: only an excessive pomp of the Englishness of the anglicised ladies and gentlemen!

This Aurobindo of ours is rare in the world. In his snow-white hue there is the divine beauty of the pure Sattvic man. He is great and noble. In the wideness of his heart, he is great. In the nobility of the Swadharma of the Hindu, he is noble. Such a complete and pure man—a core of fire like that of the thunderbolt and at the same time delicately graceful like the lotus leaf: a man so rich in knowledge, so immersed in meditation—you will never find in the three worlds. To break the chains binding our Mother India, this worthy son of the Mother, tearing off the alluring mesh of the foreign culture, sacrificing all earthly comfort and happiness, has dedicated himself to the editing of the paper, *Bande Mataram*. He is Rishi Bankim's Bhavananda, Jeevananda and Dhirananda Swami—all three in one.

Do not any more touch the journals published by the fat, hollow, whining, arrogance-drunk creatures who play second fiddle to the foreigner. Aurobindo's thoughts and feelings will flood every heart with the love of the Motherland, awaken the enthusiasm of serving the Mother. If you listen to the words of the *Bande Mataram* all your fears will disappear, your arms of flesh will be mighty as the thunder, a stream of fire will run through your veins and death will seem like a frolic of the spring. As the medicine men who specialise in snake bites, remove the poison by uttering mantras, in the same way, the mantra of the *Bande Mataram* will rid the nation of the poison of foreigner influence. You will realise that all the guns and cannons, all the jails and internments, the laws and the courts, the governors and viceroys are nothing but empty illusions. The noisy reports of the foreigner gunfire will cease in no time.

Although he was educated in England, the magic of demon temporal knowledge could not charm Aurobindo. Like the freshly bloomed autumnal lotus, Aurobindo blossomed in the greatness of his own national dharma and culture, and now he graces the lotus feet of the Mother and the Motherland like a reverent offering.

Aurobindo is not a product of the rubbish heap of the foreigner. That is why, as the true son of the Mother, he has established the Bhavani Mandir. Prostrate yourself before the Mother and utter the mantra of *Bande Mataram*. Swaraj will not be long in coming.

BRAHAMABANDHAV UPADHYAY*

(Translated by Aniruddha Sircar)

* Rabindranath Tagore had said about Brahmabandhav Upadhyay:

... (he is) "on the one hand a Roman Catholic sannyasin, on the other a vedantin—eminent, fiery, courageous, world renouncer, possessed of extraordinary talent."

HASTEN, BUT SLOWLY!

EACH one of us is born with certain innate capacities and a certain potential. During the course of life, depending upon the circumstances that happen to prevail from time to time and the opportunities that present themselves, these capacities and this potential develop and manifest in distinct ways in different individuals. Thus one person may grow up to become an architect, another a musician, a third an artist, a dancer, an engineer, a doctor, an economist, an administrator, a lawyer, a scientist, a businessman, an industrialist, an actor, a journalist, a writer, an acrobat, and so on.

It is, however, a commonly observed fact that except for the rare few who excel in their chosen fields of self-expression and action, the vast majority have to content themselves with being no more than mediocre. Most often, this is not for any lack of interest, will, application, discipline or practice, but because they seem to have reached something of a limit to the development of their capacities. It is as if in their slow and steady ascent towards the peak of excellence they find themselves on a vast plateau that practically seems to arrest their further ascent, however hard and long they may strive to progress.

The situation in the field of spiritual pursuit is no different. Most people are content with their humdrum life and do not seriously take up the spiritual quest. In general, it is only after receiving painful kicks and buffetings or meeting with a sudden calamity or tragedy that fundamental questions as to the meaning and purpose of life arise in the mind and that is when a spark of aspiration for spiritual life is lit. This quite often leads to spiritual seeking involving the reading of spiritual literature, or listening to discourses of spiritually advanced souls, perhaps visiting the ashrams of saints, sometimes attempts at regular meditation and looking for a Guru. Depending upon the sincerity and intensity of the aspiration and the kind of guidance received from books and the Guru, the individual slowly progresses. There is a gradual inner change in the person, reflected in his attitude to people and events, and reactions to situations. There is no more the kind of impulsive behaviour, bursts of anger, attacks of depression or sudden violent reactions that were so common earlier. A degree of equanimity and quiet calm prevails. These are definite signs of progress on the spiritual path.

But a time soon comes when things seemingly come to a standstill and however sincere and intense the aspiration, however hard one's effort at progress, further advance seems to be blocked for no apparent reason. Even a sense of frustration and defeat is felt. The question arises whether it is a case of "thus far and no further".

When such a stage in one's sadhana is reached, it is best to remember that spiritual fruition (not to talk about the supramental realisation) is not achieved in a single lifetime and if one has even decided to tread the spiritual path in the present life, it is precisely because some spiritual effort has preceded the present embodiment in earlier lives and it is the momentum of that effort that is presently prompting the

soul to further the sadhana from the point it had attained in the previous embodiment. And yet, that cannot be the whole picture. A complete dedication, a whole-hearted endeavour is what is asked of us as well as a total and unconditional surrender to the Divine.

Moreover, if a total unconditional surrender to the Divine is accepted as an essential part of sadhana, there can be no reason for any impatience about not attaining the spiritual goal one has set for oneself, because all that one is, all one's thoughts, feelings and actions together with their fruits are fully surrendered to the Divine. Also, annulment of the ego and abolition of all desires are conditions necessary for spiritual progress, which means the elimination even of the desire for spiritual fulfilment. This however does not mean easy complacency.

The right attitude therefore is to continue with an intense aspiration and an unflagging spiritual effort, but without any impatience for results. That is why the advice of spiritual masters to sadhaks is "Hasten, but slowly". One wonders about the apparent contradiction in the terms of this advice. It is not however without significance. "Hasten" on the strength and impulsion of the intensity of one's aspiration; "but slowly" because all (the effort together with its fruits) is surrendered to the Divine and so there is no impatience and there is no "desire" even for liberation.

B. G. PATTEGAR

The more intense the experiences that come, the higher the forces that descend, the greater become the possibilities of deviation and error. For the very intensity and the very height of the force excites and aggrandises the movements of the lower nature and raises up in it all opposing elements in their full force, but often in the disguise of truth, wearing a mask of plausible justification. There is needed a great patience, calm, sobriety, balance, an impersonal detachment and sincerity free from all taint of ego or personal human desire. There must be no attachment to any idea of one's own, to any experience, to any kind of imagination, mental building or vital demand; the light of discrimination must always play to detect those things, however fair or plausible they may seem. Otherwise, the Truth will have no chance of establishing itself in its purity in the nature.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 112-13)

TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of May 2004)

Drama and Prophecy in *Savitri*, Book X, Canto 4

SAVITRI is quite far from the world of Tagore, the world of sweetened mysticism. His heroines do not wish to rise beyond the mundane self and refuse to grow in their higher selves. Chitra's confession indicates that the woman in Tagore chooses to remain a woman instead of aspiring for the supernature:

I am Chitra. No goddess to be worshipped.... If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self.¹

The truth of this 'true self' is Tagore's own perception of life. Sri Aurobindo's Savitri searches for a wider self and grows into a vaster figure. The concept of the World Mother has not been a usual vision for Tagore. Yet, there are times in Tagore's plays, when the woman reacts to the world with a sharp feeling of pain, as in *Malini*. But then, Malini suffers from a weak psychic being inside her. One sees her incapacity as compared to the positive approach of Sri Aurobindo's heroine, who is bent on changing the complexion of the earth. Here is the helpless stance of Tagore's Malini:

Now that I have met the world face to face my heart has grown timid, and I do not know how to hold the helm of the great ship that I must guide. I feel I am alone, and the world is large, and ways are many, and the light from the sky comes of a sudden to vanish the next moment.²

Sri Aurobindo's Savitri is an embodiment of strength. She is Shakti, who saves. She is Light, who illumines. She is creatrix, who leads to the supramental victory. In Sri Aurobindo's epic, she is a rounded character evolving throughout the poem and comes out of her veil in Book X: poetry and drama come together in a moment of cosmic conflict.

The final debate of love and death sheds significant light on Sri Aurobindo's concern for material life and his vision of the future of earth, which is now a polluted and plundered planet continuously living under the shadow of death and doom. It is the most dramatic part of the epic, as the Lord of Death (Yama) puts up his final resistance against the daughter of Light, who is also Love. The speeches are long, but unlike Shelley or Tagore, Sri Aurobindo knows how to create that sense of tension, which is essential for dramatic poetry. Between the arguments and counter-arguments of Death and Savitri, there is a masterful narrator, who intensifies the cosmic tension between the two powerful forces. Death always had the final word. Only, this time it was going to end on a different note.

Love walks behind death with her claim and reaches a new landscape of despair. It is a flashback to the futile history of the earth. The narrator's voice runs to 86 lines culminating in the phrase 'fruitless labours of the worlds', which leads us to Death's viewpoint. Mind is man; beyond thought he cannot soar. He sees the greater heavens; he cannot mount to those peaks. Failing in his attempts, he seeks for Nirvana. The earth remains as it is, unchanged. How can one plant on earth the living Truth or make matter's world the home of God? Truth never appears, only the thought of Truth is our reality. We know only the name of God, not him. If there is a God, he does not care for the world. He is cool, indifferent; he enjoys the distress of man. He is solitary; he does not care for man's love. His laws are fixed. How shall the mighty Mother change his laws? Death tempts Savitri with the dreams of personal salvation, God's 'immobile peace'.

Savitri is quick to see the falsity of this argument, the false light called in to blind Truth's eyes. With the World-Mother housed within her, she cannot turn to eternal peace leaving the unchanged earth behind. And she refuses to believe that the world is cut off from Truth and God. She refers to her mind as a torch lit from the eternal sun, her life as a breath drawn from the immortal Guest and her body as the Eternal's house. Then through her mouth Sri Aurobindo, the bio-scientist and the anthropologist, sums up his theory of evolution, which indicates that man is not an end-product in Nature's lab; he is a transitional creature:

If in the meaningless Void creation rose,
 If from a bodiless Force Matter was born,
 If Life could climb in the unconscious tree,
 If green delight break into emerald leaves
 And its laughter of beauty blossom in the flower,
 If sense could wake in tissue, nerve and cell,
 And Thought seize the grey matter of the brain,
 And soul peep from its secrecy through the flesh,
 How shall the nameless light not leap on men,
 And unknown powers emerge from Nature's sleep?³

Man is entrusted with a great task, the task of creating that new species, which is bound to come because Nature cannot remain satisfied with the creation of an imperfect being. That is why Savitri is so assertive in her speech. She strongly believes that the transition from man to another new species is no utopia, as the signs of the super race are already visible on earth. Savitri stands erect before the Lord of Death and points towards herself as a living example of supernature:

I am not bound by thought or sense or shape;
 I live in the glory of the Infinite,

I am near to the Nameless and Unknowable,
 The Ineffable is now my household mate.
 But standing on Eternity's luminous brink
 I have discovered that the world was He;
 I have met Spirit with spirit, Self with self,
 But I have loved too the body of my God.
 I have pursued him in his earthly form.
 A lonely freedom cannot satisfy
 A heart that has grown one with every heart:
 I am a deputy of the aspiring world,
 My spirit's liberty I ask for all.

Death's rhetoric seeks to frustrate her. It presents a false image of Savitri's power, the image of a powerful but restless force. There is a note of threatening in Yama's directive:

Touch not the seated lines, the ancient laws,
 Respect the calm of great established things.

Savitri re-interprets the idea of calm ironically for the Lord of Death. True calm is not inertia or the suppression of the vital or a halt. The soul is on the move; it naturally yearns for the new and the unknown. Savitri responds to the directive of Death with a Blakean command:

Impose not upon sentient minds and hearts
 The dull fixity that binds inanimate things....
 Man turns to a nobler walk, a master path.

Sri Aurobindo alludes to Shelley's Prometheus in the next line with the words "I trample on thy law with living feet" and then passes on to a more powerful dramatic debate. Savitri says, "I claim from Time my will's eternity, God from his moments." Death promptly puts a rhetorical question, the question of the past ascetics who had enjoyed withdrawal:

Why should the noble and immortal will
 Stoop to the petty works of transient earth,
 Freedom forgotten and the Eternal's path?

Death mocks Savitri for having rejected the gods in favour of man. Savitri's next speech claims that God approves of her love for earth. Why are we here then? Why did he give his passion to me?

If not to achieve, to flower in me, to love,
 Carving his human image richly shaped
 In thoughts and largenesses and golden powers?

Earth was a difficult production, not heaven. Amidst the ominous masks and the terrible forces of earth, it is real greatness to create gods. Death's next speech accepts the presence of the World-Mother in Savitri, but he still goes on denying her claim. This is the most poetic speech from the Lord of Death and it images the despair of material life very convincingly. How can Truth invade the sense-life? How is it possible to integrate Matter and Spirit?

Two Powers real but to each other untrue,
 Two consort stars in the mooned night of mind
 That towards two opposite horizons gaze,
 The white head and black tail of the mystic drake,
 The swift and the lame foot, wing strong, wing broken...

Death negatives the idea that Eternal Truth may live with mortal men. He puts up a challenge before Savitri:

Or if she dwells within thy mortal heart,
 Show me the body of the living Truth
 Or draw for me the outline of her face
 That I too may obey and worship her.
 Then will I give thee back thy Satyavan....
 No magic Truth can bring the dead to life,
 No power of earth cancel the thing once done.
 No joy of the heart can last surviving death,
 No bliss persuade the past to live again.

Savitri, of course, is not affected by the anaphoral "No". She wakes up into a greater light to see that Death is God and yet not he; Death is "only his own black shadow on his path". Further clarifications glorify her speech:

Two contraries needed for his great World-task,
 Two poles whose currents wake the immense World-Force.

The speech lingers to show how all contraries prepare for harmony and then to map the ladder of transcendence—(1) The Higher Mind, (2) The Illumined Mind, (3) The Intuition, and (4) The Overmind (which is a gateway to the Supermind)—and finally to indicate the role of the World Mother in the transformation of the earth-consciousness.

The Lord of Death raises his voice for the last time to challenge the 'human claimant to immortality':

Reveal thy power, lay bare thy spirit's force,
Then will I give back to thee Satyavan.

It is time for Savitri to show him who she is. Sri Aurobindo uses cinematic technique to project the change in the human figure:

In a flaming moment of apocalypse
The Incarnation thrust aside its veil.
A little figure in infinity
Yet stood and seemed the Eternal's very house,
As if the world's centre was her very soul
And all wide space was but its outer robe.

The narrative goes on to highlight the power and the glory of the woman, who wakes up the sleeping serpent within. When the exposition ends, the narrator completes his adoration with a wonderful apophthegm:

Eternity looked into the eyes of Death,
And Darkness saw God's living Reality.

Savitri ends the cosmic dialogue, as the Great Mother speaks through her explaining that she has appointed Death to force the soul of man to struggle for Light. The Incarnation keeps him in the job for man's assistance, but bids him release the soul of Satyavan, who is man's representative in the house of God. The captain wishes man to follow his track to immortality.

The last battle starts; the two oppose each other, face to face. Sri Aurobindo helps us see the cosmic combat:

His being like a huge fort of darkness towered;
Around it her light grew, an ocean's siege.

There are other fantastic visuals like the light's 'burning tongue' licking up Death and the light finally eating the body of Yama, who has frantically and vainly called for help from the Night, Hell and the Inconscient. Curiously enough the body of Death is not burnt to ashes, but enlightened by the fire of love.

This canto in Book X is an experiment in modern poetic drama dealing with an ancient myth. The form is a queer blend of the objective and the authorial voice. The interesting thing about the canto is the fact that a cosmic dramatist standing at the

summit of spirituality looks back to the earth with an absolute commitment. Beyond the landscape of post-modernism, there wakes a memory of the future, a prescient dream of a smiling earth.

(To be continued)

GOUTAM GHOSAL

References

1. *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol. Two, pp. 50-51.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
3. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, SABCL, Vol. 29. All the lines quoted are to be found between pages 648 and 667.

*He moves there as the Soul, as Nature she.
Here on the earth where we must fill our parts,
We know not how shall run the drama's course;
Our uttered sentences veil in their thought.
Her mighty plan she holds back from our sight:
She has concealed her glory and her bliss
And disguised the Love and Wisdom in her heart;
Of all the marvel and beauty that are hers,
Only a darkened little we can feel.
He too wears a diminished godhead here;
He has forsaken his omnipotence,
His calm he has foregone and infinity.
He knows her only, he has forgotten himself;
To her he abandons all to make her great.
He hopes in her to find himself anew,
Incarnate, wedding his infinity's peace
To her creative passion's ecstasy.*

Sri Aurobindo

(Savitri, CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 61-2)

CONVERSATION BETWEEN KARNA AND KUNTI

(A free English rendering of Rabindranath Tagore's *Karna Kunti Sambad*)

Note: Kunti, the Mother of the Pandavas, goes to meet Karna before the great Battle of Kurukshetra. She reveals to him that she is his mother and asks him to join the Pandavas.

KARNA—I am worshipping the evening sun on the banks of the holy river Jahnavi. I am Karna, the son of the charioteer, Adhiratha Suta and born of Radha. Tell me, who art thou, lady?

KUNTI—My child, I am she who at the dawn of your life acquainted you with the world. I, that very person, casting aside all sense of shame, have come to reveal to you my true identity.

KARNA—O goddess, the rays from thy downcast eyes melt my heart just as the sunrays melt the hilltop snows. Thy voice, as if entering into my ears from a previous life, evokes in me a strange anguish. Tell me, O stranger, what mysterious link binds my life to thee?

KUNTI—Be patient for a while, my child. Let the sun set and the evening darkness grow more dense.... I tell you, O hero, I am Kunti.

KARNA—Thou art Kunti! Arjuna's mother?

KUNTI—Yes, Arjuna's mother am I. But grudge not that, my child. I still remember the day of trial of arms in Hastinapur. You, a young prince, entered the arena like the coming of dawn in the eastern horizon decked with stars. And among the women watching from behind the curtain, was the silent and unfortunate one who kept alive in her heart the unsatisfied thirst of affection and whose look poured kisses of blessings on your whole body. She was Arjuna's mother. And then Kripa came and smilingly inquired your father's name and said, "One who is not of a royal family has no right to fight with Arjuna."

You stood there with bent head, and blushed, without uttering a word. That expression of shame burnt like fire in the heart of that unfortunate lady. Who was she? None other than Arjuna's mother. Blessed be Duryodhan. He it was who proclaimed you instantly king of Anga state. Thanks be to him. During the coronation that followed, tears from her eyes flowed towards your head, imperceptibly. Just then, the charioteer Suta, overwhelmed with joy, elbowed his way into the arena. Instantly, you in kingly attire, in the midst of the curious crowd, bowed down at his feet, addressing him as father.

The friends of the Pandavas mocked you with cruel laughter. But there was one who blessed you with utmost pride as a hero of heroes. I am she, the mother of Arjuna.

KARNA—I salute thee, Aryan lady. Thou art the king's mother. Why then hast

thou come here alone? This is a battlefield and I am the general of the Kaurava soldiers.

KUNTI—My son, I have come with an appeal. Let me not return empty-handed.

KARNA—Ask of me! Except my prowess and religion, whatever thou askest, I shall offer at thy feet.

KUNTI—I have come to take you.

KARNA—Where dost thou wish to take me?

KUNTI—Into my yearning heart, onto a mother's lap.

KARNA—Thou art fortunate, gifted with five sons. I am a petty king without clan or name. Where wilt thou give me a place?

KUNTI—The highest status. I shall place you above all my other sons. You are the eldest one.

KARNA—With what authority shall I enter there? And those who have been deprived of wealth and empire, how shall I snatch their full share of motherly affection? A mother's heart is not bartered by betting in a game of dice nor can it be won by physical strength. It is a boon from God.

KUNTI—My dear son, one day you came on my lap with Divine sanction.... With that authority return gloriously and possess your place without hesitation on the mother's lap, among the other brothers.

KARNA—I hear thy voice, O goddess, as in a dream. Behold, the darkness has spread all around, covering the four directions and no sound emerges from the Bhagirathi. Thou hast carried me to an imaginary land, to a forgotten domain of the dawn of my consciousness. Thy words touch my heart as an old truth. I feel as if my unbloomed childhood, in the obscurity of my mother's womb, is around me now. It matters not if it is real or a mere dream. Come near, O affectionate one. And keep awhile thy right hand on my forehead and cheek. They say that I had been forsaken by my mother. Many a time I have seen in a dream at night that my mother slowly came to see me. In acute pain I wept and said, "Mother, please remove the veil and let me see thy face." Instantly the image vanished, shattering my dream of anxious yearning. Has that dream appeared this evening, dressed as the mother of the Pandavas, on the battlefield, beside the Bhagirathi?

O goddess, look, the lights have been kindled in the Pandava tents on the opposite bank. On this side, not far, the harsh sound of innumerable horses' hooves is heard, issuing from the stable of the Kauravas. The great war is going to start tomorrow. Oh, why do I hear tonight the affectionate voice of my own mother in the words of Arjuna's mother? Why does my name sound so sweet uttered by her? Suddenly my heart is drawn towards the five Pandavas as to my own brothers!

KUNTI—If it be so, come with me, come along, my child.

KARNA—Yes, I shall come, mother. I shall come without question or hesitation or any deliberation. O goddess, thou art my mother. My inner being has emerged at thy call. The sounds of the war-drums and the victory conch do not enter my ears.

Human cruelty, a hero's fame, news of victory or defeat appear unreal to me. Lead me where I should go.

KUNTI—There, to the grey sandy bank on the other side where burn the lamps in the silent war camps.

KARNA—There the motherless will have his mother for ever. There the pole-star will shine in thy large, beautiful eyes throughout the night! Goddess, address me again as your son.

KUNTI—O my dear son.

KARNA—Why then didst thou desert me, abandoning me in the dark and unknown world, without identity of clan or name or fame, far from the affectionate gaze of a mother? Why didst thou cast me away in the current of oblivion? Why didst thou exile me from my brothers and keep me separated from Arjuna? That perhaps is the reason why, from our very childhood, an unseen mysterious tie has been attracting us both irresistibly, throwing us against each other in the form of a cruel enmity? Mother, why standst thou mute, why dost thou not speak? Thy shame pierces the barrier of darkness and silently touches my body and makes me shut my eyes....

Let that be. Let the reason remain undisclosed, reveal not why thou didst forsake me....

Motherly love, the first boon of Providence in this world, why thou didst steal that gift of god from thy own son,—that disclose not...

Tell me, simply, why hast thou come today to take me back onto thy lap?

KUNTI—My child, let your reproach tear my heart into a hundred pieces as with the clap of a hundred thunders. The aftermath of my heartless act of having forsaken you left a great void within me, made me feel sonless in spite of having five famous sons. Alas! My arms grope all over the world, seeking only you. My heart burns itself up, kindling the bright flame for the sake of the departed son, a lamp with which to worship the lord of the universe. Today I have found you; I am fortunate.

Mine was a grievous crime, abandoning you at a time when your lips could not utter even a single word. I beseech you now, let those lips speak words of forgiveness for an unworthy mother. May those words be to my heart a torture more fierce than any rebuke and thus cleanse me of all my sins.

KARNA—O mother! Bless me and in return accept my tears.

KUNTI—My son, I have not come here for the joy of holding you close for a mere moment. I have come to lead you back to your own legitimate station. You are not the offspring of the charioteer Suta, but the son of a king. Brushing aside all insults, my child, come with me. Your five brothers await you.

KARNA—I am Suta's son and Radha is my mother. I deserve no greater glory than that. Let the Pandavas remain Pandavas and the Kauravas remain Kauravas. I envy none.

KUNTI—O child, regain your kingdom with the might of your arms. Yudhishtira will sway the white fan for you, Bhima will hold the royal umbrella over your head,

Dhananjaya, the hero, will be your charioteer and Dhaumya will chant the Vedic hymns. You, the victor, will dwell with your relatives in full power and occupy the jewelled throne of the universal kingdom.

KARNA—Throne! Mother, thou allurest him with kingdoms who rejected the bounty of motherly affection! The grace from which thou didst deprive him once is beyond thy power to return to him now. Thou didst uproot with one stroke at the time of my birth, my mother, brothers and kingly inheritance. Today, if I forsake Suta, O my mother, if I address the king's mother as my mother, breaking the bond of relation with the Kuru chief and hanker after a royal throne, then fie on me!

KUNTI—My son, you are a true hero. Blessed are you.... O righteous one, how severe is your punishment! Alas! Who knew then that the small baby whom I abandoned would return through the dark alleys, gaining power and energy none knew from where, and hurl cruelly weapons at the sons of his own mother! Oh God, what a curse!

KARNA—Mother, please have no fear. I proclaim that the Pandavas will win. On the dark page of night I directly read by starlight the outcome of the terrible war. In this quiet and peaceful moment there enters into my mind from the infinite sky the message of fruitless effort, of the hopeless impetus of action, and I see the silent ending without any issue....

So, entreat me not to leave the side destined to be defeated. Let the Pandavas be victorious and rule. I shall remain with those who are without hope, those doomed to defeat.

On the night of my birth thou didst leave me, homeless and nameless, in an unknown world. In like manner, now too, O mother, forsake me, without pity, to a dark and infamous defeat!

Simply this boon I ask, that for the sake of victory, fame and kingdom, may I not stray from the pure path of a hero.

CHUNILAL CHOWDHURY

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Nirodbaran: Divinity's Comrade: edited by Hemant Kapoor. Published by Sri Mira Trust. Available at Sabda, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. Price: Rs 200.00. Pages: 643.

“HE started rewriting a good deal of *The Life Divine* soon after his convalescence and finished it in two years. We used to see him sitting on his bed with his pen, papers on the table, but no books. He had forgotten the world with its devastating war-thunder; the words came ‘flowing direct to his pen, as from a hidden silence’. Now and then he would stop, look in front and dive again. The Mother would come with a glass of coconut water, and wait till he would look up. He needed no books, no thinking. He had stopped thinking long ago—after his *Nirvanic* experience in 1907 and since then all that he wrote or said or did had come from the higher silence. ‘To be free from the responsibility of thinking is a great relief,’ he used to tell us...

“*The Life Divine* over, Sri Aurobindo took up his epic, *Savitri*. I had the unique opportunity to follow its growth and development from a tiny seed into an *ashwattha* tree. With infinite care, exacting at each step a flawless perfection, he worked and worked, slowly, silently like a god in labour. One would gape with wonder...”

(*Nirodbaran: Divinity's Comrade*)

We, the lesser mortals, should gape in wonder at this lucky witness to a “god in labour”—Sri Aurobindo.

To say that Nirodbaran has a rare personality would be to raise a cliché to a new height. We can look at an Edinburgh-qualified physician becoming a poet as only a bold exercise of one's free will, unusual though; we can look as a rarer phenomenon at the same person taking to yoga but Nirodbaran is all this and much more. He exemplifies that rarest of rare qualities, humility, in the process of surrendering to his Master and the Mother, but keeping alive in his nature the quest and curiosity that characterise a growing spirit and, last but not the least, that heavenly gift of humour revealing a sun-like faith capable of shining through clouds and mists of scepticism so natural to a creative mind.

There are celebrations and celebrations marking jubilees of worthy institutions and individuals. But decades later a new generation of seekers would wonder even at those of us still alive then—that we had the privilege to celebrate the centenary of this live phenomenon called Nirodbaran, that this treasure of the memories of Sri Aurobindo moved amongst us, that the hand into which the inspired words of *Savitri* were transmitted shook hands with us. This souvenir marking his centenary, this goldmine of memories of people who were taught, advised and guided by him, of some for whom his smile was a ray of the Master's Grace, as well as of veterans who were his colleagues in spiritual practice, will be a source of joy and inspire a feeling

of gratitude in the people interested in Sri Aurobindo, for years to come.

Divided into four sections, the volume presents (Section 1) 235 pages of selections from Nirodbaran's compositions and his correspondence with Sri Aurobindo including the Master's comments and corrections made on the former's poetry, (Sections 2 & 3) 160 pages of reminiscences by persons who had various degrees of contact with Nirodbaran and (Section 4), 94 pages of articles of general interest on aspects of the vast Aurobindonian lore, apart from a list of Nirodbaran's publications. The contributors include sadhaks, seekers, scholars, kinsmen and admirers making the compilation a rich harvest in information and education.

What is lacking, and should be added in a subsequent edition, is a biographical chronology, a brief account of Nirodbaran's childhood, the milieu from which he came, his education etc. till he became an integral part of the Mother's domain, even though some information of this category remains scattered in a few articles and even though such knowledge is of no importance so far as Nirodbaran's spiritual odyssey, the only thing that matters, is concerned.

Way back in 1985, the very first issue of *The Heritage* which this reviewer edited, carried a review of Nirodbaran's *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo* and it included these lines: "Nirodbaran joined the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry in the thirties (of the 20th century) on his return from abroad as a qualified physician. Something unexpected began to happen to him. Did cascades of realisation start coming down to him? Or did some powers to perform miracles bloom? Such things could not have been unnatural so far as the conventional notion of Yoga goes. But what descended on the physician is sheer poetry!... Once he had brought his inspiration to the Master's notice, miracles—not in the crude but in the subtle sense—did indeed begin to happen. The Muse found in him a permanent settlement and some of his creations were certified by the Master as 'Exceedingly fine'...

"Sri Aurobindo assured this disciple of his: 'Any activity can be taken as part of the sadhana if it is offered to the Divine and done with the consciousness or faith that it is done with the Divine Power.'

"Once the doctor in Nirodbaran was moved when the Master's eyes were unwell. 'How I wish, as a medical man, I mean, I could enforce absolute rest to the eyes and issue a bulletin.' Sri Aurobindo underlined absolute rest and wrote: 'It does not exist in the world—not even in the Himalayas—except of course for the inner being which can always be in absolute rest.'

"Nirodbaran seems to have developed a fascinating relationship with the Master, his total trust and dependence calling down instant light on several issues he raised."

No doubt, Nirodbaran's reminiscences of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, his correspondence with the Master, are among the most precious documents for the ever-growing number of people in general and scholars in particular interested in the vision of Sri Aurobindo.

"Earth badly needs occasions like the birth centenary of Nirodbaran," said Amal

Kiran (K. D. Sethna) and this reviewer cannot think of a more poignant comment on both the significance of Nirodbaran and the condition of the earth. We can also say that we badly needed such a compilation.

MANOJ DAS

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