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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

Sri Aurobindo

THE INFINITE ADVENTURE (Poem) ... 1

The Mother

‘THE REDEMPTION AND PURIFICATION OF MATTER’ ... 2

‘GRANT, O LORD, THAT I MAY BE...’ ... 3

Sri Aurobindo

‘KATOSHATO CHANDOBANDHE...’ (Poem in Bengali) ... 4

NATARAJA (English Translation by Richard Hartz) ... 4

ON IDEALS ... 5

Nolini Kanta Gupta

SELECTIONS FROM NOLINI KANTA GUPTA’S WRITINGS ... 10

A LETTER ... 10

TO READ SRI AUROBINDO ... 12

MEAT-EATING ... 16

A YOGA OF THE ART OF LIFE ... 18

THE SOUL’S ODYSSEY ... 21

YOGA AS PRAGMATIC POWER ... 23

HYMN TO SURYA (A Translation) ... 25

Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SAVITRI ... 26

Priti Das Gupta

MOMENTS, ETERNAL ... 33

Debashish Banerji

NIRODBARAN’S SURREALIST POEMS ... 44

Mangesh Nadkarni

RAMANA MAHARSHI AND SRI AUROBINDO:
THE RECONCILIATION OF KAPALI SASTRY ... 45

Nolinikanto Sarkar

BETWEEN THE ARRIVAL AND THE DEPARTURE ... 52

<i>Aniruddha Sircar</i>		
FIRE (Poem)	...	59
<i>Pravir Malik</i>		
INDIA AT THE CROSSROADS	...	60
<i>Mary “Angel” Finn</i>		
SHAKTI OF THE SUN (Poem)	...	69
<i>Prema Nandakumar</i>		
THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY	...	70
<i>Snehajeet Chatterjee</i>		
O, THE LIGHT! (Poem)	...	79
<i>R. Prabhakar (Batti)</i>		
TIPS FROM THE TOP	...	80
<i>Pradip Bhattacharya</i>		
A CLEAR RAY AND A LAMP—AN EXCHANGE OF LIGHT	...	82
<i>Sarani Ghosal Mondal</i>		
MANMOHAN GHOSE: A RE-VALUATION	...	89
<i>Hemant Kapoor</i>		
ONENESS (Poem)	...	99
<i>Amita Sen</i>		
MONSIEUR AND MADAME FRANÇOIS MARTIN IN PONDICHERRY	...	100
<i>Pujalal</i>		
NAVANIT: STORIES RETOLD	...	106

THE INFINITE ADVENTURE

On the waters of a nameless Infinite
My skiff is launched; I have left the human shore.
All fades behind me and I see before
The unknown abyss and one pale pointing light.
An unseen Hand controls my rudder. Night
Walls up the sea in a black corridor,—
An unconscious Hunger's lion plaint and roar
Or the ocean sleep of a dead Eremite.

I feel the greatness of the Power I seek
Surround me; below me are its¹ giant deeps.
Beyond, the invisible height no soul has trod.
I shall be merged in the Lonely and Unique
And wake into a sudden blaze of God,
The marvel and rapture of the Apocalypse.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 137)

1. the

‘THE REDEMPTION AND PURIFICATION OF MATTER’

June 15, 1913

EVEN he who might have attained a perfect contemplation in silence and solitude would have arrived at it only by withdrawing from his body, by disregarding it; and so the substance of which the body is constituted would remain as impure, as imperfect as before, since he would have left it to itself; and by a misguided mysticism, through the lure of supraphysical splendours, the egoistic desire to unite with Thee for his own personal satisfaction, he would have turned his back upon the very reason of his earthly existence, he would have refused like a coward to accomplish his mission—the redemption and purification of Matter. To know that a part of our being is perfectly pure, to commune with this purity, to be identified with it, can be useful only if this knowledge is later used to hasten the transfiguration of the earth, to accomplish Thy sublime work.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 20)

‘GRANT, O LORD, THAT I MAY BE...’

June 17, 1913

GRANT, O Lord, that I may be like a fire that illumines and gives warmth, like a spring of water that quenches thirst, like a tree that shelters and protects.... Men are so unhappy and ignorant and have so great a need of help.

My trust in Thee, the certitude within me grow deeper day by day; and day by day too I feel Thy love more ardent within my heart, Thy light more brilliant and yet also more sweet; and more and more am I unable to distinguish Thy Work from my life and my individual being from the entire earth.

O Lord, Lord, Thy Splendour is infinite, marvellous is Thy Truth; and Thy all-powerful Love shall save the world.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 21)

‘KATOSHATO CHANDOBANDHE...’

কতশত ছন্দোবন্ধে...

কতশত ছন্দোবন্ধে নৃত্য কর, নটরাজ,
এই তব বিশ্বমাঝে।
সদা নানা দেহ পর, ধর সদা নানা সাজ,
ঘোর নিত্য নব কাজে।
ওই উড়লে বিহঙ্গম, এই ব্যাঘ্র মৃত্যু সম
পড় হরিণীর শিরে।
মৎস্য তুমি, জেলে তুমি ফেল জাল
নিত্যানন্দ সিঞ্চুনীরে।

শ্রীঅরবিন্দ

NATARAJA

Hundred-rhythmed is thy dancing,
Lord of Dance, and with entrancing
Motion fills the cosmic stage.
Never-ending is the series
Of thy forms, thy masks; nor wearies
Thy fantasy from age to age.

Yonder as a bird thou wingest;
Death incarnate, lo! thou springest
On the deer with tiger-leap.
Fish and fisherman thou art;
Tirelessly thou takest part
In the ballet of the deep.

(Translation of Sri Aurobindo's Bengali poem,
'Katoshato Chandobandhe...' by Richard Hartz)

ON IDEALS

IDEALS are truths that have not yet effected themselves for man, the realities of a higher plane of existence which have yet to fulfil themselves on this lower plane of life and matter, our present field of operation. To the pragmatic intellect which takes its stand upon the ever-changing present, ideals are not truths, not realities, they are at most potentialities of future truth and only become real when they are visible in the external fact as work of force accomplished. But to the mind which is able to draw back from the flux of force in the material universe, to the consciousness which is not imprisoned in its own workings or carried along in their flood but is able to envelop, hold and comprehend them, to the soul that is not merely the subject and instrument of the world-force but can reflect something of that Master-Consciousness which controls and uses it, the ideal present to its inner vision is a greater reality than the changing fact obvious to its outer senses. The Idea is not a reflection of the external fact which it so much exceeds; rather the fact is only a partial reflection of the Idea which has created it.

Certainly, ideals are not the ultimate Reality, for that is too high and vast for any ideal to envisage; they are aspects of it thrown out in the world-consciousness as a basis for the workings of the world-power. But they are primary, the actual workings secondary. They are nearer to the Reality and therefore always more real, forcible and complete than the facts which are their partial reflection. Reflections themselves of the Real, they again are reflected in the more concrete workings of our existence. The human intellect in proportion as it limits itself by the phenomena of self-realising Force fails to catch the creative Idea until after we have seen the external fact it has created; but this order of our sense-enslaved consciousness is not the real order of the universe. God pre-exists before the world can come into being, but to our experience in which the senses act first and only then the finer workings of consciousness, the world seems to come first and God to emerge out of it, so much so that it costs us an effort to rise out of the mechanical, pluralistic and pantheistic conceptions of Him to a truer and higher idea of the Divine Reality. That which to us is the ultimate, is in truth the primary reality. So too the Idea which seems to us to rise out of the fact, really precedes it and out of it the fact has arisen. Our vulgar contrast of the ideal and the real is therefore a sensuous error, for that which we call real is only a phenomenon of force working out something that stands behind the phenomenon and that is pre-existent and greater than it. The Real, the Idea, the phenomenon, this is the true order of the creative Divinity.

The pragmatic intellect is only sure of a thing when it finds it realised in Power; therefore it has a certain contempt for the ideal, for the vision, because it drives always at execution and material realisation. But Power is not the only term of the Godhead; Knowledge is the elder sister of Power: Force and Consciousness are twin aspects of being both in the eternal foundation of things and in their evolutionary

realisation. The idea is the realisation of a truth in Consciousness as the fact is its realisation in Power, both indispensable, both justified in themselves and in each other, neither warranted in ignoring or despising its complement. For the idealist and visionary to despise the pragmatist or for the pragmatist to depreciate the idealist and visionary is a deplorable result of our intellectual limitations and the mutual misunderstandings by which the arrogance of our imperfect temperament and mentality shuts itself out from perfection. It is as if we were to think that God the Seer and Knower must despise God the Master of works and energies or the Lord of action and sacrifice ignore the divine Witness and Originator. But these two are one and the division in us a limitation that mankind has yet to conquer.

The human being advances in proportion as he becomes more and more capable of knowing before he realises in action. This is indeed the order of evolution. It begins with a material working in which the Prakriti, the executive Power, is veiled by its works, by the facts it produces, and itself veils the consciousness which originates and supports all its workings. In Life the force emerges and becomes vibrant in the very surface of its works; last, in Mind the underlying consciousness reveals itself. So too man is at first subject in his mentality to the facts which his senses envisage, cannot go behind and beyond them, knows only the impressions they make on his receptive mind. The animal is executive, not creative; a passive tool of Matter and Life he does not seek in his thought and will to react upon and use them: the human being too in his less developed state is executive rather than creative; he limits his view to the present and to his environment, works so as to live from day to day, accepts what he is without reaching forward in thought to what he may be, has no ideals. In proportion as he goes beyond the fact and seeks to anticipate Nature, to catch the ideas and principles behind her workings and finally to seize the idea that is not yet realised in fact and himself preside over its execution, he becomes originative and creative and no longer merely executive. He begins thus his passage from subjection to mastery.

In thus progressing humanity falls apart after its fashion into classes; it divides itself between the practical man and the idealist and makes numerous compromises between the two extremes. In reality the division is artificial; for every man who does anything in the world, works by virtue of an idea and in the force given to him by ideals, either his own or others' ideals, which he may or may not recognise but in whose absence nevertheless he would be impotent to move a single step. The smaller the ideals, the fewer they are and the less recognised and insisted on, the less also is the work done and the progress realised; on the other hand, when ideals enlarge themselves, when they become forceful, widely recognised, when different ideals enter into the field, clash and communicate their thought and force to each other, then the race rises to its great periods of activity and creation. And it is when the Ideal arisen, vehement, energetic, refuses to be debarred from possession and throws itself with all the gigantic force of the higher planes of existence on this reluctant and

rebellious stuff of life and matter to conquer it that we have the great eras which change the world by carrying out the potentialities of several centuries in the action of a few decades.

Therefore wherever and whenever the mere practical man abounds and excludes or discourages by his domination the idealist, there is the least work and the least valuable work done in that age or country for humanity; at most some preliminary spade-work, some labour of conservation and hardly perceptible motion, some repression of creative energies preparing for a great future outburst. On the other hand, when the idealist is liberated, when the visionary abounds, the executive worker also is uplifted, finds at once an orientation and tenfold energy and accomplishes things which he would otherwise have rejected as a dream and chimera, which to his ordinary capacity would be impossible and which often leave the world wondering how work so great could have been done by men who were in themselves so little. The union of the great idealist with the great executive personality who receives and obeys the idea is always the sign of a coming realisation which will be more or less deep and extensive in proportion as they are united or as the executive man seizes more or less profoundly and completely the idea he serves and is able to make permanent in force what the other has impressed upon the consciousness of his age.

Often enough, even when these two different types of men work in the same cause and one more or less fulfils the other, they are widely separated in their accessory ideas, distrust, dislike and repudiate each other. For ordinarily the idealist is full of anticipations which reach beyond the actual possibilities or exceed the work that is destined to be immediately fulfilled; the executive man on the other hand is unable to grasp either all the meaning of the work he does or all its diviner possibilities which to him are illusion and vanity while to the other they are all that is supremely valuable in his great endeavour. To the practical worker limiting himself by patent forces and actual possibilities the idealist who made his work possible seems an idle dreamer or a troublesome fanatic; to the idealist the practical man who realises the first steps towards his idea seems a coarse spoiler of the divine work and almost its enemy: for by attaching too much importance to what is immediately possible he removes the greater possibilities which he does not see, seems to prevent and often does prevent a larger and nobler realisation. It is the gulf between a Cavour and a Mazzini, between the prophet of an ideal and the statesman of a realisable idea. The latter seems always to be justified by the event, but the former has a deeper justification in the shortcomings of the event. The successes of the executive man hiding away the ideal under the accomplished fact are often the tragedies of the human spirit and are responsible for the great reactions and disappointments it undergoes when it finds how poor and soulless is the accomplished fact compared with the glory of the vision and the ardour of the effort.

It cannot be doubted which of these two opposites and complementaries is the most essential to success. Not only is the upheaval and fertilising of the general

consciousness by the thinker and the idealist essential to the practical realisation of great changes, but in the realisation itself the idealist who will not compromise is an indispensable element. Show me a movement without a force of uncompromising idealism working somewhere in its sum of energies and you have shown me a movement which is doomed to failure and abortion or to petty and inconsiderable results. The age or the country which is entirely composed of reasonable, statesmanlike workers ever ready for concession and compromise is a country which will never be great until it has added to itself what is lacking to it and bathed itself in pure and divine fountains and an age which will accomplish nothing of supreme importance for the progress of humanity. There is a difference however between the fanatic of an idea and the true idealist: the former is simply the materialistic, executive man possessed by the idea of another, not himself the possessor of it; he is haunted in his will and driven by the force of the idea, not really illumined by its light. He does harm as well as good and his chief use is to prevent the man of compromise from pausing at a paltry or abortive result; but his excesses also bring about great reactions. Incapable of taking his stand on the ideal itself, he puts all his emphasis on particular means and forms and overstrains the springs of action till they become dulled and incapable of responding to farther excitation. But the true idealist is not the servant of the letter or the form; it is the idea which he loves and the spirit behind the idea which he serves.

Man approaches nearer his perfection when he combines in himself the idealist and the pragmatist, the originaive soul and the executive power. Great executive personalities have usually been men of a considerable idealism. Some indeed have served a purpose rather than an ideal; even in the idea that guided or moved them they have leaned to its executive rather than its inspiring and originaive aspect; they have sought their driving force in the interest, passion and emotion attached to it rather than in the idea itself. Others have served consciously a great single thought or moral aim which they have laboured to execute in their lives. But the greatest men of action who were endowed by Nature with the most extraordinary force of accomplishment, have owed it to the combination in them of active power with an immense drift of originaive thought devoted to practical realisation. They have been great executive thinkers, great practical dreamers. Such were Napoleon and Alexander. Napoleon with his violent prejudice against ideologues and dreamers was himself a colossal dreamer, an incurable if unconscious ideologist; his teeming brain was the cause of his gigantic force and accomplishment. The immense if shapeless ideas of Alexander threw themselves into the form of conquests, cities, cultures; they broke down the barriers of Greek and Asiatic prejudice and narrow self-imprisonment and created an age of civilisation and soul-interchange.

But these great personalities do not contain in themselves the combination which humanity most needs; not the man of action driven by ideas, the pragmatist stirred by a half-conscious exaltation from the idealistic, almost the mystic side of his nature,

but the seer who is able to execute his vision is the higher term of human power and knowledge. The one takes his stand in the Prakriti, the executive Force, and is therefore rather driven than leads himself even when he most successfully leads others; the other takes his stand in the Purusha, the Knower who controls executive force, and he possesses the power that he uses. He draws nearer to the type of the divine Seer-Will that has created and governs the universe. But such a combination is rare and difficult; for in order to grasp the Ideal the human soul has to draw back so far from the limitations, pettinesses, denials of the world of phenomenal fact that the temperament and mentality become inapt for executive action upon the concrete phenomena of life and matter. The mastery of the fact is usually possible to the idealist mind only when its idealism is of no great depth or power and can therefore accommodate itself more easily to the actual life-environment.

Until this difficulty is overcome and the Seer-Will becomes more common in man and more the master of life, the ideal works at a disadvantage, by a silent pressure upon the reluctant world, by occasional attacks and sudden upheavals; a little is accomplished in a long time or by a great and sudden effort, a little that is poor enough, coarse enough, material enough compared with the thing seen and attempted, but which still makes a farther advance possible though often after a period of quiescence and reaction. And times there are, ages of stupendous effort and initiative when the gods seem no longer satisfied with this tardy and fragmentary working, when the ideal breaks constantly through the dull walls of the material practical life, incalculable forces clash in its field, innumerable ideas meet and wrestle in the arena of the world and through the constant storm and flash, agitation of force and agitation of light the possibility of the victoriously fulfilled ideal, the hope of the Messiah, the expectation of the Avatar takes possession of the hearts and thoughts of men. Such an age seems now to be coming upon the world. But whether that hope and expectation and possibility are to come to anything depends upon whether men prepare their souls for the advent and rise in the effort of their faith, life and thought to the height and purity of a clearly-grasped ideal. The Messiah or Avatar is nothing but this, the divine Seer-Will descending upon the human consciousness to reveal to it the divine meaning behind our half-blind action and to give along with the vision the exalted will that is faithful and performs and the ideal force that executes according to the vision.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 111-18)

SELECTIONS FROM NOLINI KANTA GUPTA'S WRITINGS*

A LETTER

In simple words, in a plain manner you want to know the meaning of Yoga. You have asked me not to use highly philosophical terms, but just to make you understand the real purport of Yoga in a few words. I shall try my best, but before that I would like to tell you something. Difficult matters cannot be explained as easily as easy ones. It is quite natural that a thing above the common cannot be brought down to the level of common understanding, nor is it advisable to do so. To do that is to help the common in their idleness. There is always some usefulness in acquiring a thing by the sweat of one's brow. One can derive much benefit from such labour. Instead of trying to bring down the uncommon to the level of the common, it would be better to try to mould the common after the uncommon, if needed, even at the cost of some effort. However, it must also be admitted that it is not always necessary to court useless toil on that account. Often we look at the uncommon in too excessive proportions, and make it almost inaccessible to our understanding. Specially about Yoga what you have said is quite true.

Generally we take Yoga for something quite mysterious. It is because we associate Yoga with many complex, ununderstandable rites and consider these as its main and inseparable parts. In fact, Yoga is a quite natural thing if we turn to it in the right manner. All ought to practise Yoga and all without exception can do that. Not only that, all are doing Yoga, if not consciously. Sadhana, spiritual practice, consists in bringing out the undercurrent flowing within oneself, in doing consciously what one's inner nature demands.

In short, Yoga is an attempt at discovering a new 'Law of Life', and after that discovery one has to mould and regulate one's life in accordance with it. This Law of Life is nothing other than the Law of Divine Life. What does it mean? It means that in a human being there are two planes, two kinds of nature and two laws of life—one belongs to the lower region, the other to the higher, one belongs to the terrestrial, the other to the supraterrrestrial. This earth of clay or the lower region possesses body, life and mind. Man moves about according to the laws and customs, bondages and limitations of body, life and mind. But there exists a world, a plane above these three; and there the knowledge of man does not depend on gross physical sensations or on syllogistic reasonings. There the knowledge is self-revealing, undeformed and infallible. It is called Intuition, Revelation. There the restless wild urge of action or blind agitation of numberless sensations have turned into a calm spiritual power and an unalloyed delight. And that plane too has a body of its own. But it is absolutely

* On the occasion of his birthday, 13 January.

free from disease, decay and death that we find in the physical being. To leave aside the laws of body, life and mind and rise into the highest spiritual nature is called Yoga. But don't think, in doing Yoga you shall have to do away with this body, life and mind and keep aloof from the world and the earthly concerns. This theory is an absurdity on the face of it. The higher world can be contacted even while remaining in the body, life and mind, and it can also be infused into these three. The lower nature can be moulded by the infusion and the law of the higher. While residing in the world all earthly activities can be directed by the drive of that higher world.

It is a difficult task, but not impossible. It seems to be an impossibility or a mere ideal only, when I look upon myself alone, and think that I am a little, insignificant creature—how can I have the power to change the process of Nature that has been active from time immemorial? Will it be possible to do so even in hundreds of lives? But is it not that a ray of hope peeps into me the moment I cast a glance at the universe without taking me into account? We admit nowadays the law of evolution preached by the West. According to that law of evolution there existed Matter first in the creation, and then appeared the animal, finally the human being. That is to say, the Western science has recognised, in the first instance, evolution on lower planes of Nature. First body, then life and then mind. But nothing can be as absurd and illogical as to say that the evolution of Nature has stopped after reaching the mental level. In fact, Yoga tells us that above the mental level there is a plane called Supermind and above man there is Superman.

All Nature is anxious to give birth to the Supermind, and we too, all human beings, have been making the same effort, although unconsciously. Behind your power and mine, behind your effort and mine there resides an enormous power of the whole universe, and that power is aspiring for the divine manifestation in humanity, for the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth and the Divine Play of the Golden Age. When that universal Power reveals itself to our sight, and when we are able to recognise it and consciously collaborate with it, there can be nothing beyond our reach.

(Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol. 7, pp. 307-09)

TO READ SRI AUROBINDO

I LEARNED that you want to know something about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from me. But then there are three lines of approach: you may want to know *about* them, know *of* them or know them. Of course the last is the best. Indeed if you want to know truly something you have to become it. Becoming gives the real knowledge. But becoming Sri Aurobindo and the Mother means what? Becoming a portion of them, a part and parcel of their consciousness—that is what we are here for. And if you can do that, you know enough....

Once I told you, I think, how to study or approach Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in order to read them or understand their writings. There are two things: studying and reading; I made a distinction between the two. To study Sri Aurobindo is—I won't say fruitless, that is too strong a word, but it can only be an aid or a supplementary way. Study means: you take the text, you understand mentally each word and phrase; if you don't understand, you take a dictionary and try to catch the external meaning expressed by the words. That may be necessary but it is not the way to approach their works.

Simply to read them in the right way is sufficient. Read, it does not matter what you understand and what you do not, simply read and wait in an expectant silence. In studying you approach them with your external mind, your external intelligence. But what is there in the text is beyond your mind, beyond your intelligence. And to understand mentally means you drive your intellect forward into the thing. It is an effort and takes you only to the outside of the thing. It is an exercise of your brain, developed in that way, but it doesn't take you very far. Instead of that, suppose you could keep quiet, silence your mind, and only read, without unduly trying to understand, and wait for what is there in the text to enter into you. Instead of your intelligence driving forward, pushing forward and trying to catch the thing, let the thing come into you; for what is there in their writings is not words and phrases, dead material, it is something very living, something conscious, that they have expressed in the words, phrases and the sound and rhythm. And I may tell you that each sentence anywhere, not to speak of *Savitri*, is a living being with whom you have to make acquaintance—not that you understand or are able to explain, but it is a living being, an entity, a friend, even a Lover whom you have to know. And your attempt in that way will be rewarded. You will enjoy much more. You may ask: "Just because I open a book and read, how can what are in the lines come to me?" But I say they are living entities—if you approach in the right spirit, they come into you. The consciousness, the being in each line comes to you. And you find how beautiful it is. This is an approach of love, not of the intellect to understand and explain. Take for example, the very first verse of *Savitri*:

It was the hour before the Gods awake.

(Book 1, Canto 1)

It is a Mantra, a living person, how beautiful it is, you needn't understand much—and a whole world is there.

Or, take the opening sentence of *The Life Divine*—the rolling cadence of the vast ocean is there. It brings you a sense of vastness, a sense of Infinity and takes you there. And, as I said, it is a very living entity and personality.

Here is the whole passage:

The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation,—for it survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns after every banishment,—is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last,—God, Light, Freedom, Immortality. (Book 1, Chapter 1)

There is indeed a personality behind it and you have to make acquaintance with that personality. That is what I meant when I said: become it, by an approach through love, an approach through your soul. Even in studies you shouldn't approach with the mere intellect, mere mental understanding; however fine an understanding or intellect you may have, it won't lead you very far. Only through your soul you can go far. Even intellectual things can be approached through your soul—because the soul is the very essence of all your faculties and being. The soul is not mere consciousness, mere being, it gathers in all the elements of your personality. The seeds of your mind, your vital, even of the physical personality, the true physical personality, are there in your soul, and you can establish a true relation with things and persons through that part of your being—your soul. And remember the soul is not very far from you because you are that—rather your mind, your vital, your physical are away from you; they are not your true personality. It is your soul that is nearest to you.

In this connection you may remember what the Mother has said more than once: what is one here for? What are the children here for? And what is she giving here in the school, in the playground, in all the activities? It is not simple efficiency in the outer activities that is given here, or meant to be given here. For such things one can get outside in a more successful way—external efficiency of your intellect, of your mind, of your vital capacity and your physical strength—the Russian or the German type. Our records don't match theirs, do they? But we don't aspire for those

records. For, as the Mother has said: “I am giving here something which you won’t get anywhere else in the world—nowhere except here.” In your external expression you may cut a very poor figure: low marks—but that is not the sign of the Truth that we acquire here. You acquire it even without your knowing it. When you are in the swimming pool you are soaked all through, aren’t you? You can’t help it; so here also; even without your knowing it you are soaked with the inner consciousness of your soul. It is a very precious thing—I should say, the only precious thing in the world. And through that, if you study, you learn—if you approach that way, you will get another taste, another interest in things.

When I was reading with Sri Aurobindo, he didn’t lay much stress upon the grammar or the language—just the most elementary grammar that was necessary. He used to put me in contact with the life, the living personality of the poet—what he was, what he represented in his consciousness. That was the central theme, because a truly great poet means a status of consciousness; in order to understand his consciousness you must become identified with his being.

Amrita also used to say the same thing, because he was learning the Gita from Sri Aurobindo. He could feel the spirit of Krishna and the spirit of Arjuna throughout—their relations and the atmosphere they created. It is not the mere lesson, the teaching, that is important—that is secondary. The person is the primary thing. And the person in the book or outside, you can approach only through your soul, through love. The soul alone can love.

I think I told you that once somebody asked me: “You speak of the soul but where is it?”

I said: “It is very near you; still you don’t believe. If you see into yourself quietly, you will find that there are very many good things in you, not only bad things—bits perhaps, shades or shadows perhaps, but you know this is a good thought in you, this is a noble impulse, a sweet feeling. Each one has all these things, you have only to recognise them. All this is the expression of the soul in you. The beautiful, the luminous, the noble things that appear to you, in your consciousness, from time to time, all come from your soul.” Even the greatest villain has such moments. You remember Lady Macbeth—known as the cruellest woman; well, she said about Duncan, “I would have killed him myself but he looked like my father”¹—well, that is the feeling even she had. So let us not despair, even the weakest among us should not despair. First of all, each one has a soul, and secondly, we have the luminously strong support of the Mother. It is the nature of the Divine that even if you don’t think of Him, He thinks of you. It is true, very true; because you are part of the Divine. Only you have to concentrate consciously on that part, that portion; then gradually it will increase.

1. Shakespeare: *Macbeth*, Act II, Scene 2.

Lady Macbeth: ...Had he not resembled

My father as he slept, I had done’t.

Question: What is the distinction you make between “to know about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother,” and “to know of them”?

Answer: “About” means what a man does, what his profession is, his occupation—*kimāsīta vrajeta kim?*—and “of” means his personality, his character, nature.

(Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol. 5, pp. 35-39)

It is not an extension or intensification of the mind and its capacities that will solve the problem: a radical change in the very nature of the mind, a reversal of the mental consciousness—a turning of it inside out as it were, an opening out and up is needed to discover the true source of the Light. Therefore it has been said that man must transcend himself, find a new status in the other hemisphere. In fact there is a domain, a status of being and consciousness, a master-force which when revealed and made active will remould inevitably and spontaneously human creation and expression as a reality embodying the Highest. It is the world of Idea-Force which Sri Aurobindo has named Supermind: it is beyond the mind, even the highest mind: it is the typical concentration of the Supreme Consciousness. It is the fulcrum for the Supreme Consciousness to create and express a new formulation of the Truth in the world of matter.

(Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol. 4, pp. 299-300)

MEAT-EATING

What happens when one eats meat?

I WILL tell you then a story. I knew a young woman, Swedish, who was doing Sadhana. Normally she was a vegetarian, by habit as well as by inclination. One day she was invited to a dinner. She was given fowl to eat. She did not like to make a fuss and quietly ate her fowl. Now at night she found herself, in dream of course, in a basket and her head in between two bits of sticks and being shaken to and fro. She felt very unhappy, very miserable. And then she saw herself head down and legs up in the air and being shaken, shaken continually. She was thoroughly miserable. All on a sudden she felt she was being skinned, flayed and how painful it all was! And then someone came with a knife and cut off her head. She woke up at that. She told me the story and said she had never had such a frightful nightmare in her life. She had thought nothing of this kind before going to bed; it must have been simply the consciousness of the poor chicken that entered into her and she experienced in dream all the agonies of this creature when it was being carried to the market, her feathers pulled out and in the end the head severed. That is what happens. In other words, along with the meal that you take, you absorb also, in a large or small measure, the consciousness of the animal whose flesh you swallow. Of course it is nothing serious, but it is not always pleasant. Yet obviously it does not help you to be more on the side of man than on that of the animal kind. Primitive men, we know, were much nearer the animal level and used to take raw meat: that gave them evidently more strength and energy than cooked meat. They used to kill an animal, tear it to pieces and bite into the flesh. That is how they were robust and strong. Also it was for this reason perhaps that there was in their intestines an organ called appendix of a much bigger size than it is now: for it had to digest raw meat. As men however started cooking their food and found it more palatable that way the organ too gradually diminished in size and fell into atrophy; now it does not serve any purpose, it is an encumbrance and often a source of illness. This means that it is time to change the diet and take to something less bestial. It depends, however, on the state of the consciousness of each person. An ordinary man, who leads an ordinary life, has ordinary aspirations, thinks of nothing else than earning his livelihood, keeping good health and rearing a family, need not pick and choose, except on purely hygienic grounds. He may eat meat or anything else that he considers helpful and useful, doing good to him.

But if you wish to move from the ordinary life to a higher life, the problem acquires an interest. And again, for a higher life if you wish to move up still farther and prepare yourself for transformation, then the problem becomes very important. For there are certain foods that help the body to become more refined and others that keep it down to the level of animalhood. But it is only then that the question acquires an importance, not before. Before you come to that point, you have a lot of other

things to do. It is certainly better to purify your mind, purify your vital before you think of purifying your body. For even if you take all possible precautions and live physically with every care to eat only the things that help to refine the body, but the mind and the vital remain full of desire and inconscience and obscurity and all the rest, your care will serve no purpose. Your body will become perhaps weak, disharmonious with your inner life and drop off one day.

You must begin from within. I have said a hundred times, you must begin from above. You must purify first the higher regions and then purify the lower ones. I do not mean by this that you should give yourself up to all the licences that degrade the body. I do not mean that at all. I am not advising you not to control your desires. What I mean is this: do not try to be an angel in the body before you are already something of the kind in your mind and in your vital. For that will bring about a dislocation, a lack of balance. And I have always said that to maintain the balance, all the parts must progress together. In trying to bring light into one part you must not leave another part in darkness. You must not leave any obscure corner anywhere.

(Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol. 4, pp. 73-74)

That is the definition of sincerity to be transparent and single-pointed to your soul-consciousness, to your deity. And that also is the only way by which there can be realised in you, the highest and largest, the most intimate and absolute harmony you are capable of and that is demanded of you. The perfect organisation of the individual life can be obtained in and through the harmony inherent in the central reality, in the natural order of its activities.

(Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol. 1, pp. 369-70)

A YOGA OF THE ART OF LIFE

1

WHEN Sri Aurobindo said, “Our Yoga is not for ourselves but for humanity,” many heaved a sigh of relief and thought that the great soul was after all not entirely lost to the world, his was not one more name added to the long list of Sannyasins that India has been producing age after age without much profit either to herself or to the human society (or even perhaps to their own selves). People understood his Yoga to be a modern one, dedicated to the service of humanity. If service to humanity was not the very sum and substance of his spirituality, it was, at least, the fruitful end and consummation. His Yoga was a sort of art to explore and harness certain unseen powers that can better and ameliorate human life in a more successful way than mere rational scientific methods can hope to do.

Sri Aurobindo saw that the very core of his teaching was being missed by this common interpretation of his saying. So he changed his words and said, “Our Yoga is not for humanity but for the Divine.” But I am afraid this change of front, this volte-face, as it seemed, was not welcomed in many quarters; for thereby all hope of having him back for the work of the country or the world appeared to be totally lost and he came to be looked upon again as an irrevocable “metaphysical” dreamer, aloof from physical things and barren, even like the Immutable Brahman.

2

In order to get a nearer approach to the ideal for which Sri Aurobindo has been labouring, we may combine with advantage the two mottoes he has given us and say that his mission is to find and express the Divine in humanity. This is the service he means to render to humanity, viz., to manifest and embody in it the Divine: his goal is not merely an amelioration, but a total change and transformation, the divinisation of human life.

Here also one must guard against certain misconceptions that are likely to occur. The transformation of human life does not necessarily mean that the entire humanity will be changed into a race of gods or divine beings; it means the evolution or appearance on earth of a superior type of humanity, even as man evolved out of animality as a superior type of animality, not that the entire animal kingdom was changed into humanity.

As regards the possibility of such a consummation,—Sri Aurobindo says it is not a possibility but an inevitability—one must remember that the force that will bring about the result and is already at work is not any individual human power, however great it may be, but the Divine himself, it is the Divine’s own Shakti that is labouring for the destined end.

Here is the very heart of the mystery, the master-key to the problem. The advent of the superhuman or divine race, however stupendous or miraculous the phenomenon may appear to be, can become a thing of practical actuality, precisely because it is no human agency that has undertaken it but the Divine himself in his supreme potency and wisdom and love. The descent of the Divine into the ordinary human nature in order to purify and transform it and be lodged there is the whole secret of the sadhana in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. The sadhaka has only to be quiet and silent, calmly aspiring, open and acquiescent and receptive to the one Force; he need not and should not try to do things by his independent personal effort, but get them done or let them be done for him in the dedicated consciousness by the Divine Master and Guide. All other Yogas or spiritual disciplines in the past envisaged an ascent of the consciousness, its sublimation into the consciousness of the Spirit and its fusion and dissolution there in the end. The descent of the Divine Consciousness to prepare its definitive home in the dynamic and pragmatic human nature, if considered at all, was not the main theme of the past efforts and achievements. Furthermore, the descent spoken of here is the descent, not of a divine consciousness—for there are many varieties of divine consciousness—but of the Divine's own consciousness, of the Divine himself with his Shakti. For it is that that is directly working out this evolutionary transformation of the age.

It is not my purpose here to enter into details as to the exact meaning of the descent, how it happens and what are its lines of activity and the results brought about. For it is indeed an actual descent that happens: the Divine Light leans down first into the mind and begins its purificatory work there—although it is always the inner heart which first recognises the Divine Presence and gives its assent to the Divine action—for the mind, the higher mind that is to say, is the summit of the ordinary human consciousness and receives more easily and readily the Radiances that descend. From the Mind the Light filters into the denser regions of the emotions and desires, of life activity and vital dynamism; finally, it gets into brute Matter itself, the hard and obscure rock of the physical body, for that too has to be illumined and made the very form and figure of the Light supernal. The Divine in his descending Grace is the Master-Architect who is building slowly and surely the many-chambered and many-storeyed edifice that is human nature and human life into the mould of the Divine Truth in its perfect play and supreme expression. But this is a matter which can be closely considered when one is already well within the mystery of the path and has acquired the elementary essentials of an initiate.

Another question that troubles and perplexes the ordinary human mind is as to the time when the thing will be done. Is it now or a millennium hence or at some astronomical distance in future, like the cooling of the sun, as someone has suggested for an analogy. In view of the magnitude of the work one might with reason say that the whole eternity is there before us, and a century or even a millennium should not be grudged to such a labour—for it is nothing less than an undoing of untold

millenniums in the past and the building of a far-flung futurity. However, as we have said, since it is the Divine's own work and since Yoga means a concentrated and involved process of action, effectuating in a minute what would perhaps take years to accomplish in the natural course, one can expect the work to be done sooner rather than later. Indeed, the ideal is one of *here* and *now*—here upon this earth of material existence and now in this life, in this very body—not hereafter or elsewhere. How long exactly that will mean, depends on many factors, but a few decades on this side or the other do not matter very much.

As to the extent of realisation, we say again that that is not a matter of primary consideration. It is not the quantity but the substance that counts. Even if it were a small nucleus it would be sufficient, at least for the beginning, provided it is the real, the genuine thing—

*Svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt.*¹

Now, if it is asked what is the proof of it all, how can one be sure that one is not running after a mirage, a chimera? We can only answer with the adage, the proof of the pudding is in the eating thereof.

3

I have a word to add finally in justification of the title of this essay. For, it may be asked, how can spirituality be considered as one of the Arts or given an honourable place in their domain?

From a certain point of view, from the point of view of essentials and inner realities, it would appear that spirituality is, at least, the basis of the arts, if not the highest art. If art is meant to express the soul of things, and since the true soul of things is the divine element in them, then certainly spirituality, the discipline of coming in conscious contact with the Spirit, the Divine, must be accorded the regal seat in the hierarchy of the arts. Also, spirituality is the greatest and the most difficult of the arts; for it is the art of life. To make of life a perfect work of beauty, pure in its lines, faultless in its rhythm, replete with strength, iridescent with light, vibrant with delight—an embodiment of the Divine, in a word—is the highest ideal of spirituality; viewed as such, spirituality—the spirituality that Sri Aurobindo practises—is the *ne plus ultra* of artistic creation.

(*Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. 3, pp. 3-7)

1. *The Gita*, II. 40.

THE SOUL'S ODYSSEY

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:¹...

RARELY has a poet—a secular poet, I mean—given utterance to deep spiritual and occult truth with such clarity and felicity. It is, however, quite open to doubt whether Wordsworth himself was fully cognisant of the truth he expressed; the words that were put into his mouth carry a significance and a symbolism considerably beyond what his mind seemed to have received and understood. The passage may be taken as one more illustration of Matthew Arnold's characterisation of Wordsworth's genius at its best, it is then Nature herself that takes up the pen and writes for the poet.

The deep spiritual truth we are referring to is the Odyssey of the human soul. And it is also an occult phenomenon happening in the world of the inner reality. The Soul's own home is in God, is God; for it is part and parcel of the divine consciousness, it is essentially one in being and nature with the supreme Reality. It is a nucleus, a centre of individuation, a projection in a particular name and form of the infinite and eternal Being and Consciousness and Bliss on this side of manifestation or evolutionary Nature. Being in and with the Divine, merged within it, the Soul has, at the same time, its own proper domain, exclusively its own, and its own inalienable identity. It is the domain where the Soul enjoys its *svarājya*, its absolute freedom, dwelling in its native light and happiness and glory. But the story changes, the curve of its destiny takes a sudden new direction when it comes down upon earth, when it inhabits a mortal body. Within the body, it no longer occupies its patent frontal position, but withdraws behind a veil, as it were: it takes its stand behind or within the depth of the heart, as spiritual practice experiences it. It hides there, as in a cavern, closed in now by the shades of the prison-house which its own body and life and mind build round it. Yet it is not wholly shut out or completely cut off; for from its secret home it exerts its influence which gradually, slowly, very slowly indeed, filters through—bathes, clarifies, illumines the encasement, makes it transparent and docile in the end. For that is the soul's ultimate function and fulfilment.

In the meanwhile, however, "our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting." A physical incarnation clouds the soul-consciousness and involves loss of memory, amnesia.

1. Wordsworth: *ODE. Intimations of Immortality*.

The soul's travail therefore in a physical body is precisely to regain the memory of what has been forgotten. Spiritual discipline means at bottom this remembering, and all culture too means nothing more than that—that is also what Plato thought when he said that all knowledge, all true knowledge consists in reminiscence.

Man, in his terrestrial body, although fallen, because shrouded and diverted from his central being of light and fire, is yet not, as I have said, wholly forsaken and cut adrift. He always carries within him that radiant core through all the peregrinations of earthly sojourn. And though the frontal consciousness, the physical memory has no contact with it, there is a stream of inner consciousness that continues to maintain the link. That is the silver lining to the dark cloud that envelops and engulfs our normal life. And that is why at times—not unoften—there occurs a crack, a fissure in the crust of our earthly nature of ignorance and a tongue of flame leaps out—one or other perhaps of the seven sisters of which the Upanishad speaks. And then a mere man becomes a saint, a seer, a poet, a prophet, a hero. This is the flaming godhead whom we cherish within, Agni, the leader of our progressive life, the great Sacrifice, the child whom we nourish, birth after birth, by all that we experience and do and achieve. To live normally and naturally in that fiery element—like the legendary Salamander—to mould one's consciousness and being, one's substance and constitution, even the entire cellular organisation into the radiant truth is the goal of man's highest aspiration, the ultimate end of Nature's evolutionary urge and the cycle of rebirth.

(Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol. 3, pp. 119-21)

While we are in Ignorance, our relations with men and the world are false and ignorant, but once we attain our true self, we find the same self in men and things and we have no more revulsion for them—tato na vijigupsate.

(Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol. 1, p. 363)

YOGA AS PRAGMATIC POWER

PEOPLE ask about the practical value of Yoga, but do not always wait for an answer. For, according to some, Yoga means “introversion”, escapism—illusion, delusion, hallucination. And yet the truth of the matter is that Yoga is nothing but a downright practical affair, that its proof is in the very doing of it. To judge a Yogin you are to ask, as did Arjuna, a very prince of pragmatic men, how he sits, how he walks about—*kim āsīta vrajeta kim*. Indeed the very definition of Yoga is that it is skill in works. To do works and not to run away from them has always been the true and natural ideal even (and particularly, as we shall see) for the spiritual man: the ideal is as old as the Upanishadic injunction, “Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years.” The Yogi as a world-shunner was not always the only ideal or the highest ideal. To do works, yes; but, with skill, it is pointed out, that is to say, in the way in which they can be most effectively done. Sri Krishna teaches Arjuna the skill and shows how to apply it in the crudest and the most terrible action, viz., a bloody battle. But the skill that he demands, that is demanded of a Yogi, is not mere cleverness, craftiness or business policy including deceit, duplicity, sharpness; it means quite another spirit and faculty.

The ordinary man does works, achieves the object he aims at, through processes and means which, however powerful and effective, can be only moderately and approximately so. The amount of time and energy wasted is not proportionate to the result obtained. Man knows to utilise only a fraction of the energy collected in a system: the best of dispositions and organisation can harness just a modicum of the total stock, the rest is frittered away or locked up, whether it is vital energy or mental energy or even physical energy. That is because the central power that drives, the consciousness that controls the whole mechanism is of an inferior quality, of a lower potential. The Yogi views all energy as various forms and gradations of consciousness. So what he proposes, as a good scientist, is to lift up the consciousness and thus raise its potential and effectivity and minimise the waste. The higher the consciousness, the greater the effectivity, that is to say, the pragmatic value. As we rise in the scale there is less and less waste and greater and greater utilisation until we reach a climax, a critical degree, where there is absolutely no waste and where there is the utmost, the total utilisation of the whole energy. This supreme peak of consciousness that is absolute energy Sri Aurobindo names the Supermind. But on lesser levels too the spiritual consciousness is dynamic and effective—pragmatic in a way that the ordinary, limited, externally pragmatic consciousness cannot hope to be.

Sometimes it is urged that in the worldly affairs we should move according to the worldly procedure, otherwise to import into mundane things spiritual values would merely confuse issues and end in failure in both the fields—“fallen from hence, lost from thence”. Of course there are spiritual points of view that go ill with the mundane, as indeed there are mundane considerations that do not match with the spiritual. The

two categories of view-point have been succinctly and luminously named by Sri Aurobindo as the Materialist Denial and the Ascetic Refusal.* But there are other points of view, other lines of approach which seek a harmony and union between Spirit and Matter, that envisage the marriage of Heaven and Earth.

The fundamental truth to be noted is that the Spirit is power, not merely consciousness: indeed the very definition of the spirit is that it is consciousness-energy. And it is this consciousness-energy that is at the source of all cosmic activities. Man's action too springs from this original source, although apparently it seems to be caused by other secondary and derivative energies. As a matter of fact what these energies that seem to be actually in play do is not the origination but rather the deviation and diversion, a diminution and adulteration of the supreme energy, a lowering of the quality, the tone and temper of the dynamism. In other words, as we have already said, a thought force, a vital force, a nervous or physical force, all these are only lower, even minima values, more or less distant and deformed echoes of a true and absolute Power behind and above them all. These forces become powerful in proportion as they are instruments and functions of that one mother energy. The truth is most beautifully illustrated in the story of Brahma and the gods in the Kena Upanishad. The gods conquered and were proud of their conquest; each thought that it was due to his own personal prowess that he conquered. But they were utterly discomfited and shamed when the Divine Power appeared and proved to them that but for this Power they would not be able even to tackle a blade of grass—Fire would not burn it, Water would not drench it, Wind would not move it.

(Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol. 1, pp. 391-93)

* *The Life Divine*, by Sri Aurobindo.

सूर्यप्रणामः

ॐ जवाकुसुमसङ्काशं काश्यपेयं महाद्युतिं।
ध्वान्तारिं सर्वपापघ्नं प्रणतोऽस्मि दिवाकरम्॥

HYMN TO SURYA

(A Translation)

Glowing like the red passion-flower,
born of the Supreme Light,
lo, the Mighty Splendour!

He dispels darkness, he slays
all ills, I bow to the
creator of the Day.

(Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol. 8, p. 57)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SAVITRI

(When this article first appeared in Srinwantu, August 1986, it had the following prefatory editorial note:

A few of us have been trying to read and study Savitri in a group. We requested Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna) to kindly give us a guide-line, so that our understanding as well as enjoyment of Savitri might be enhanced and enriched. We put some specific questions which would show him the trend of our mind. Given below are the first two of them along with his answers.)

Q. One may approach Savitri (1) with a devotee's attitude as the spiritual autobiography of the Master, (2) as a book or store-house of spiritual wisdom comparable to the Vedas, the Upanishads or the Gita, and (3) as great poetry. Can these approaches merge? What should be the basic approach for a full and just appreciation?

A. To make the right approach we must understand what Sri Aurobindo intended *Savitri* to be. A few statements of his may be cited. "I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level. Moreover I was particular—if part seemed to me to come from any lower levels I was not satisfied to leave it because it was good poetry. All had to be as far as possible of the same mint. In fact *Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one's own yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative."

We can gather several points here. First and foremost, *Savitri* is an adventure in poetry. But the aim is not merely to write good poetry. The poetry has to be good by an ascension in poetic quality to the highest spiritual plane possible: this plane has to be creative in terms of poetic values. *Savitri* should express poetically the ever-higher peak reached by Sri Aurobindo's progressive spiritual ascension. Therefore we cannot consider it either as sheer poetry or as sheer spirituality. It must help us at the same time to ascend to Sri Aurobindo's own peak and do so with the full awareness of the poetic way in which that peak has become communicative of its truth, its power, its delight. *Savitri* has to be taken as Sri Aurobindo's poetically spiritual autobiography which is meant to make us re-live his inner life of both poetic creativity and creative spirituality.

Further, we must attend to some details of these two creativities, keeping in view Sri Aurobindo's disclosure: "there have been made several successive revisions each trying to lift the general level higher and higher towards a possible Overmind poetry. As [*Savitri*] now stands there is a general Overmind influence, I believe,

sometimes coming fully through, sometimes colouring the poetry of the other higher planes fused together, sometimes lifting any one of these higher planes to its highest or the psychic, poetic intelligence or vital towards them.” Mention of Overmind aligns *Savitri* to the top reach of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita, and the enormous mass of it, nearly 24,000 verses, renders it a super-scripture, an unparalleled store-house of spiritual wisdom. But we must remember that this wisdom comes at its best in the form of what the ancients called the Mantra, which Sri Aurobindo characterises in a line which is itself mantric as

Sight’s sound-waves breaking from the soul’s great deeps.

Here the final emergence of the Overmind’s truth-light and truth-vibration is suggested, the surging up of the supreme Word from the secret heart of things which is one with our own inmost heart and which has received that Word for manifestation from the hidden heights. What is pertinent in this connection is that the Mantra is borne to us in “sound-waves”, not simply the luminous sense but also the harmonious verbal embodiment of it is important. Thus the poetry that is *Savitri* is inseparable from the spirituality of this master-work of Sri Aurobindo and the latter cannot be appreciated and assimilated in a living manner unless we are responsive to the mode of vision, the cast of word, the mould of rhythm—the Spirit’s varied poetic avatar. The heart of *Savitri*—the mystery from which the poem has sprung—yields its pulsation most intimately when we approach it with sensitiveness to the art of *Savitri*.

I may add that the wisdom we have to absorb from this poem has an intellectual element too. That is why Sri Aurobindo says that in its final form *Savitri* is “a sort of poetic philosophy of the Spirit and of Life”. But we have to mark the qualifying noun “sort”, for the “philosophy” is no more than the mental look the eyes of Yogic vision and experience put on, and we have to note the qualifying adjective “poetic” which brings in the artistry with which that look is worn.

*

Q. If somebody is fond of poetry and would prefer to come to sadhana via the road of poetry, will the study of Savitri as poetry help him much? Would you kindly explain to us how and where poetry becomes yoga and yoga poetry in Savitri?

A. I should think that all poetry, like all of the other arts, tends at its intensest to take us not only into magic but also into mystery. An impact of flawless form is felt: an impression of the ideal, the perfect, is received through the inevitable rhythmic expression. Even a descriptive line like

Sweet water hurrying from reluctant rocks,

from Sri Aurobindo's early poetry enchants us with its apt surprises—the choice of the contrasting epithets “hurrying” and “reluctant”, the easy run of the voice in the first half of the line and the retardation of it in the second half with its close consonantal conjuncts “ct”, “nt”, “cks”, and yet the weaving together of the opposing senses by the alliterating “r” in the five words out of six, and finally through all these bespelling effects the disclosure of some hidden life in things which apparently are inanimate but occultly carry on a play of their own. Not only is a surface beauty of natural events delineated: a secret design of interacting and counteracting mobility and stability is also hinted at. We are given simultaneously a satisfying sight and a felicitous insight. This is the function of all inspired poetry. We get an inner experience through an outer stimulus: our perceptions get subtilised. Without even a directly spiritual communication attempted we undergo an exquisite refinement which can prepare us for it. As a critic has intuitively said, “Poetry may not save souls but it makes souls worth saving.”

When we come to poetry like *Savitri* we have this power eminently exercised. *Savitri* can serve the poetry-lover as a road to sadhana. Here, over and above an account of spiritual states and by means of it a conceptual as well as imaginative sign-post to the mystical goal, we have a vibrant evocation of these states in a language that is born out of them and is no mere reflection of the profundities beyond the mind in mental terms. The process and the product of this special language are thrillingly pictured in the *Savitri* passage whose concluding line I have already quoted to illustrate the Mantra. Sri Aurobindo is describing the various orders of ascetics whom Savitri comes across in the course of her search for her destined mate. The Rishi-like occupation of one order is conveyed to us:

Intuitive knowledge leaping into speech,
Seized, vibrant, kindling with the inspired word,
Hearing the subtle voice that clothes the heavens,
Carrying the splendour that has lit the suns,
They sang Infinity's names and deathless powers
In metres that reflect the moving worlds,
Sight's sound-waves breaking from the soul's great deeps.

As *Savitri* exemplifies, by and large, this sort of spiritual composition, the reading of it is bound to induce movements of yoga. But the reader must approach it rightly. He should imagine the twofold birth of the Mantra: high above in an ether of Super-consciousness and deep within where the Rigvedic *hṛdaya samudra*, the heart-ocean, the wondrous in-world into which opens the individual emotional-psychic experience, echoes and images the over-world. Then he should practise a dedicated silence in

the mind in order to imitate something of the “hushed intense receptivity turned upwards” which Sri Aurobindo, in a letter to me, stressed as the state for the Rishi to draw the Mantra into his utterance. Such a state is necessary for two reasons. First: the full impression of the Mantric speech would be missed unless the mind were made a blank sheet on which the script of the Eternal could come out absolutely clear. Second: that speech is itself most typically, most fundamentally from a similar state. Sri Aurobindo, in *Savitri*, writes of

Silence, the nurse of the Almighty’s power,
The omniscient hush, womb of the immortal Word,

and in the same context he recounts how the Goddess of Inspiration

Lent a vibrant cry to the unuttered vasts,
And through great shoreless, voiceless, starless breadths
Bore earthward fragments of revealing thought
Hewn from the silence of the Ineffable.

A final requisite for the reader to make *Savitri* his mode of sadhana is to read it not with the eye alone but also with the ear. The silence with which he approaches this poem which is born from “the omniscient hush” can be most effectively employed for “the immortal Word” to leave its mark upon it if we peruse the verse audibly. We have to hear and not just see the lines. In a slow subdued voice we have to communicate *Savitri* to our consciousness. All poetry has to be vocalised if its total magic and mystery are to go home to us. Much more is it necessary to vocalise *Savitri*. It has rhythmic properties more subtle than in any other poem, since it hails from realms of expression rarely tapped and unless we are so adept as to get inwardly the complete shape, as it were, of its “vibrant cry” we need to realise that shape by an audible transmission. Even to understand something, it is advisable to read it aloud—and *Savitri* too is best understood through the ear. But what I am asking for is meant to bear us beyond understanding. Poetry sets up a stirring within us answering to the life-throb of a vision or emotion or intuition, a life-throb which repeats itself in us and gives us a reality of the poet’s substance exceeding the mere idea of it. Understanding poetry amounts to acquiring an idea of the vision, emotion, intuition concerned and reflecting upon the way they are conveyed. Such reflection is part of winning access to the art-element. It cannot be dispensed with, but even more important for the access is to catch the life-throb of those psychological faculties at work. Audible reading most fruitfully carries into us the life-throb and the basic shape of the poetry, transmitting both its aesthetic and its spiritual truth. Of course the value and efficacy of this double aspect of the poetic phenomenon—and particularly of a super-phenomenon like *Savitri*—will differ from reader to reader, depending on the inner sensitivity and on the intimacy with the English language. But all readers will

receive the maximum they can by reciting *Savitri* instead of simply running the eye over the page.

As for the “how” and “where” of poetry becoming yoga and yoga poetry in *Savitri* I cannot make absolutely definite observations. I should say that the poetic and the yogic interplay throughout but there are several degrees which we may attempt to mark off in a rough way. Let me take a single theme and distinguish the modes of its recurrence. There is the straightforward statement, fusing the mental and the ultra-mental with a fine ease:

My mind transfigures to a rapturous seer.

This seems to be what Sri Aurobindo has termed the “adequate style” at an inevitable pitch. Then there is, in my opinion, his “effective style” keyed up to inevitability:

Out of our thoughts we must leap up to sight,

Next we may show an example of the inevitable “illuminated style”:

In the light flooding thought’s blank vacancy,

The “illuminated” merges in the “inspired” when we read:

Splendours of insight filled the blank of thought,

A mixture of all these styles—with perhaps the “adequate-effective” as an overall tone—may be found in:

His seeking mind ceased in the Truth that knows;

A keener articulation of such a mixture meets us when Sri Aurobindo speaks of sages escaping from the confines of thought

To where Mind motionless sleeps waiting Light’s birth,

This verse draws near to the style which, according to Sri Aurobindo, goes out of all classification, however inevitable a line may be within its own class—the style which is the “sheer inevitable” and whose undeniable example, in my eyes, is:

Our minds hush to a bright Omniscient;

Here poetry passes wholly into the mood of yoga and yoga becomes most intensely articulate in poetry.

An alternative scheme of distinction might take the first two instances as the “Creative Intelligence” in a couple of varying phrases: quiet felicity in the one and *vivida vis* (lively force) in the other. Perhaps the second instance is half-way into the “Higher Mind”. The next two seem to be the “Higher Mind” taken up into the “Illumined Mind” and verging on the “Intuition”. The first of the pair of penultimate instances looks like the direct penetrative simplicity of the “Intuition” under the guise, as it were, of the “Creative Intelligence”’s clear-cut drive rather than of its colourful play. The second member has a greater sign in it of the “Intuition”’s thrilled power going straight to the heart of a subject, be it a scene, an event, a state or a person. Beyond this power lies the revelation of the “Overmind” which brings us the intensest inmost of the calmest immense, a sovereign seizure of spiritual truth in all its beauty of vision, voice and vibrancy.

In the line I have quoted—

Our minds hush to a bright Omniscient;

we have the vision of the thinker in us losing his loud self-assertive limits in a spontaneous super-knowledge which lights up everything. This vision finds voice in a compact pattern, the intransitive verb “hush” acquiring an extra impact, a depth of force, by standing in an inverted foot, a trochee in a virtually iambic verse, and that too as the second unit in the scansion, a surprise suddenly interrupting the expected metrical run. At the line’s end comes another surprise, a noun made out of an adjective packed with tremendous significance. I believe that it is the first time in English literature that “Omniscient” is used as a noun with an indefinite article. Apart from that singularity is the question: “Why is ‘omniscience’ not used?” The habitual noun would indicate a state of all-knowledge and not a being who knows all. The personal identity of the yogi is preserved in some supreme form in a realm where the basic Universal wears numerous individual faces and the One Omniscient manifests in a multiplicity of Omniscients. There is also a sound-effect to be appreciated. The *sh*-sound in “hush” is caught up in “Omniscient” which is pronounced “Omnishyent”, the suggestion of the echoed sound is that the hushing of the mind deepens and widens and heightens by a natural process the mind-possessing finite being that we are into an infinite supernal self who is by contrast a knower of everything and yet mysteriously continuous with our present finitude. Finally, both for sense and for sound the epithet “bright” is the *mot juste*. “White” could have been put instead, connoting shadowless purity. But the special effect of the conjunct consonants *br* would have been absent. These consonants carry as if by the very modulation of the lips and tongue the hint of a spreading out as well as a glowing forth. The psychological impression is of a bursting into light. In addition we have to note that “bright” has a long *i* just as “minds” has. The sound-parity suggests the “minds” themselves turning “bright” through the hushing experience. Besides, “bright” is at the tail-end of a

series of five mono-syllables, a sort of climaxing of the process they represent. And this fivefold process thus climaxed terminates and culminates in a massive reality of transcendent transformation indicated by the single four-syllabled word “Omniscient”.

To feel and recognise the spiritual afflatus of so superb a kind, borne magically home to us in a design of manifold artistry, is indeed a preparatory movement of sadhana. Again and again we get a chance to develop the sadhana-mood. The fundamental attitude necessary for advance in spirituality is hit off to perfection in the middle verse of the three powerful inward-drawing lines which yet turn one’s soul outward to master the world’s “crass casualty”:

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

The absolute of this peace, the self-existent infinitude of it meets us in a life-changing passage when Aswapati’s aspiring consciousness breaks beyond the barrier of both individual and universal existence:

Across a void retreating sky he glimpsed
Through a last glimmer and drift of vanishing stars
The superconscient realms of motionless Peace
Where judgment ceases and the word is mute
And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone.

Everywhere, in some places more directly and in others through a transparent veil, *Savitri* which is the self-expression of a master yogi can lead us towards yoga. But its most creative function is to kindle in us a flame burning at all times so that we may build up in ourselves the living presence of that master yogi and through the illumining art of this epic of the Spirit quicken at each moment with the invocation:

O Wisdom-Splendour, Mother of the universe,
Creatrix, the Eternal’s artist Bride,...

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

(From *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, pp. 131-40. With acknowledgement to *Srinwantu*.)

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

O! Let me clasp Your Feet!

I AM sitting at my writing desk. In front of me is a picture of the Mother's Divine Feet. And as I fix my eyes on it an unearthly joy fills my heart. Memories of how this picture came to me come flooding in.

Every year, before my birthday, the Mother would ask me:

"What would you like?"

And strangely, at that moment of reply, I just could not wish for anything! I could not think of anything to ask for. After coming down from Her room I would tell myself that for my next birthday I would ask Her for a picture of Her Divine Feet. But then each time the same thing repeated itself!

"What would you like?"

Hardly had I heard these words that I would forget everything. I do not know why this happened, but I really felt that there was nothing I wanted. To me it remained a source of supreme mystery.

In 1972 I offered my birthday 'pranam' at the Mother's Feet for what was to be the last time. After completing my 'pranam' as usual, and accepting the Mother's flower-blessings, I was about to leave the room when Champaklal-ji called out:

"Priti, the Mother is calling you."

From the door I quickly went back to the Mother. As I knelt down, Champaklal-ji handed the Mother a colour photograph of Her Divine Feet. She sweetly smiled and then gave me this photograph.

I couldn't believe it and was overcome with joy. Was it really true? For on this day the Mother had fulfilled at last such a long-cherished wish of mine. I bowed at Her Feet once again. A line echoed within me:

I have looked upon you, I have surrendered my life, I am tied to Your adorned Feet forever!

I turned back in silence and slowly left the room. As I was going down the stairs, I could not help feeling somewhat amazed. Such a long-cherished wish had finally been fulfilled! And my heart overflowed with gratitude...

I sat in silence for a long time at the spot where the Mother's couch stands today. How could I have known then that one year later Her Body would be brought down from Her room and kept at this very spot? And that this was to be my last visit to the Mother? Perhaps that was why the Mother had fulfilled that day my long-cherished wish by giving me this photograph of Her Lotus Feet. I was sitting facing Sri Aurobindo in the picture that stands today in the front hall. But at that time this photograph was all there was in the place where the Mother's couch is kept today.

After Sri Aurobindo left His Body this photograph was installed there. We would bow down to Him there every morning and evening and pray: "O Lord, O Divine Sri Aurobindo, come back, come back. Bring to our country, India, unity, make Her one, O Lord." I still utter the same prayer regularly. Will not the Lord fulfil our prayer?

We love the Mother. We have all felt Her, sometimes as Mother Aditi Herself, sometimes as Maheshwari, at other times as Mahakali, Mahalakshmi or as Mahasaraswati. Standing next to a fire, how can our body not be touched by its warmth? And in spite of our untransformed, ignorant condition the Mother's Grace has so spontaneously blessed us in all Her forms. But we have never known the Mother's Body or had the experience of it as being fully Divine. We found Her so close to us in such an effortless way that it never even occurred to us that this human body of the Mother, in whose protection we have been advancing on this difficult path, is in its every atom and in its very external form too, the body of Mother Aditi Herself. Being so close to the Mother we always looked upon the Mother physically as our best friend. But how immeasurably valuable this was, was revealed to us one day by the Mother Herself in the course of events. What an amazing experience that was!

When the Mother played tennis, She would always wear a pair of 'tabi', a special Japanese footwear which was neither shoe nor sock but it was most comfortable. The pairs of 'tabi' that the Mother had brought from Japan were all more or less worn out. One day the Mother was talking to Vasudha about 'tabis' at the tennis-court. They were discussing how to procure these 'tabis'. As I was standing beside them I overheard everything. And as luck would have it, just a few days later my youngest uncle arrived here. He was to go to Japan and had come to the Mother to ask for Her permission. I was delighted beyond words.

"You have to get some 'tabis' for Mother from Japan," I told my uncle.

"Get me the measurement of the Mother's Feet. Only then will the 'tabis' fit Her," my uncle replied.

With a sheet of paper and pencil in my hand I entered Her room in the Playground. She had come back after playing tennis and was resting on Her sofa.

"Could you please place Your Feet on this paper? I will make a tracing. My youngest uncle (Himansu) is going to Japan. He'll get some 'tabis' for You and needs Your size," I told Her.

The Mother agreed at once.

I bent down to trace out the Mother's Feet. The more I looked at Her Feet, the more I was filled with wonder. My hand would just not move. I had never had such an opportunity to look at Her Feet for so long. I was enamoured, enamoured of the fine shape and beauty of Her Feet and toes and I kept staring at them, oblivious of everything. What marvellous beautiful Feet! Each toe was so finely shaped and so beautifully kept. The sun's brilliant glow was there on the Mother's Feet and toes. Each nail looked like a miniature shell crafted with the subtlest of artistry. The beauty

of the lotus and the soft smoothness of morning dew had come together in the making of the Mother's Feet. Brilliance, beauty and softness wondrously met in the Mother's Feet. I had never had in my life the good fortune of seeing the Mother's Feet in this way. I felt truly blessed!

I do not remember how long I must have sat there staring at the Mother's Feet. I suddenly came back to my senses when the Mother gently touched my head. I quickly traced out Her Feet with the pencil. Raising my head and looking at Her Feet I exclaimed:

"Such lovely Feet, Mother! How beautiful indeed!"

The Mother sweetly smiled and said a little mysteriously:

"Why, haven't you ever seen the Feet of gods and goddesses?"

I was flabbergasted. Sure! The Feet of Mother Durga, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati resembled Hers. All those sculptors who have made images of gods and goddesses must have had a vision of the Mother in some subtle world. That is why they were inspired to carve these images. I was awestruck. We humans could gaze at the Mother's divine Body in a human form from so close in this mortal world! Gaze and be blessed! It is one thing to be able to see these incomparable Feet in a painting or a statue but the fact that the Mother has come down on this earth with those same Feet and we are able to see and touch Them is quite another. It is an experience in itself. I remained seated, speechless in wonder. The Mother blessed me once again by touching my head. A marvellous thrill of delight ran through my entire body. I placed my head at Her Feet and bowed to Her. This 'pranam', from that moment, took on a special meaning in my life.

I stood up with the paper and pencil in my hand and as I came out of the Mother's room I looked up and noticed the western sky aglow in red and the sun's rays were streaming from behind in all the four directions. Were not the Mother's Feet created from these very rays of the sun? Who was that sculptor? Two lines of a poem echoed in my being:

*Janani, tomar korun charanakhani
Herinu aji e arunkirona rupe.*

(O Mother, I have beheld your compassionate Feet today in the rays of the Sun.)

Memories

O Mother Maheshwari, Mother Mahakali, Mother Mahalakshmi, Mother Mahasaraswati!

Thus invoking Your Lotus Feet I set forth in my boat of memories...

What boundless joy a fleeting glimpse of the Mother would give us! How Her presence drew us like a magnet and kept us rooted to our seat for hours together in absolute stillness. These moments have become today a part of history. It is impossible to describe that marvellous experience when at Her radiant, unutterable touch an immortal stream of such exceeding peace would flow within us and in each and every atom of our body. Only those who have been blessed with that divine Touch can truly and fully understand this experience. And this was a daily occurrence. We got to experience all this so easily, so effortlessly that I feel even gods and goddesses themselves must have been envious of us. The Mother Herself has come down onto this mortal world and opened up the treasure-trove of Her Grace. Now in these moments of leisure, every utterance, every gesture of the Mother overwhelms the heart with a memory of divine grace and beauty. In remembering Her, my entire consciousness sinks deep within my heart. At that time it seemed the most natural of things, life would go on in this way! When Mother Aditi Herself has descended upon the Earth, then Her infinite Love would naturally be showered over us, Her children. This was our firm conviction.

With small children the Mother would Herself become a child. She would love them, tell them stories, recite humorous verses to divert them, to educate them. The Mother would reveal this aspect of Hers so beautifully when She used to take the children's classes in the evening:

*With my far-reaching Rays I illumine the universe
Yet do not forget the drop of dew
For Love within my Heart I nurse.*

How true these lines of the poet are for the Mother!

The Mother showered Her infinite Love on all, young and old. In these pages my endeavour will be to recreate for you some of those moments. Personal references will keep coming in but that is inevitable in writing about memories.

I will not be able to express the incredible joy that each of the Mother's gestures evoked. Her way of talking, Her way of looking, in fact everything She did had such graceful beauty and tenderness, and even today directs us to some distant, subtle world....

How can one forget the memories of those days? Why, you too have grown up in the shadow of the Mother's Love. The Mother's laughter, the Mother's words have illumined your treasure-house of memories as well. Anybody who has received the privilege of approaching the Mother as a Mother, as a Friend, has had his whole life transfigured!

I remember the Mother taking Her French class with the children. The class was held in the courtyard of the house where the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had

lived at one time. It was also the house where the first meeting between the Mother and Sri Aurobindo took place. In this children's class, the Mother would come and start with a dictation. Then She Herself corrected the mistakes in all the notebooks. What tremendous concentration She put into that evening class. If a child was unable to recite some text She would slowly read it out for him. The children had to memorise a poem almost daily. I never saw the Mother get angry while teaching. We too, after all, are teachers! We loved the way the children sat on the floor and wrote their dictation. You must have seen photographs of this class.

There was a time when Dada (Pranab) garlanded the Mother in this courtyard before She started Her class. What a marvellous sight that was! How lovely the Mother looked! I cannot ever forget Her sweet smile. We would eagerly wait in a corner of the courtyard in order to watch the Mother being garlanded. I will no more be able to see that incredible scene again. I feel bad just thinking about it. The lyrics of a song that one of my childhood friends used to sing with so much feeling and love come to mind:

*What loveliness of form fills my eyes
And his lips adorned with that softest of smiles
Is it the beauty of the garland
Or is it the beauty of the neck,
That the garland sways in such happy abandon?*

This *kirtan* is about Sri Krishna. I remembered this song every time the Mother was garlanded with flowers. And each time I was overjoyed. The Mother looked resplendently beautiful with the garland around Her neck. Such an event has never occurred in the earth's history. The World-Mother being garlanded by Her son! I have been told that after finishing all Her work in the Playground, the Mother would go back to the Ashram and first offer this garland at Sri Aurobindo's Feet. Those who have had the privilege of witnessing this marvellous scene are blessed. I am overjoyed just trying to imagine the scene. Mother Aditi Herself offering a garland of flowers at the Feet of the Supreme Purusha! And such an incident has taken place on our earth of ordinary dust. Blessed is our Mother Vasundhara and blessed are we human beings!

The Mother used to take the adults' class as well, on Wednesdays and Fridays. On these two days, on waking up, the thought would immediately come: Ah today is the Mother's class! And the heart would begin dancing with joy. The whole day unfolded in a sort of enthusiasm and joy just at the thought that we had the Mother's class in the evening. I would try to imagine what the Mother was going to say that evening. Even today I cannot help thinking of those classes on Wednesdays and Fridays.

I remember a childhood scene. As soon as it was evening, we children would be

fed by a *masima* (aunt) and each evening it was a different one. The rice would be mixed with a vegetable on a very large plate and then each child would be fed a morsel one after the other. And even as we ate, we listened to wonderful stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. What eagerness and excitement there used to be while listening to these stories. We would listen to the Mother's words also with that same eagerness and excitement of childhood. Even though the Mother did not always tell us stories we would listen to the Mother's words of philosophical truth and advice with the same eagerness and feel as if we had understood everything. Such a sense of satisfaction there was, really!

The class with the bigger ones took place in the main Playground. A chair used to be kept for the Mother in front of the map of India that was made with green cement after the Mother had Herself drawn the outline of it on the wall. In the Mother's vision this was the true map of India.

Everyone would ask the Mother all types of questions, especially the 16-17-year-old boys and girls. In fact the class had been started for them. Listening to the Mother, I would simply forget myself. The Mother had this natural flair for explaining the most difficult philosophical and spiritual subjects with such simplicity and in such an easy language. It is difficult to compare that joy with anything else. The Mother read out to the class the various books written by Sri Aurobindo and by Herself one after the other. Then She would ask:

"Has anyone got any questions?"

Then one by one She answered all the questions while we all listened with rapt attention.

*

*Much have I loved with desires and longings
But by their deprivation now hast Thou saved me!*

One day the Mother came and stood in front of the map of India to take the March-Past salute. I thought this was the right moment and so I told Her:

"Mother, they (Minnie-di, Millie-di) are going to Mahabalipuram. I too would like to go, Mother."

"No, you can't go," the Mother replied. "You won't go."

I was quite stupefied on hearing this.

"Why can't I go, Mother? There are so many things to see in Mahabalipuram. Let me go with them, Mother."

"No, you shall not go."

I just kept still.

"Look at me," the Mother continued, "I stay here with all of you, have I gone anywhere?"

"But before coming here, you went to Russia and to America," I retorted.

The Mother was quite surprised.

“Who has told you that I went to Russia and America? I have never been to America nor will I ever go there.”

She uttered the last part so forcefully that I was a little taken aback.

After some time the Mother continued:

“What will you do there? You will just spoil their fun.”

I was extremely perplexed by the Mother’s words. Why would I spoil their fun, I wondered.

The Mother explained:

“As soon as you reach, you’ll start complaining about a terrible headache or a cold. You’ll start feeling terribly feverish. They would have so much trouble with you. No, you shan’t go.”

I just stood silently, and suddenly I remembered something from my childhood.

When I was at school (Sarala Balika Vidyalaya) in Feni, *Mejomasima* (elder aunt) and *Chhotomasima* (younger aunt) (this is how we called our teachers) often used to take the girls for an outing. Tapati and I could never go because we used to catch a cold or fever as soon as we went out anywhere. We were, as a result, absent from school for a few days. That is why father had given clear and strict instructions that we be forbidden from going on picnics. But how did the Mother get to know about this? The Mother knew every little detail even about our childhood, whereas I myself had forgotten! This instance of the Mother’s infinite Grace moved me very deeply. The Mother saved us in this way from innumerable dangers and difficulties and She continues to do so.

But by their deprivation now hast Thou saved me!

*

The Mother one day asked me to teach French at the School. I had just learnt a little French then. So it seemed absolutely impossible for me to take up teaching. However, I started the classes. My whole day was spent in preparing for my French classes. I had no time at all for reading my storybooks. Premanand, the Ashram librarian at that time, used to select the books for me to read. There were no sports activities then. After coming home from the meditation in the evening, I would enjoy reading my books.

At school and college I had not had so many opportunities to read storybooks. Father had strictly forbidden the reading of novels. Travelogues and biographies were fine. My schoolmates used to tease me:

“Don’t say that even Saratchandra’s books are out!”

My elder brother came up with a ploy.

“Just open your textbook but keep your novel inside.”

In the evenings, after coming out of the *Puja-Room*, father used to verify with

my elder brother and me if all the lessons for the next day at school had been learnt. Then he would go to visit *Jethamoshai* (Headmaster Manindra Mukherji). There at *Jethamoshai*'s (elder uncle's) house a large number of people would gather and discuss various things almost till 9 o'clock in the evening. During this gap I would read some books of Saratchandra's with great glee. But then how many books could I read? There was also schoolwork to be finished. Dada would whisper:

"There! Father is coming back!"

At once the textbook was pulled out from under the novel and we would start studying seriously. Not once was I caught! Dada had some brains, I must admit.

One day I received a severe thrashing from *Chhotokaka* (youngest uncle) (Sachindranath Dasgupta). I had just gone to Calcutta after sitting for the Matriculation exam. A big house had been taken on rent. It was *Chhotokaka*'s wedding. I was totally engrossed in reading *Pather Panchali* near the verandah-door. I did not even notice that *Chhotokaka* had come in and was standing behind me. Then all of a sudden I got a slap on my cheek.

"What's going on, Khuku? So you're reading a novel, aren't you?"

I was quite startled. I had been caught red-handed! Then suddenly I had an idea.

"Look, Nelli-di (a cousin) got this book from the School as a prize."

What could *Chhotokaka* say after that? He turned around and started walking up and down again.

And so in this way, under father's and *Chhotokaka*'s strict discipline, I completed my school-life. On entering college my first feeling was: "Ah, now I will be able to read my novels freely and happily!" I had grown up after all. But there was a fly in the ointment. The Second World War broke out and let alone novels, it became difficult to buy even all the textbooks. Our mother (*Bibhavati*) would write down the lessons by hand in a notebook.

When I first came here in 1941, *Mridu-masi* (aunty) showed me all her books and said:

"You can take any of these books to read, if you wish."

It was as if I had been given the moon. I first picked up a novel, *Sandhaney* written by Jyotirmala Devi. Its language was so clear and beautiful and the story marvellously well-constructed. Then I read other books by the same author. After that I started reading Dilip-da's books. But then it was time for me to go back to Feni. There I did not get such an opportunity for reading novels again.

In trying to prepare the French lessons I found out that there was no time for reading novels. In the mornings I worked at the Press. Mid-mornings I had to rush to the French class. In the evenings I had to correct the students' notebooks. I was really exhausted. Besides, I did not know enough French and so I had to really prepare very hard. I myself needed to study systematically.

One day, on finding an opportunity, I told the Mother in the Playground:

“Mother, I don’t want to teach at the school. I hardly know any French. Moreover, I don’t get any time to read novels.”

The Mother went on looking at me, quite astonished. Then She said:

“What will you get from reading novels? I don’t encourage reading novels. It is only to improve your language that you can read a few books, especially those parts that contain some beautiful thoughts or have a beautiful style of writing. It is only for improving the language that books should be read.

“Why don’t you want to teach at the school?” She raised Her voice a little. “If you teach at the school, then your French too will improve. The more you teach the more your knowledge will grow. *Tu es très timide* (You are very shy). That is one more reason why I have asked you to teach at the school.”

Before I could reply, the Mother said a little loudly:

“*Mère a donné le travail, il faut le faire.*” (The Mother has given the work, it must be done.)

She would give me a special flower called *Calm and modest confidence in oneself*.

As soon as I realised my stupidity I slipped out from there. I did not get any other opportunity to read novels. Today, as I am writing about all this, I feel that it was the Mother’s Grace that I did not get these opportunities to read all sorts of useless books. It was natural that I had this curiosity for reading novels at that young age. But how many children get the opportunity of selecting the right kind of books to read?

Allow me to quote some advice given by the Mother on this subject.

Many years later, we started the Free Progress System in our school. There was a lot of excitement in the air. The Mother spoke to the teachers about the selection of novels for students. She said:

There should be very few novels in the school library (the students read only too many novels), and no modern novels unless they are of particularly good quality.

Literature has its place in the ‘Bibliothèque Choisie’, so that the students can learn what literature is.

The most important thing to be taken into consideration when selecting books, is the quality of the language and style, something ‘splendid’ as in Flaubert.

It is now that I understand how right from our childhood the Mother guided us without our knowing it: what books to read, how to stay away from life’s errors and pitfalls, how to seek Her protection.

In April 1944 I came away to the Ashram for good. In those days a time was allotted to each one for going to the Mother. I had permission to go and see Her twice

a week. And even today I can feel within my heart that thrill and joy. The whole week would go in preparing for that moment. I used to feel a strange kind of fear-tinged faith while going to the Mother. One day I blurted it out to the Mother:

“You know, Mother, I strongly feel like coming to see you but I also feel a strange kind of fear and excitement. Why is that, Mother?”

The Mother was probably not expecting such a question. She gently put Her hands on my shoulders and looked at me with Her love-filled, steady eyes. A heavenly love and tenderness flowed from them. Then She held me really close to Her. And from that day slowly a sense of friendship grew with the Mother. And the clouds of fear began dissolving under the sunrays of Her soft, gentle smile. And this is how I was initiated into my new life. It was impossible for me to speak to the Mother freely. I would keep thinking: “I have just arrived. I am totally new to this place.” At that time no one really spoke with the newcomers. Nolini-da was the only person who understood me. Why, even girls of my age did not speak much! That is how life was in the Ashram of those days. It was like coming to the first class in a new school. At least that is how I felt. And when I went to the Mother I would feel Her so exalted, so distant that I felt helpless. But then a strong attraction like a magnet would draw me to the Mother. Hardly had I entered Her room that She would greet me: “*Bonjour, mon enfant*” (Good morning, my child), and then lovingly give me a flower. She would keep smiling as she looked at me but I just could not forget that the Mother was that very *Mahashakti* (Supreme Power) that governed this world and the universe. The Mother strove to teach me to be simple and free but I was always in awe. I always felt that I was a most ordinary girl from a little town called Feni. And I just could not get over my diffidence. Suddenly, one day, I entered the Mother’s room and involuntarily exclaimed: “*Bonjour, Douce Mère!*” (Good morning, Sweet Mother!) But then immediately afterwards I felt a little ashamed.

The Mother hugged me happily and said:

“There! You’ve spoken! That’s very good, very good!” And in this way the wall of diffidence crumbled with that ‘*Bonjour*’. And in time a close friendship grew with the Mother. There was no incident that I did not freely speak to the Mother about. In time we felt that the Mother was our Friend forever.

And that unearthly joy has no parallel.

Once in the earlier part of my life in the Ashram, the Mother told me while giving me a flower:

“Every morning, read a little bit of Sri Aurobindo’s book *The Mother*. Just as in India people read the *Gita* in the morning. You make the same kind of inner progress by reading *The Mother* as you do by reading the *Gita*. Read it regularly every morning.”

I did not quite have the capacity to understand the Mother’s advice then. I just kept staring at the Mother in speechless amazement: this was that same Mother! My whole body thrilled with delight. I was capable of experiencing a little the Mother’s being *Adishakti* and *Maheshwari*. But the Mother Herself indicating to me who

She was! This experience of mine I cannot convey. A supernatural sort of feeling overwhelmed me. After reading the sixth chapter of *The Mother* I understood why I used to feel a fear-tinged faith and love when I met the Mother.

By being with us the Mother slowly removed all diffidence and shyness from us. Thanks to Her happy indulgence we became courageous. The Mother had so ingrained the idea that She was our Friend that we used to speak freely to her about all sorts of things, sometimes even forgetting that we were but ordinary human beings. There was no such secret that we did not happily share with Her. In fact there was no way we could hide anything from Her. One had to go to the Mother and something from within would automatically tell Her everything. What a marvellous situation to be in! When everything was spoken out then the inner 'I' would automatically fall silent. The Mother would smile sweetly and envelop us in Her Divine Compassion. Then She would place some flowers in our hands and look at us for a little while. We would feel blessed by this benediction of Her eyes. After confiding in Her all our difficulties and obstacles, we would get a welcome respite from them. The Mother always told us: "Never forget for a moment that you are my much-loved children." Helped by the Mother's indulgent Love, a new wondrous consciousness began to take shape within us. Year after year, how much time, love and infinite patience the Mother lavished on us ordinary little boys and girls so that our personality would develop and grow! How She used to speak to each one of us according to our capacity of receptivity and understanding. How She educated us and surrounded us with Her support and sympathy! We could not do without the Mother in moments of difficulty. Today when I think about all these things my eyes, for no reason, fill up with tears. The Mother saw in each of us a person or being who far excelled his or her outer personality and She would pour Her infinite Patience and Compassion in order to bring that out and that would take us forward slowly day by day. There was no end to that progress.... With joy bubbling over in our hearts we would advance, surpassing mountain-like obstacles. Holding Her hand, we effortlessly overcame all pain, sorrow, suffering and disease. The Mother was there, what needed we fear, then? We just had to call out to Her, but call Her with all our heart: "Ma, Ma, Ma." And even this secret of calling out to Her in either pain or peril, the Mother Herself had taught us.

Once my eyes were paining considerably. I went and told the Mother about it. She went in and got some blue water. Then She taught me how to put the medicine in the eyecup and wash the eyes and even while doing this to call out, "Ma, Ma, Ma." To hear the Mother Herself saying "Ma, Ma, Ma" filled my heart with an extraordinary joy. That Mantra of the Mother has remained with me throughout. Why, even in dreams when we faced a danger, at once we called out, to the Mother or should we say someone from within called out "Ma, Ma". This strange experience happens to each one of us even today. The Mother has not left us. This calling "Ma" for help is its living proof. We cannot see Her with our physical eyes which brings us great sorrow.

In the sacred presence and love of the Mother a new 'I' has taken birth. Our new 'I' is full of self-confidence and always says, "I shall try. I shall most certainly make myself worthy of the Mother's trust." In each one of us there abides an infinite Power and once man wakes up to it there is nothing that is beyond his capability. The Mother has not ceased to work for the awakening of that new person within us.

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

(Translated by Maurice Shukla from the original Bengali *Abismaraniya Muhurta*)

NIRODBARAN'S SURREALIST POEMS

(Continued from the issue of December 2004)

LIBERATION

In the seaward path of the infinite my boat
 Floats in Kamala's mantra-wrapped tune.
 The full-rayed blue-lotus gem shed by the dawn
 Illumines the perilous path: Nearby Night
 With pale sorrow-moistened eyes
 Calls me repeatedly to the black regions.
 Its knot loosens: He who was locked
 In a headless demon's grasp—into those addiction-shackles
 Whence comes this Liberation's breeze?
 Desire's molten-blue moonlight-canopy
 Shivers in the current of radiant Fire.
 On the ocean breast blows Cataclysm's breath.
 On Death's black lap the disgraced corpse
 Spends its skeletal terror-night.

(To be continued)

DEBASHISH BANERJI

RAMANA MAHARSHI AND SRI AUROBINDO: THE RECONCILIATION OF KAPALI SASTRY

(Continued from the issue of December 2004)

PART 2B

ANOTHER reason why it would be unfortunate to ignore Sri Aurobindo is that his is the only spiritual philosophy which is responsive to the aspirations of the modern man. Take, for instance, modern man's insistence on earthly life as the real field of achievements. This is nowhere taken as seriously as in Sri Aurobindo's approach. I have already, in the first lecture, quoted a telling sentence from one of Sri Aurobindo's early letters to the Mother. It says, "Heaven we have possessed, but not the earth; but the fullness of the Yoga is to make, in the formula of the Veda, 'Heaven and Earth equal and one'."¹ Sri Aurobindo is probably the only philosopher who has built into his thinking the significance of Upanishadic sayings such as, *padbhyām prithvī*: "Earth lies at His feet"² and *prithvī pājasyam* "Earth is his footing"³. His comments on these Upanishadic statements make this clear:

The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness—to its heights we can always reach—when we keep our feet firmly on the physical.⁴

Thus Sri Aurobindo has maintained forcefully that the establishment of a divine life upon earth is of central importance to his yoga.

A second impelling force of the modern age is the effort to rule nature, to establish supremacy over nature. This is presently seen in nature internal and external. In the physical field this is manifest in the thrust of modern science and technology, whose victories over the forces of nature are unprecedented. In the spiritual realm this trend is reflected in Sri Aurobindo's yoga which aims at a consciousness which seeks to gain a complete mastery even over the body so that nothing in us is any more subjected to the inconscience. This is what Sri Aurobindo means when he regards immortality of the body as one of the eventual results of his Supramental yoga. Thus once again, we have in Sri Aurobindo a culmination of another thrust of the modern age.

Modern thought sees all growth as an evolutionary development because this perspective enables us to link our past to our future as a harmonious and natural growth. Sri Aurobindo sees man primarily as a transitional being. According to him, "Man's greatness is not in what he is, but in what he makes possible."⁵ He sees man as a living laboratory in which nature aims at bringing out the new man with the supramental consciousness. He is the only philosopher who has asked the question,

“Who after man?” and then gone on seriously to seek an answer.

Finally, there is the aspiration of the modern age to do justice to the collectivity without any impairment to the claims of the individual. Our age has made many experiments in this domain but either the individual has suffered or the collectivity has been hurt. Sri Aurobindo has provided the best perspective on this problem and a perfect solution to it also. Just as modern science sees everything in the material world as a process through which the universal force of Nature works, similarly we need to conceptualise a universal Being who fulfils himself in the world through the individual as well as through the collectivity with an impartial regard for all as equal powers of manifestation:

This is obviously the self-knowledge which is most likely to be right, since it most comprehensively embraces and accounts for the various aspects of the world-process and the eternal tendencies of humanity. In this view neither the separate growth of the individual nor the all-absorbing growth of the group can be the ideal, but an equal, simultaneous and, as far as may be, parallel development of both, in which each helps to fulfil the other. Each being has his own truth of independent self-realisation and his truth of self-realisation in the life of others and should feel, desire, help, participate more and more, as he grows in largeness and power, in the harmonious and natural growth of all the individual selves and all the collective selves of the one universal Being.⁶

Sri Aurobindo not only is sensitive to these demands of the Time-Spirit, he has also developed a philosophy and a yoga which answer to these demands.⁷ This is the significance of the third goal of Integral yoga, as it was identified in the earlier lecture, namely, becoming a universal being capable of oneness with all souls. In other words, what I am claiming here is that the teachings of traditional Indian philosophy and yoga are not sufficiently responsive to the new demands made by the Time-Spirit.

Bringing the supramental consciousness down into the consciousness of the earth and fixing it there is the central object of his yoga. This alone can make the transformation of the lower nature and its instruments, mind, life and body, possible. In other yogas, there is the attempt to rise to the higher consciousness of the true self. Then one is free as long as one remains in it, but when one comes down and uses the mind, the vital or the body, one has to act from the ordinary consciousness and be subject to all the perversities and imperfections of this consciousness. When the supramental consciousness is brought down into the consciousness of the earth with its lights, glories and powers, this will enable us to transform our mind, life and body. In this transformation, the body will not cast away any of its energies, capacities and methods; the new consciousness will only bring out its hidden possibilities, uplift, sublimate and disclose its innate divinity, and make the body perfect. Our vital, which is now full of obscurity and confusion and preoccupied with low and dull aims, will

feel all its urges and instincts exalted and irradiated. Similarly, the mind, now ignorant and struggling towards knowledge, will rise into the supramental light of truth in its inmost and outermost movements. This transformation will bring a divine perfection to our life here on earth.⁸

The impact and the challenge of the West which India is facing is becoming acute in this new century, and unless it is adequately handled, the chances of our surviving as anything other than a colony of the West are rather dim, because the challenge is really tremendous. Globalisation, as I see it, is a push from evolutionary nature to make us regard ourselves as citizens of the entire globe, rather than of one country with loyalties to one culture or religion. It is intended to give us eventually a global consciousness and provide the inner basis for human unity. The positive aspects of this push can be seen today in the present ecological concerns which are not nationalistic but planetary. This global consciousness is also discernible in the holistic approaches being adopted in many disciplines like medicine and management. But there are negative aspects to globalisation as well.

One comes in the form of a strong projection of Western values. The current wave of globalisation is bringing into the country a great flood of alien values, most noticeably in the form of the American life-style and mode of behaviour. It projects material affluence as the goal of all our striving, not the four *purusharthas* of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* but *artha* and *kama* alone. For culture we are given entertainment and recreation, with shopping malls, giant movie theatres and huge sports arenas. These are offered to us as modern temples in which to worship.

Globalisation should make us receptive to pluralism in culture, but instead it is threatening to impose the monoculture of Coca Cola, Macdonalds, and Barbie Dolls on the whole world. Today we often hear of a “clash of cultures”, a phrase made famous in the recent writings of Samuel Huntington. He has argued that we are passing through an era of cultural warfare, and this war is being waged through the media and through economic policies and it has a single purpose, namely, to ensure the dominance of one culture. Cultural chauvinism is rampant, and the pressure of globalisation is aggressive in persuading people all over the world to adopt the American consumerist lifestyle. Global business also presents a challenge since it projects a materialistic culture for the whole world.

This is a challenge we have to meet squarely or there is every chance of India ceasing to be India, and of being only a cultural province of the West. But we cannot meet this challenge on the basis of a world-negating spirituality. To meet it successfully, we need all the resources of a world-affirming spirituality of the kind Sri Aurobindo has been advocating.

We need, for example, a strong mind, life-force and body. Traditional spirituality is so totally focussed on attaining liberation of the soul that it tends to neglect these outer powers or instruments of our being. Flawed in their functioning, these instruments are often treated as obstacles to spiritual fulfilment. Traditional spirituality

tries to annul them or weaken them so that we can be unburdened of them in our single-minded flight to Nirvana or liberation. But the challenge that the West has brought to our doorsteps is particularly directed towards those domains of life which require the engagement of our senses, our vital energies and our mind. A spirituality that ignores the development of these faculties will be found inadequate in dealing with this challenge. Sri Aurobindo regards life as the field of a divine manifestation not yet complete: here in life, on earth, in the body we have to unveil the Godhead and express it as far as possible. This will require a discipline that is aimed at perfecting our mental, vital and physical instruments so that they become joyous collaborators in the manifestation on earth.

I have tried to show the great dangers of allowing ourselves as a nation to slide back into the world-negating ascetic spirituality. That spirituality might have benefited us by enabling us to withdraw into ourselves when we were passing through a period of alien political and cultural domination. But now the night has passed; we are seeing a new dawn on our national horizon. There are still dangers and challenges that threaten to engulf us. We need for this new age a spirituality which is positive and which aims at recreating this earth in the image of the perfection mankind has always been dreaming of.

I have presented a critique of the spiritual ideals of Ramana Maharshi from the perspective of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo, just as I had tried to assess Sri Aurobindo's teachings from the Maharshi's perspective. We are dealing here with matters of spiritual experience and my intellectual evaluation of such matters is, of course, rather inadequate. It is like a person who is tone-deaf trying to evaluate the musical recitals of two accomplished artists. And unfortunately, most of us do not have the advantage of Sastriar, who was primarily a sadhak. He was able to work out a reconciliation between the teachings of the Maharshi and those of Sri Aurobindo. Therefore, as Ponnuswami Iyer has stated, he was loyal to both his spiritual Gurus at the same time.

Besides, I am not sure to what extent the Maharshi was in fact a votary of traditional asceticism. [...] I would like the reader to note that I am concerned in this paper with the implications of a negative spiritual philosophy. The Maharshi in his personal life was not negative about life, nor did he ever act like one who was world-weary. He was meticulous about things and matters pertaining to this world. He does not seem to have encouraged anyone to accept sannyas and to relinquish life. As I have repeatedly pointed out earlier, the Maharshi was a stupendous spiritual phenomenon, worthy of being held in the highest respect, no matter what one's intellectual predilections be.

There are real differences between the teachings of the Maharshi and those of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo's ideal is the Superman, while Maharshi's is the Jivanmukta. It is also to be noted that one cannot reach the state of a Superman without first attaining Jivanmukti. And attaining even the stage of Jivanmukti is not

easy. That in itself is a tremendous achievement, and although the Maharshi said that it took him less than half an hour to attain that state, for most spiritual aspirants it might well take several lives to get there. Supermanhood, on the other hand, is an ideal still to be achieved in the future. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother through their intense tapasya established that consciousness on earth, but there are as yet no supermen on earth.

My concern in this talk has been with the two spiritual ideals and how they are likely to shape the future of our country and of humanity. I have during the course of this talk made my preference clear. I am a believer in the path of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Does that mean that I reject the Maharshi? In my opinion, no true devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would have anything but the highest regard for the stupendous realisation of the Maharshi. But do we really cherish the greatness and the spiritual achievements of the Maharshi? If we do, what is the basis for it?

As I have said earlier, I see the spiritual ideal of the Maharshi as a focus on the passive and static aspect of Brahman, while Sri Aurobindo's is a focus on the dynamic and kinetic aspect without losing sight of the passive Brahman behind it. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

The Absolute is beyond stability and movement as it is beyond unity and multiplicity. But it takes its eternal poise in the one and the stable and whirls round itself infinitely, inconceivably, securely in the moving and multitudinous. World-existence is the ecstatic dance of Shiva which multiplies the body of the God numberlessly to the view: it leaves that white existence precisely where and what it was, ever is and ever will be; its sole absolute object is the joy of the dancing.⁹

The passive consciousness of Brahman and its active consciousness are not two different, conflicting and incompatible things; they are the same consciousness, like the stillness of a reservoir and the coursing of the channels which flow from it. In fact, behind every activity there is the passive power from which it rises and by which it is supported. Neither the passive consciousness nor the active consciousness is the sole absolute truth of Brahman's reality. The opposition between these poises of Brahman becomes salient only when we see the Brahman in relation to the activities of its consciousness. When we see the deployment of the conscious energy of Brahman in universal action, we speak of the mobile active Brahman, and when we perceive its simultaneous reservation of the conscious energy which is kept back from the action, we speak of the immobile Brahman.

To make a choice between the Maharshi and Sri Aurobindo is as unnecessary as it would be to choose between the passive Brahman and the dynamic Brahman. The Mother once spoke about the Avatars of Vishnu and of Shiva and indicated the difference between these two different lines of descent of the Divine on earth. The

Avatars of Vishnu are constructive and preservative, while those of Shiva have tried to fight ignorance, illusion, darkness and suffering and demolish what causes these things. She regards Buddha as an Avatar of Shiva:

To speak more accurately, he manifested something of the power of Shiva: it was the same compassion, the same understanding of all the misery, and the same power which destroys—obviously with the intention of transforming, but destroys rather than constructs. His work does not seem to have been very constructive. It was very necessary to teach men practically not to be egoistic; from that point of view it was very necessary. But in its deeper principle it has not helped very much in the transformation of the earth.¹⁰

For me the Maharshi represents more fully than anyone else in our time the aspect of Shiva described here, — Arunachala Shiva. He came as an answer to all the misery that was being created on a worldwide scale by the mental civilisation that was spreading everywhere. Quite a few Western scholars who came to scoff at him stayed on to adore and worship him. This, I feel, is also the reason why J. Krishnamurti had a wide appeal for the intellectuals worldwide. He advised spiritual seekers to quieten the mind and let Reality come in. The almost magical appeal of Buddhism to post Second World War Europe can also be attributed to the same sort of appeal. The Buddhist ideal of Nirvana was heavenly music to the ears of those whose minds were numbed and whose vital was devastated by the harrowing experiences of the World Wars.

Although Sri Aurobindo had in him the Shiva aspect, he stands out for his Vishnu-like role as the leader of a new stage in the evolutionary march of humanity. He had no quick-fix solutions to the problems humanity faced in the twentieth century. He saw all those problems as manifestations of an evolutionary crisis. He did not advise anyone to abandon the mind; his teaching was about how to transform the mind and to transcend its ordinary workings, to arrive at the altogether higher level of consciousness he called the Supermind. Not rejection but transformation was Sri Aurobindo's method and goal. He represents the Vishnu aspect more markedly than the Shiva aspect. He came to lead the evolutionary world to the next stage in its Godward progress.

And yet, as the Mother has told us, humanity has a tendency to worship the great men who come to uphold the old teachings and ignore those who bring a new teaching. But today we need a new teaching. And fortunately, the Indian spiritual tradition is not a closed book, as Swami Vivekananda reminded us; there are still many unwritten pages in the Book of God, and Sri Aurobindo came to write one of those new pages. He said:

We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future. A mass of new material is flowing into us; we have not only to assimilate the influences of

the great theistic religions of India and of the world and a recovered sense of the meaning of Buddhism, but to take full account of the potent though limited revelations of modern knowledge and seeking; and, beyond that, the remote and dateless past which seemed to be dead is returning upon us with an effulgence of many luminous secrets long lost to the consciousness of mankind but now breaking out again from behind the veil. All this points to a new, a very rich, a very vast synthesis; a fresh and widely embracing harmonisation of our gains is both an intellectual and a spiritual necessity of the future.¹¹

Sri Aurobindo's teachings provide this "embracing harmonisation" and fulfil both the intellectual and spiritual necessity of the future better than those of any other spiritual guide. But we don't have to reject the Maharshi to accept Sri Aurobindo or vice versa. The Indian spiritual tradition is too multifarious to condone such narrowness.

Not merely peace, but fulfilment is what the heart of the world is seeking. The peace and silence of the immutable Brahman was what the Maharshi represented, while Sri Aurobindo represented the seeking after fulfilment. The natural relationship between them is obvious. Peace is the eternal support, the infinite condition, the natural atmosphere of fulfilment. Fulfilment completes the peace by bringing to life the divine light, love, beauty and bliss—all the elements of a divine life on earth.

(Concluded)

MANGESH NADKARNI

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BETWEEN THE ARRIVAL AND THE DEPARTURE

(Continued from the issue of December 2004)

A FEW months passed. Shanti's uncle came to my office to give me the sad news that our dear Indu-da had died of tuberculosis and that Shanti had returned from Behrampore. I visited them that evening and found the whole family grief-stricken. On seeing me Shanti broke down completely. I consoled her to the best of my ability, and promising her that I would see her soon, took my leave.

Here I must confess that in the course of our music lessons, Shanti and I had fallen in love. When I went to their house a few days later, Shanti's mother spoke to me in private. After a slight hesitation, she said, "I would like to ask you something. But I don't know how to say it. If Indu were alive, he himself would have spoken to you."

I looked at her questioningly and said, "Please tell me what is on your mind."

In a beseeching tone she said, "I want you to marry Shanti. Please don't refuse me."

"But I am already married. My wife is alive."

The lady was surprised. She said, "But Indu never mentioned it to us."

"Perhaps Indu-da was not aware of it."

Shanti's mother became very serious. I too found the situation rather awkward. Quietly I came away from their house.

The next day when Shanti's uncle visited me in my office, everything became clear. Indu-da was a sort of a great-uncle to Shanti. Her mother had asked him to look for a suitable bridegroom for her. Indu-da had played the marriage broker and used the ploy of music tuition to introduce me to the family. Except for me everybody knew of it, including Shanti herself.

Uncle said, "My sister is a Brahmo. In their society, the boy and the girl are given an opportunity to get to know each other before they are married. Hence this subterfuge."

"Indu-da has committed a grave mistake," I said. "He shouldn't have kept me in the dark. Then this embarrassing situation could have been avoided."

"Shanti is terribly hurt. She has fallen for you."

"Do you think I care for her any less? But what's to be done? Life brings many disappointments. In time one gets over them. Moreover they are Brahmo. Their society does not permit bigamy. But if your sister is not averse to our getting married under the laws of the Hindu religion, this problem may be solved."

"Why don't you come to our house and speak to my sister?"

"I'd rather not. You know my mind. Let Shanti's mother consult her relatives and the leaders of the Samaj. Whatever she decides please let me know."

My mind was in a turmoil. Although the Hindu law permitted one to take a

second wife while the first wife was still alive, modern society, especially one's friends and relatives, looked askance at this practice. Supposing I went ahead and married Shanti, what would the final outcome be?

At this point, I happened to meet my intimate friend, the poet Narendra Deb (father of the famous modern author Nabanita Debsen, ex-wife of the Nobel Laureate economist Amartya Sen). I was in dire need of some advice. I presented the whole case to him.

He said, "I don't see any problem. If the girl wants to marry you and is ready to live amicably with your first wife, marry her. I am sure that her mother will come round and agree to a Hindu marriage. I do know of people who are living in perfect harmony with two wives. As for the adverse opinion of friends and relatives, you may be sure that it will change in time and that they will accept your second wife."

In a day or two Shanti's uncle came bearing the news that their family had no objection to a Hindu marriage. When I met Shanti next, I asked her whether she had given some thought to the problems of living with a co-wife, she smiled and said, "I have threshed out all that with my mother. I can assure you that I shall not bring any disharmony to your house."

Shanti's mother fixed the third week of May, 1924, for the wedding.

Now that everything was settled, my poet friend, Narendra Deb, did not delay in spreading the news among my friends and colleagues. Soon I could not take a step without people asking me about my forthcoming marriage. I did not know that I had so many well-wishers in Calcutta. I received mixed reactions—some supportive, some openly hostile. Answering the same set of questions again and again, I too got rebellious and said whatever occurred to me. One day while going to my office I came face to face with old Raibahadur Jaladhar Sen, the famous editor of *Bharat-varsha*, who had published some of my humorous pieces in his prestigious magazine.

He came straight to the point, "Nolini, I hear that you are taking a second wife. Why?"

I do not know what prompted me to say, "My first wife has not been able to give me a child. I fear that my line will come to an end with me. That's why this second marriage."

The old man literally exploded, "Do you belong to a solar or lunar dynasty, that you think that if your line comes to an end it will be an irreparable loss to India?"

Without waiting to hear more, I beat a hasty retreat.

But there was no respite. When I came home, I found Sarojini-di (Sri Aurobindo's sister) standing in front of my room. As soon as she saw me she fired the opening volley, "I have been waiting for you. I hear that you are about to get married a second time. Please don't do it. It is not right."

As it was, I was very upset. I was in no mood for lengthy arguments. With folded hands, I pleaded with her, "Please Didi, please don't try to stop me. The wedding day has been fixed, everything has been arranged, I cannot back out at this point."

Later, I heard that finding no other way to stop the marriage, as a last resort Sarojini-di had written to Sri Aurobindo: "While his first wife is still alive, Nolini is going to marry a second time. Many of us have tried to dissuade him but to no avail. I am sure that if you forbid him he will listen to you." Sri Aurobindo had replied to her in his usual witty manner, "It is too late. Inform me much earlier when Nolini will go to marry for the third time."

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The marriage was celebrated without further impediment. It was well attended by all of my close friends, most of whom were well-known poets, dramatists, novelists, painters, musicians and actors of the time. Shanti and I made our new home in a rented place. Very soon my first wife joined us. But unfortunately, she was suffering from some incurable disease. Shanti proved to be an ideal wife. In addition to running the household in a most capable manner, she took upon herself the onerous task of nursing my first wife back to health. They got on very well together, setting all my anxieties at rest.

But I was not meant to enjoy unmixed bliss. A telegram came from my aunt that her only son, Bhagavati had died of snake bite. Accompanied by my first wife, I rushed to our village. My aunt was devastated. My wife and I did our best to console her. But I could not stay there for long. I had a weekly magazine to run. Leaving my wife behind to care for my aunt, I went back to Calcutta.

Gradually, things returned to normal. My aunt got over her grief. She wrote to me regularly but she sounded worried. It was mainly about my first wife. "When she came here," my aunt wrote, "she seemed on the way to recovery. But now she is not feeling quite well. The local Kaviraj is treating her. If she does not improve, I shall write to you to take her back to Calcutta. I am all right. I don't need looking after."

After quite a few days I received another letter from her asking me to come home as soon as I could. I left Calcutta immediately, but when I reached my village my aunt tearfully informed me that my wife had died the previous day.

*

The weekly *Bijali* was a grand success. Our policy of encouraging new talent was yielding good dividends. Many writers who gained fame in later years cut their teeth on the pages of the *Bijali*. The magazine was in great demand. In a single day we sold twenty thousand copies of the issue dated February 3, 1923 and public demand obliged us to print it again. As the demand rose, enthusiastically we printed more and more copies.

But the very popularity of the *Bijali* brought about its downfall. One day we received a notice from our paper supplier to settle their bill immediately. It amounted

to a few thousand rupees. We did not have that much ready cash. We approached a rich businessman friend. When he heard our story, he roundly rebuked us, "You people have acted very stupidly, indeed. Your income from the advertisements enables you to print only five thousand copies. The moment you print more copies, you incur a loss. That much sense you should have had. Moreover, I find that the advertisers owe you a lot of money. Go round and collect those debts."

Our friend gave us much valuable advice but no money. We approached all our advertisers but could collect only a pittance. That much would not solve our problem. While we were going out of our minds with worry, the gentleman who had provided the capital to start the *Bijali*, came to our office. He was an admirer of Barin-da and we were under the impression that he had given the money without any selfish motive. Although Barin-da always greeted him with the words, "Hello, Proprietor!" he did it jocularly. We too always treated him as a good friend and not as a proprietor.

He came straight to the point, "Have you collected the money?"

When I shook my head, he asked, "How much do you owe the paper supplier?"

"Almost five thousand rupees."

"And the Press?"

"We did not give it any thought. The Press belongs to us."

"How can you say that when you announce in each issue 'Printed at the Cherry Press Limited'? The Press belongs to a limited company of which Kumar Arun Sinha is a big shareholder."

We did not know what to say. He took the bill of the paper supplier and went away.

After a few days we were summoned by Kumar Arun Sinha who informed us that the old 'proprietor' had sold the *Bijali* to him for five thousand rupees and that henceforth the magazine would be edited and published by the poet Savitriprasanna Chattopadhyay.

My four-year-old relationship with the *Bijali* came to an abrupt end.

*

My close friend Haridas Ganguli was the director of the local Young Men's Association. Although himself not a writer, he loved literature and had helped many authors to publish their works, financially or otherwise, notable among whom was the famous historian and archaeologist, Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay. Every year he organised the annual conference of the Young Men's Association in which many well-known authors, poets, singers of Bengal participated. As his intimate friend, I had a standing invitation to attend the conference.

1924 was memorable for me because that year I met Dilip Kumar Roy who gave a new direction to my life. I had seen him for the first time at the Young Men's Association Conference. He had come with his sister Maya Banerji and her husband

Bhavashankar Banerji, son of the famous national leader Sir Surendranath Banerji. Dilip Kumar had returned to India in November 1922, after completing his studies in Music and Mathematics in England. In these two years his music had earned him much popularity among the younger generation. Here too there was a capacity crowd, all eager to hear him sing. After he finished singing and received a standing ovation, my friend, Haridas, asked me to sing a few comic songs. On purpose, I sang some very funny songs which had been composed by Dilip Kumar's father, Dwijendralal Roy. Dilip seemed to enjoy my rendition. But on that occasion we could not get acquainted.

A few days later there was a music conference at the University Institute in which both Dilip and I participated. I sang Dada Thakur's famous comic song, the "Errors of Calcutta", followed by a parody written by Dwijendralal Roy. Dilip's songs concluded the programme. Although I received much applause from the audience, I was not at all happy. For the last three days I had been suffering from a deep depression. The thought of committing suicide was foremost in my mind. When I came out of the University Institute, I stood at the gate looking for a likely person who would lend me a rupee. My intention was to buy a rupee's worth of opium and put an end to my accursed life. Many people passed by me but there was not a single known face. Suddenly I felt a strong grip on my wrist. It was Dilip. Without so much as a by your leave, he said, "Come with me" and dragging me to a waiting car pushed me in. As the car moved forward, he explained, "I have promised my uncles and aunts that I will give them a treat of your comic songs. No time like the present."

I was stunned, overwhelmed by complex emotions. Just one thought revolved in my mind: I had planned to go somewhere and where was I going now? Who had brought the would-be-suicide back? Dilip Kumar or my benevolent Providence, using Dilip Kumar as His instrument?

The car reached N^o 34, Theatre Road. Dilip lived here in his uncle's house. He introduced me to all the members of the family. Apparently I was no stranger to them and they were eager to hear me sing. Although I was not in the right mood, I had to sit before the harmonium and sing a few comic songs by Dwijendralal Roy. Dilip requested me to sing the "Errors of Calcutta". Amid much laughter and applause, Dilip's aunt invited me to have dinner with the family. Dilip then asked me where I lived. I was in a quandary. My domestic problems had obliged me to leave home. The last three nights I had slept at the Old Club after spending the days with my writer friends. How could I tell Dilip all that? So I uttered the first thing that came to my lips, "The Victoria Hotel in Sealdah."

Dilip said, "Then don't go back to the hotel to-night. Stay here. We shall have a long chat."

We did just that. After dinner we retired to Dilip's room. There were two beds side by side. We talked of many things. In the course of our conversation I happened to mention our magazine *Bijali*. Dilip exclaimed, "But that was Barin Ghose's paper!

Were you too with the revolutionists? Did you know Sri Aurobindo?"

I answered, "I was in the Anushilan Samiti, the group that was formed to carry on the work after Barin-da and the rest were captured. But I have had Sri Aurobindo's Darshan in Pondicherry."

As soon as I said that, Dilip sat up in bed, "You've been to Pondicherry? When did you go? How long did you stay there?"

"I went there in the month of March, 1921. I had the good fortune of being with Sri Aurobindo for five months."

"I too have been there," Dilip said wistfully. "I went there in January last." (1924)

We could not talk enough of Sri Aurobindo. Dilip was eager to know everything that I had seen, heard, felt and experienced in the divine presence of Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. I found that Dilip was a true bhakta in search of God. He told me that Krishna bhakti was in his blood, having been born in the dynasty of Adwaita Acharya, a direct disciple of Sri Chaitanya. He told me that he had been blessed by the love that he had received from Master Moshay, Sri M., the compiler of *Sri Ramkrishna Kathamrita*. He had read the book many times, hoping to get proper guidance. His one aim in life was to see Sri Krishna with his physical eyes. It was long past midnight when we finally fell asleep.

Next morning, at the tea-table, Dilip introduced me to his uncle, Khagendranath Majumdar. After tea was over, Dilip said, "This evening there is a musical soir  e at the house of the poet, Jatindramohan Bagchi. Rai Bahadur Surendranath Majumdar is going to sing. Rabindranath Tagore is expected to attend the programme."

"Yes, I know about it," I said. "Jatin-da has invited me."

Dilip said, "That's very good. I shall see you there."

The whole day I kept thinking about the miracle that had occurred in my life the previous night. I had been determined to die. Suddenly out of the blue came Dilip Kumar, snatching me away from certain death and filling my heart with the nectar of the will to live. And the strangest thing of all was that we hardly even knew each other.

I began to recollect our conversation. We had talked about many things, mostly about ourselves. But whereas Dilip had spoken very freely about his life, opened his heart to me, I had been much more reserved. I had formed, without any basis for it, a totally wrong mental picture of Dilip Kumar. I had assumed that Dilip Kumar Roy, handsome and highly talented son of the famous dramatist and poet, Dwijendralal Roy, grandson of the eminent physician Dr. Pratapchandra Majumdar, born in an aristocratic family, living in the lap of luxury and, moreover, just returned from England with a prestigious degree in music, would naturally be proud, perhaps even a little snobbish. But now, on meeting the real Dilip Kumar, I had to change my views. Dilip Kumar was as beautiful inside as he was outside. He was totally transparent. His outer behaviour reflected the sweetness of his inner personality. He had opened his heart to me and made me his intimate friend in just a few hours.

Rai Bahadur Surendranath Majumdar was the Deputy Magistrate of Bhagalpur. Apart from being a top-class classical singer, he had also enriched Bengali literature with his excellent short stories. At the function that night, held in the house of the well-known poet, zamindar Jatindramohan Bagchi, Rabindranath Tagore was the honoured guest. He had come with a big entourage. Dilip was present with some of his friends and relatives. And there were the host's other invitees, including me. It was quite a gathering. To the accompaniment of his tanpura, Surendranath sang song after song and kept us spell-bound with the grace and virtuosity of his music. After about two hours the last song was over and Surendranath put his tanpura down.

Suddenly Dilip said, "Please sing Kedar's song."

Surendranath looked embarrassed and demurred. Tagore sensed that there was something the matter. He asked Dilip, "Are you asking him to sing the Kedara ragini?"

"No, no," Dilip clarified. "Not Kedara ragini, but the song of Kedar."

Tagore was puzzled. "Kedar? But who is Kedar?" he asked Surendranath.

Surendranath blushed and said, "Please don't pay any attention to Dilip's nonsense."

Dilip addressed Tagore enthusiastically, "Believe me, I'm not talking nonsense. Surendranath's rendition of Kedar's song is highly entertaining. It leaves you in stitches!"

Now Tagore too caught the enthusiasm. He requested Surendranath to sing it.

Surendranath tried to explain it to Tagore, "But it is not really a song. It is only a caricature. It is for amusing youngsters. You will not like it."

But Tagore was determined to hear it and finally Surendranath had to comply.

Kedar's song was indeed a thing of wonder. Kedar was a man who thought that he was a singer. Unfortunately, his voice was totally tuneless. Of the seven notes he could not produce even one. Rhythm too eluded him. Surendranath gave a fantastic imitation of such a person singing a song, complete with all the technical details. It was astounding how he could turn his own superbly tuneful voice into such a tuneless one.

Dilip was right. We were in stitches. I had never expected to see the great Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore laugh so heartily.

The function was over. The audience began to disperse. Suddenly Dilip pressed an envelope in my hand and saying, "There is a letter for you," disappeared from my view.

When I reached home I opened the envelope. Imagine my surprise when I found there no letter but ten ten rupee notes, quite a big sum of money in those days!

Next morning, I confronted Dilip Kumar in his house. Showing him the envelope, I asked him, "Why did you give me this money?"

Very simply, as though it was the most natural thing to do, Dilip explained, "During our talk the other night, I suddenly realised that at present you are unemployed. Maybe you have some financial difficulties. I felt that it was my duty to

help a friend. I had no intention of hurting your *amour propre*. Please don't take it amiss."

All my attempts to return the money to him, even a part of it, were in vain.

Gradually Dilip and I became very intimate. I began to call him by his pet name, Montu, and he called me Nolini-da. All his relatives, his uncle, aunt, cousins, grandmother, all accepted me as one of their own. I was on very friendly terms with his intimate friends too, such as Subhash Chandra Bose (later known as Netaji), the famous scientist Satyendranath Bose (of the Bose-Einstein Theory fame), Professor Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay and last but not the least, the famous singer, Sahana Devi.

(*To be continued*)

NOLINIKANTO SARKAR

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

FIRE

HAVE I not seen thee oft at thy mystic dance,
Thy limbs aglow with a silken sheen,
And robes a-swirl—vermilion, gold and green,
Flames leaping or swaying in a sacred trance?

Thou bearest our yearnings to the Luminous Ones,
Bringest Their grace in rains to this vale of tears,
Art ever close to man in his mortal years,
Yet kindest Thyself from the eternal suns.

O *Vahni*, purest of the pure Thou art,
Existent here and beyond Space and Time,
All things unclean shine bright at Thy touch sublime—
O light up all my cells, awake in my heart!

In the core of my being burn, O mystic Fire,
That I for Godhead may be fit to aspire.

ANIRUDDHA SIRCAR

INDIA AT THE CROSSROADS

Introduction

INDIA faces some challenging circumstances. To begin with we have a high rate of poverty and illiteracy. Second, our educational system is outdated and continues to be oriented towards a western world-view. Third, there is continuing uncertainty about Kashmir, and in spite of over 50 years of Independence, we have been unable to wholly integrate it into India. Fourth, we are on the verge of opening up to a capitalistic way of life, and embracing wholeheartedly a value system that may be very different from values that reflect who we really are. Fifth, we are technologically laggard, regardless of the field, and hence tend always to be followers rather than leaders in any enterprise that we may choose to pursue.

While each of these areas stands as a mighty challenge in and of itself, and could conceivably require an army of full-time ratiocinating professionals to arrive at effective and sustainable solutions, yet it can be argued that a common and relatively simple set of dynamics has in fact been largely responsible for creating these diverse critical situations. If this is so, if indeed there is a fundamental and common set of dynamics that has resulted in each of these daunting challenges, then it could be argued that the understanding of this set of dynamics will itself give the clue to what needs to be done to create a vastly different India.

It is fair to say then that as a nation we stand today at a mighty crossroads. The effective handling of the choices before us, by dint of which we choose to become, will determine whether these daunting challenges become a doorway toward further confusion, or become a springboard which will enable us to leap powerfully into the future.

In this analysis, we will look first at what this relatively simple set of dynamics could be. We will then create four scenarios that elaborate these dynamics. We will consider some modern developments in the light of these scenarios, and conclude finally with a more detailed look at one of the scenarios, True India, in which, by virtue of the simple set of dynamics alive within it, we will find that these very challenges that have so complicated our lives today, will no longer exist.

The underlying dynamics

The key dynamics can be thought of as being the play of two qualities. The presence, absence, and various combinations of these two qualities can create four divergent scenarios. Hence, each scenario, dictated by a particular combination of the presence or absence of these qualities, can create a vastly different reality and outcome. In fact, we may find that the challenges themselves were the natural outcome of our being in one scenario instead of another, and hence, of wholeheartedly embracing

some combination of the presence or absence of the two simple qualities.

Getting to the point, we can refer to these underlying qualities as ‘selflessness’ and ‘integrality’. The presence of selflessness implies working not for some fruit, but for the joy of the offering. At its highest it implies expressing one’s dharma in a free and full way, because that is the only thing that fulfils. The absence of selflessness implies working for some fruit, or implies allowing one’s dharma to become subservient to some ego-centred motive either within oneself or in another. Perhaps we can refer to the absence of selflessness as ‘not-selflessness’. The presence of integrality implies synthesis of ideas, thoughts, or truths, to arrive at a greater idea, thought, or truth in which even opposites may be reconciled. The absence of integrality implies ‘narrow-mindedness’ and would manifest as the pushing forward of one perhaps pre-conceived or favoured idea without adequately recognising, understanding, and hence considering the truth of other ideas.

These two essential qualities, hence, become four when permuted in terms of presence and absence. These four can combine together to create four divergent scenarios. Hence, we can have a scenario determined by selflessness & integrality, another determined by selflessness & narrow-mindedness, a third determined by not-selflessness & integrality, and a fourth determined by not-selflessness & narrow-mindedness.

Let us explore each of these in the context of India’s past, present and future. In the process the meanings of our terms ‘selflessness’ and ‘integrality’ will also become abundantly clear, and the essence of each scenario self-evident.

Exploring the scenarios

Abdul Kalam, the current President of India has written *India 2020: A Vision for the New Millennium*. In this book, he emphasises that the path to a developed India lies in its becoming technologically superior. He makes the point that every critical field, from agriculture to manufacturing to information technology to defence, requires the continual enhancement of technology in order that true development begins to set in. Technology development becomes synonymous with national sovereignty. If we lapse technologically, thereby becoming inefficient or perpetuating inefficiencies, then in today’s continually opening markets we run the risk of currency devaluation, thereby opening ourselves to the likes of corporate raiders and international loan enforcers and, like the phenomenon we witnessed in South East Asia just a few years ago where national asset-bases ceded to institutions in developed countries, can conceivably be bought up by aggressive multinational corporations and international banks overnight. Hence, technological development is critical.

He identifies critical areas and identifies what needs to be done in each from a technology point of view in order that India can stand amongst the world leaders by 2020. In his book he suggests that Indian corporations, entrepreneurs, and people,

should take on one or several of the projects identified, in an area that they may currently be engaged in or have strength in, to assure that the needed overall development takes place by the required time. The primary motivation for pursuing these projects, remains the development of a strong, prosperous and developed India. Obviously those projects that simultaneously yield adequate financial returns should be pursued, so that any project is viable and sustainable by business standards.

This rationale for project engagement, while not being purely capitalistic, in which the profit-motive is the sole motive determining any line of development, seeks to create an India that is a better-USA. Many would argue that surely this is a good thing. But let us think about it in terms of the four scenarios we are beginning to put together, to try to understand its real essence.

If we were to think through modern-day capitalism, we would find that it is usually driven by personal greed and hence becomes entirely selfish in character. Further, all other motives for development are subdued to it so that if profit is not generated from a line of development, that line of development is considered worthless and a waste of time. This is nothing other than narrow-mindedness. Today's version of capitalism thus lives in a scenario bounded by not-selflessness and narrow-mindedness. Its nature easily lends itself to perversities, such as we experienced when our country became a vassal of imperialistic England or more recently, when the World Trade Center fell, possibly by reactionary aggressions resulting from the USA's own commercial interests and consequent foreign policy, so it has been opined, or when the USA unilaterally invaded Iraq under the guise of bringing freedom to its people, but more likely to ensure its control over a crucial resource it needs, to maintain its position of global power, so too it has been opined.

Kalam's rationale for project management perhaps engenders a capitalism of another kind. It is not just the profit-motive that is supreme, but this is integrated with the goal of creating a prosperous, strong India able to defend itself against aggressors of any kind. This kind of capitalism then, while still bounded by not-selflessness on one side, in that it is not the dharma of a person or group that is necessarily important or being pursued, is bounded more by integrality than narrow-mindedness on the other side, in that it will allow other goals of even a different nature to co-exist.

In setting as our goal, however, the development of technology, Kalam could be implying something even more different. Let us begin to explore this in more detail.

Technology itself could be viewed at two levels. At the fundamental level it can be thought of as providing essential infrastructure to make the country more capable. This capability will likely translate into system transparency, enhanced efficiency, and availability of resources where and when needed, by dint of better communication, transportation and information processing systems, and lead to an overall development for India. Such technologically-stimulated development, consequently, could be a powerful force in removing poverty and in beginning to uplift the people.

At the more advanced level, technology development gets embedded into the system, so that it becomes the outcome of any activity pursued with sincerity. A fully-engaged man working in the fields, for example, should continually find more effective ways to do what he is doing. Hence the changes and enhancement to the technology used in caring for and leveraging the fields will occur naturally and continually, and function to make India more efficient internally and on world-markets, while simultaneously providing a sense of fulfillment to the workers. The seeds used, the way crops are rotated, the additional inputs in terms of fertilizers and pesticides, the irrigation systems, any additional machinery used should continually be bettered, because that is the way that each has begun to work.

Yet such a system, whereby development and breakthroughs in technology are by-products, flowers of the system, almost, will require a very different kind of set-up and motivation than a system geared to produce better technology. One can say that a system explicitly geared toward the development of technology is not as selfless as a system in which technology breakthroughs happen as a by-product. Development in much of the world today falls in the first category. If technology is sought after, it is sought after so that more riches can accrue to those concerned. It is sought after so that the balance of power can be tilted in favour of the pursuer. Rare is it when technology development happens as a by-product of living deeply, selflessly, to develop the possibilities that need to be developed because that is what one exists for.

The latter system, one geared toward selflessness, could be one in which true dharma is pursued. Some are natural artists or have an inclination to pursue that line of engagement. Others, such as certain classes in India, are natural traders. Others embody something of the Kshatriya spirit, and yet others find fulfillment in the pursuit of knowledge, or in selflessly serving those around them. Each of these interests or ways of being are motive forces for development, and if allowed to develop along lines entirely natural to their own instinct are likely to produce enduring outcomes of beauty and perfection, as in so much of the architecture, music, literature, administrative, social, and medical systems of older India.

Today however, each line of development more often than not becomes subservient to the motive of making money. Art is evaluated in terms of how much people will be willing to pay to own it. Sport is pursued so that the sportsman may become rich through winning prize-money and through company-sponsorship. Knowledge itself exists only so that competitive advantage and hence money or power can accrue to those who have promoted the development of that knowledge. In the bargain, all efforts and actions cease to be selfless, but become increasingly or entirely selfish. The outcome in such a system can never reach the same level as in a system that allows efforts and actions to be pursued because there is a resident instinct to both express and live the possibility which is pregnant in the depths.

A system that is selfless in this manner would allow multiple motives for development to come to the surface, thereby also becoming naturally 'integral' in its

character, and importantly, through the truly boundary-breaking efforts being made, would inspire different character-types to become more full and complete. The seeker of knowledge would receive an impetus from interacting with or seeing the Kshatriya at work that would audaciously push the bounds of his own knowledge forward. He would receive a harmonising power from the artist by which the knowledge may, if it tended to be barren and theoretical, become more embracing and hence complete in its body. And he would receive the urge that would truly heighten his whole effort from the type who does all for the services of others.

Advancements and breakthroughs in technology will likely become the natural by-product of such a system. Such a system will become truly robust, sustainable, beautiful, enduring. Such a system would create a strong and developed nation, beyond the wildest dreams of any capitalist or socialist system. This system, hence, perhaps best describes the scenario bounded by selflessness and integrality.

But is this the system that Kalam is referring to when he talks about a technologically-developed nation? There is no reference to the notion of type or dharma, no notion of the development of communities driven by multiple motive forces, and hence we may conclude, that the nature of development will at the end of the day be driven primarily by the prospect of commercial gain, albeit of the modified type, bounded by integrality on one side and not-selflessness on the other, as just discussed. We will come back to this shortly.

Is the development he is aiming at integral in character? In important respects it is. He talks about the upliftment of all classes in India. Removal of poverty is a key criteria for this development. He suggests that this removal would happen through first concentrating on bringing the poor to a level of health and education that would begin to make them self-sufficient. This could be coupled with allowing self-empowering opportunities at the cottage-industry and agricultural levels. This is in contrast to today's self-defeating notion of reservations and subsidies for the poor, and to today's easy neglect of the rural areas of India. He talks further of the need of concerted development between government, business, research facilities and academics. This is definitely more integral in character, than say Nehruvian socialism or Gandhi's notion of the development of the rural economy, in that it affirms at the outset the importance of each of these different groups in the development of the nation, and seems not to give one group unbalanced and massive power over the others.

By contrast, Nehru believed in the power of central planning. If indeed the vision, knowledge, consciousness of the central planning committee was so vast that it saw the good and bad of all instruments and possibilities, and integrated these impersonally and seamlessly together to weave a mosaic of substantial possibility, and if indeed each citizen offered himself selflessly to the country, central planning would perhaps be the best and fastest way to effectively mobilise talent in India and integrate it into the Global Economy. In reality however, neither the consciousness of the central planning committee or of others who held key positions in the

government was of such a nature, nor were people motivated by such selfless standards, and hence various kinds of perversities began to creep into the system. What resulted was a nation that certainly wasn't socialistic, in that there were still a massive number of people below the poverty line. It certainly wasn't democratic, since it was not the people who governed, but a progressively self-interested class of politicians and a rule-bound and fearful class of bureaucrats. In fact, when we look at the resulting system we see that it was neither integral nor selfless in character. It was only those who were privileged from the beginning, either by dint of belonging to the bureaucratic or some other favoured group, who seemed to have any degree of self-empowerment.

In a selfless system, self-empowerment would be high. In the Centrally-Planned India that resulted, it became very low. Even bureaucrats, it can be argued, who ultimately controlled all the various developments that a country may become engaged in, from health services to manufacturing to agriculture to education, became bound by a system of self-saving and self-serving procedures. Licenses were required for everything. Power was concentrated in these favoured echelons. The notion of accountability was completely cast aside. Creative initiatives were few. Inertia became the order of the day. This was true internally, and in India's dealings with foreign aggressors. Centrally-Planned India hence, while aptly described by not-selflessness, seems also to be more on the narrow-minded side.

Gandhi, on the other hand, would have favoured a rural economy made up of independently governed villages within the framework of a larger India. In some respects he was an extraordinary character. He constantly talked of the upliftment of the poor, did not care for material comforts for himself, and hence appeared to be selfless. But his appears to be a morally-driven selflessness that did not allow the true dharma to emerge. If his had been the true dharma then it would have naturally aligned itself with the deepest need of India, and many of the problems we face today would not have resulted. While Gandhi tapped into the important need for development from the bottom-up, he seemed too to be completely impervious to other equally important types of development. Had it been up to him we would most likely have gone back to the 'simple' life. No technology. No science. No defence. Further, this India would probably have epitomised the glorification of the labourer, the untouchable, the underprivileged, with any and every other class or type of character, even if they represented the majority, existing only to bring about the comfort of the chosen, underprivileged few. It can be argued that the hardening rift between Hindus and Muslims was in fact an outcome of his moral tendency to want to appease the minority at any cost. Perhaps his India, Underprivileged India, would be best described by the scenario bound by selflessness and narrow-mindedness.

Let us return now to Kalam's India. While integrality seems quite prevalent in his view, we cannot say the same about selflessness. His India, as we had begun to discuss, appears to be more dependent on outward-focused rather than inward-focused

levers. Development does not necessarily proceed by surrender to one's dharma, but perhaps by an outward set of standards that has already been practised and accepted, and is more common and likely, the characteristic of a life that is ultimately centred on one ego-based standard or another. His India, in our terminology would perhaps then tend to be more toward the quality of 'not-selflessness'. Let us look a little further to determine this one way or another.

Kalam makes the point that Indians abroad have done very well. They must have done well, he adds, because the education system in India must be good. Yet, it can be argued that Indians have done well wherever they are, in spite of the education system, perhaps because there is something else that is imparted to them by being Indian, or perhaps because there are prevalent values of hard work, or even prevalent family and social values by nature of living in extended families in India, that help them succeed in other parts of the world. In fact, if we take a closer look at education in India, we find that for the most part it is not an organic, living system, but one that is old and has to a large extent been imported or more accurately forced upon us by the West. It is not value-based, but rote-based. There are no living personalities who by force of their presence are able to impart something of themselves to their pupils. Rather, 'learning' takes place by reading from books and memorising. It is not the natural curiosity of the pupil that drives the lines of development, but the stipulations of a central board, the hangover from a Nehruvian paradigm, that takes the place of the development of one's dharma. It is to be noted that education driven by a pupil's natural curiosity and the response and shaping influence of a developed personality, and an emphasis on value rather than memorisation, would be the outcome of an integral, dharma-led scenario bound by selflessness on one side and integrality on the other.

The point of Kalam's acceptance of the education system as it is, is a reinforcement of an externally-oriented and hence a more outward and artificial as opposed to a 'selfless' approach. Perhaps, then, it is fair to say that Kalam's India is best described by the scenario bounded by integrality and not-selflessness.

We have made an initial examination of the four scenarios. The scenario bounded by not-selflessness and integrality is roughly Kalam's India. The scenario bounded by not-selflessness and narrow-mindedness is Centrally-Planned India. The scenario bounded by selflessness and narrow-mindedness is roughly Under-Privileged India. And the scenario with multiple motive-forces allowing the following of one's true dharma can be thought of as being bounded by integrality and selflessness. This perhaps is the nature of True India.

True India

If we were living in True India, it may be argued, none of the formidable challenges we are faced with today would ever have occurred. Each would have been transmuted

into an opportunity at the very outset and functioned to create a more robust and full India. Conversely, we may conclude that each of the challenges we are faced with is the result of our living in a scenario other than that of True India. And for this there has been ample opportunity with our past icons such as Nehru and Gandhi, and now the capitalist-kings of the world.

This in fact, the focus on capitalism, is the latest development to hit India. Balanced capitalism and equitable distribution of wealth is surely a good thing, especially in a country like India where reportedly 60% of the population is below the poverty line. Balanced capitalism, engaged in because it is the function of the type who possesses such a dharma, naturally integrated with a host of other developments, is perhaps how capitalism will proceed in True India. This then, the third type of capitalism, is of a completely different nature than those existing in the already described scenarios bounded by not-selflessness and narrow-mindedness, and not-selflessness and integrality, respectively. In this brand of capitalism those who are naturally suited to exchange and commercial development pursue capitalistic projects because it expresses who they are and hence fulfils them. At the same time, entirely different lines of development, inspired by the adventurist impulse, the knowledge-impulse, and the selfless-worker impulse exist and flourish according to their own laws.

If we had been living in True India at the time of Independence, then rather than the following of one path in opposition to another, we may have pursued an integral development that combined the best aspects of Nehru's vision, Gandhi's vision, and other important requirements of the time, because the dharma of the true leader would have demanded nothing less. It could have been that self-governing localities existing in and for a united India became the base, spontaneously and opportunistically interacting localities embarking on larger projects of even an infrastructural, commercial, scientific, and academic character, the important middle-ground, and large industry, defence, and other critical endeavours with representation from many if not all localities, the overarching national emphasis.

If we had been living in True India at the time of Independence, we would not have allowed the hardening fissure between Hindus and Muslims to proceed any further. That fissure was legitimised by not exercising adequate integrality in outlook. By exercising integrality we could have shifted the emphasis of discussion to citizens belonging to India, rather than belonging to the Hindu or the Muslim community.

Ultimately, there is no other way than to ensure that we begin to live in True India. Capitalism in this scenario becomes balanced. Technology becomes the flower or by-product of a harmonious collectivity in which each pursues his own dharma and strengthens every other by this fact. Education becomes value-based and hence more easily creates true leaders who will not admit any injustice for long. Poverty, illiteracy, and the indecision at top levels that has resulted in the ongoing instability

of Kashmir, by virtue of self-empowered and hence responsible and engaged citizens, will also surely be overcome.

India will then assume a very different face. Its true dharma will more easily be felt. The future will become very bright. Let us, therefore, move in that direction now.

PRAVIR MALIK

To be interested in outward things is not wrong in itself—it depends on the way in which one is interested. If it is done as part of the sadhana, looking on them from the true consciousness, then they become a means for the growth of the being. It is that that matters, to get the true consciousness—and it is this that comes in you when you have the sense of the Peace and the working of the Force in it.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1284)

[Tehmi passed away on 1st December, 2004]

Tehmi has reached her goal in this life. She has now set forth on a greater search. There is no end to the goal.

AMAL KIRAN

SHAKTI OF THE SUN

A WIDE and marvellous dawn has come to lighten up our days.
Our Mother made an appearance as the sun and as the rays.

The sun the very symbol in each new passing day,
Which follows night and darkness and helps us on our way.

Divinely brought together with a consciousness supreme;
The supramental body is more than just a dream.

You have paved the way with wisdom, perseverance and with strife;
The transformation is sure in each and every life.

We know the day will come when we are one with the Divine
The supramental light is sure and in all of us will shine.

It has taken many lifetimes for all that you have done,
Our wonderful, loving Mother, the “Shakti of the Sun”.

MARY “ANGEL” FINN

If you desire this transformation, put yourself in the hands of the Mother and her Powers without cavil or resistance and let her do unhindered her work within you. Three things you must have, consciousness, plasticity, unreserved surrender. For you must be conscious in your mind and soul and heart and life and the very cells of your body, aware of the Mother and her Powers and their working; for although she can and does work in you even in your obscurity and your unconscious parts and moments, it is not the same thing as when you are in an awakened and living communion with her.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Mother, SABCL, Vol. 25, pp. 36-37)

THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of December 2004)

14. The Prime Devotee

INDIAN tradition speaks of fourteen sterling devotees of Narayana: Prahlada opens the roll-call of honour:

*prahlāda nārada parāśara puṇḍarīka
vyāsāmbarīṣa śukaśaunaka bhīṣma dālbyān
rukmaṅgadārjuna vasiṣṭha vibhīṣaṇādīn
puṇyānimān paramabhāgavatān smarāmi*

The nation has seen innumerable devotees. Of these, the sterling fourteen—Prahlada, Narada, Parashara, Pundarika, Vyasa, Ambarisha, Shuka, Shaunaka, Bhishma, Dalbhya, Rukmangada, Vasishtha and Vibhishana—are remembered daily to strengthen our faith constantly. Here again, Prahlada is the first among equals. Such is the knotted perfection of India's spiritual adventures that this prime devotee among the bhagavatas was actually the son of Hiranyakashipu whose hatred for Narayana has no parallel. That is the truth about life, the legend seems to tell us. Quite often an evil becomes the catalytic agent for good to burst out in efflorescence. It is within evil that hides what is good just as within the deepest darkness is hidden the ray of dawn. Probably this too was a concept evolved by Sanatana Dharma for tolerance and universal friendship. In the totality of creation who is the friend, and who is the enemy? As the Tamil poet, Subramania Bharati, sings:

Love thine enemy, my heart!

We have seen in our experience
Fire at the centre of smoke;
Our Lord who is all love
Resides in the core of enmity.

The first of the Puranas, the *Vishnu Purana*, has detailed cantos on Prahlada's life. Maitreya wishes to know why Prahlada, a dharmatma, was put to unimaginable torture by his own father, Hiranyakashipu. Parashara begins his narrative with an account of Hiranyakashipu's *digvijaya*. Soon, strengthened by the boons given by Brahma, the Asura king had become an overlord of the three worlds. He is not able to tolerate it when his own son speaks of Narayana as the Supreme. Subjected to various tortures, Prahlada overcomes them all by his firm faith in the indwelling

universal Divine. The Lord appears before him and grants him several boons. One of them frees Hiranyakashipu from all the sins he had committed towards Prahlada. Hiranyakashipu is transformed and looks after his son with great love. Prahlada also serves his parents with unrivalled devotion. There is only a solitary reference to the Narasimha incarnation as we close the canto: *pitaryuparati nīte narasimhasvarūpiṇā*, after the killing of his father by the Lord as Narasimha. But by the tenth century (or a little later) when the *Bhagavata* was composed, the Narasimha incarnation had gained much in description and Hiranyakashipu had come to be seen as pure Ego, one who never atoned for his guilt in hating the Lord and trying to kill Prahlada. The pas-sages in the *Vishnu Purana* of Prahlada being tortured make us shudder but there is no description of Narasimha. Later on, when we read the *Bhagavata*, the same image draws us towards a moment out of Time, frozen as an experience of power and glory.

In both the Puranas, Prahlada remains a sterling devotee of the Lord. When Hiranyakashipu examines Prahlada after his early lessons, the latter quietly says that he has learnt the best possible education for a human being, words that have become very famous indeed (*śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ*):

Hearing about Vishnu, singing about Him, remembering Him, serving Him, worshipping 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.

Hiranyakashipu is quite upset and upbraids the teacher of Prahlada who happens to be the son of Shukracharya. The teacher's conciliatory words have no effect and the asura king puts Prahlada through several tortures which have no effect upon the young boy whose thoughts are immersed in the Divine. Shukracharya's sons now request Hiranyakashipu to spare Prahlada and give him another chance to learn the right things. But Prahlada's devotion is not devotion that suffers alteration. He now speaks to his fellow-students with greater fervour on the need to follow the path of devotion. In a philosophical mood, he tells them that one must take to devotional practices when still quite young as this is a discipline that helps them perfect themselves in every way. Life is always uncertain and it is best that the aspirant learns the path of surrender at the feet of the Lord early in life. Desires lead to unhappiness; the end of all material pleasures is pain. Indeed, even if one wants to think of the Divine, he has very little time on hand:

Man lives for a hundred years at the most. Of this span of life, if a man is of uncontrolled senses, half is wasted in sleep at night when he is in a state of

darkness and inertia, almost like that of a dead body. Of the remaining half, the first twenty years are spent in the ignorance of childhood and the playfulness of early youth. Another twenty are spent in the decrepitude of old age, which reduces man to a helpless condition. Chained to domestic life, and oblivious of the ultimate purpose of his existence, the rest of man's life too is wasted in the pursuit of insatiable sexual enjoyments and under the domination of overwhelming infatuation.

This passage is obviously inspired by a verse of Tondar-adip-podi Alwar (7th century) in his *Tirumalai*:

Even if one attains one hundred years
Spoken of in the Vedas, half is spent
In sleep; fifteen years of ignorant boyhood;
Then hunger, sickness, old age, sorrows;
I do not desire such a birth, O Ranganatha!

The only way to escape such a birth that revolves in what appears to be meaningless rotation, is to kill desire. This comes by turning away from desire and clinging to the Lord through prayer and surrender. Of course, it sounds rather strange to hear such homilies from a little boy, but in the spaces of devotion which acts always on the level of emotion and intuition, the material sheath has no relevance at all. The child Prahlada says that the Supreme is closest to us, closer than our own parents and siblings. He is the Indwelling Universal Divine (*pratyagātman*). Prahlada's friends are astonished. From where did he gain this knowledge of a Supreme when the entire universe vibrates to the praising and worshipping of Hiranyakashipu as god? Prahlada then recounts the circumstances attending his birth.

When Hiranyakashipu was away, engaged in tapasya in the Mandara Mountain, Indra attacked his kingdom and all the asuras ran away. Indra carried away Hiranyakashipu's queen who was then pregnant, for he wished to kill the baby when it was born. Narada intervened and assured Indra that this child would be a great devotee of Narayana. Indra was overwhelmed, he saluted the lady and went his way since he was a devotee of Narayana. Hiranyakashipu's queen stayed in Narada's ashram and gave birth to Prahlada. As the child listened to the Vedas being recited in the ashram while still in the womb, he learnt that the Atman is indestructible:

The Atman is eternal, undecaying, the one without a second, pure and unsullied by matter and its attributes, the one distinct from the body, for whom the body is an object and field of expression, the support of everything, pure consciousness without volition, the changeless being, self-conscious awareness, the cause of all, the pervasive, the unattached, and the uncircumscribed. Understanding these

twelve unique attributes of the Atman, one should give up the false feeling of “I am the body or that the body is mine”—a feeling born of ignorance.

With this knowledge, one can pursue the path of yoga and attain realisation. But of the many paths of yoga, Prahlada assures his listeners that the Path of Devotion is the easiest. He teaches them how to practise Bhakti Yoga by serving the guru and surrendering all one has to the Lord. Reciting the glory of the Lord’s incarnations is part of this yoga too, just as it is most welcome to meditate on the form of the Lord. Ecstatic bhajan is a beautiful way of practising this yoga. The author of the *Bhagavata* closely follows the verses of the Tamil hymnologist Kulasekhara Alwar (8th century) when Prahlada speaks of devotional ecstasy:

When, on hearing of the Lord’s exploits in His Divine incarnations and of his unparalleled excellences, a devotee derives great joy resulting in horripilations all over, and his voice grows tremulous and he breaks into ecstatic singing, weeping and dancing; when like one possessed, he sometimes laughs, sometimes cries, sometimes meditates, sometimes salutes all as the Lord, crying aloud, “O Lord Hari! O Lord of All! O Narayana!” all the while breathing deeply and utterly unconcerned with what the world thinks of him—then is that man liberated from all bondage; then does he become identified with the Lord in mind and body in the state of ecstatic contemplation of His divine play; then does he, through the destruction of the subtle tendencies and their bases of ignorance by the power of Bhakti, attain to the Lord in truth and reality.

This had been the inspiration for Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and it has been demonstrated repeatedly during the last few centuries how ecstatic adoration can liberate aspirant souls and lead them to a totally different, rarefied plane of consciousness. Sri Rupa Goswami’s *Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu* speaks in great detail of such ecstatic adoration. Goswami was a contemporary of Chaitanya and received from him the methodology in which the Divine can be made to pervade one’s consciousness. The method is simple enough: “Chant the Lord’s name! Recall the Lord’s exploits and imagine Him as he was in Brindaban. Meditate upon his Vaijayanti garland made of wild blossoms, the Tulasi plant, his conch Panchajanya, his smile.” Then there is the flute of Krishna. The experience is known as ‘anubhava’, and it manifests in different ways. Why, one may even laugh like a madman when undergoing Krishna-anubhava:

Such mad laughing is an expression of the condition of the heart, which is technically called *aṭṭahāsa*. When a devotee becomes affected with this mental condition, his love is expressed through the lips. The laughing sounds, coming one after another, are compared to flowers falling from the creeper of devo-

tion which grows within the heart of the devotee. In the *Chaitanya-caritamruta* devotional service to the Lord is also compared to a creeper which rises up to the lotus feet of Krishna in Goloka Vrindavana.¹

This is, perhaps, an extreme manifestation of the ecstasy spoken of by Prahlada to his friends. All the same, literature on this subject is extensive. Even an anthology like the *Sri Hari Bhakti Vilasa* compiled by Gopala Bhatta Goswami of Brindavan (a younger contemporary of Sri Chaitanya) shows how the idea of bhakti resulting in ecstatic anubhava has been recorded in various Puranas and allied religious literature. Sri Aurobindo takes this aspect in its totality and has explained that devotional ecstasy is a very valid experience and no doubt belongs to the highest state of devotion. He has also corrected the erroneous impression that his yoga is against the emotional worship of Krishna, the Vaishnava bhakti:

It is a misunderstanding to suppose that I am against Bhakti or against emotional Bhakti—which comes to the same thing, since without emotion there can be no Bhakti. It is rather the fact that in my writings on yoga I have given Bhakti the highest place. All that I have said at any time which could account for this misunderstanding was against an *unpurified* emotionalism which, according to my experience, leads to want of balance, agitated and disharmonious expression or even contrary reactions and, at its extreme, nervous disorder. But the insistence on purification does not mean that I condemn true feeling and emotion any more than the insistence on a purified mind or will means that I condemn thought and will. On the contrary, the deeper the emotion, the more intense the Bhakti, the greater is the force for realisation and transformation. It is oftenest through intensity of emotion that the psychic being awakes and there is an opening of the inner doors to the Divine.²

This seems to be an accurate picture of Prahlada in the *Bhagavata*. The change in Prahlada and his classmates is marked and this gets reported to Hiranyakashipu. The king is not prepared to listen to Prahlada who asks him to train himself in equanimity with faith in the Universal Lord. Universal? If He is everywhere, why is He not seen in this pillar? Prahlada replies that he sees the Lord there too. Enraged, Hiranyakashipu jumps down from his throne and strikes the pillar with his sword:

Immediately a terrific sound arose from that pillar. That sound was so loud that it seemed to crack the Cosmic Shell. Hearing it, Brahma and other deities thought that the doomsday of the world, including their spheres, had come. Thus while Hiranyakashipu was making a determined effort to kill his son, he was wonder-struck to hear the strange and terror-inspiring sound, whose source he could not trace anywhere in the assembly. In order to make true the words of his devotee

that he saw Sri Hari in the pillar too, and also to demonstrate that He was immanent in everything, the Lord was seen as emerging into the assembly from the pillar, in a form that was neither of a beast nor of a man. The Asura, who was looking around for the source of that sound, now saw that form emerging from the pillar, a wonderful form which was neither a whole man nor a whole animal, but lo! a Man-lion!

The author of the *Bhagavata* spares no stroke of his brush in creating the terrible form of Narasimha, a sheer brilliance of matted locks and mane, terrifying fangs, sharp tongue, curved eyebrows, huge erect ears, mouth like an open cave, the cheeks all ferocious. It was a form that filled the spaces with innumerable arms, while the hair all over the body glistened like the rays of the moon. Hiranyakashipu, little knowing his end is near, thinks of this as the result of some magical illusion and proceeds to slash at the form. Now follows a fight with no holds barred and presently the asura king is caught in the vice-like grip of Narasimha. The Purana describes in gory detail the way in which the Man-lion placed Hiranyakashipu on its thighs and tore him into two, garlanding himself with the intestines plucked out of the severed body. Presenting a terrible sight with blood dripping, the incarnation proceeds to destroy the few asuras who had not run away from the scene. There is relief and joy in the heavens that Hiranyakashipu is no more. But who dare come close to Narasimha who was the very personification of fury?

All of them, devas, rishis, siddhas, nagas and the rest pray to Narasimha to calm down but do not dare approach Him: no, not even Lakshmi. They send Prahlada who goes to Narasimha with a natural grace, and salutes Him. At once the Lord's anger is gone and His heart overflows with divine love (*kṛpayā pariplutaḥ*). Prahlada's hymn to the Divine is full of meaningful messages. A direct child of the Bhakti Movement initiated by the Alvars, the *Bhagavata* here decries casteism in society in almost the same image used by Tondar-adipodi Alvar. All devotees of the Lord belong to the same caste (the 'tonda-k-kulam', spoken of by Perialwar)!

I consider even a man of very low birth, a man born in the caste of dog-eaters, who has offered his mind, words, hopes, objects of desire, and vital energy to the Lord, as immensely superior to a Brahmana possessed of the twelve qualifications mentioned above, but is still indifferent to the Lord's holy feet. For the former purifies even his tribe, while the latter has only pride as his asset and not purity.

Prahlada addresses the Lord to assure us that there is nothing to be afraid of in Narasimha; and for all time to come, people will contemplate this fierce form to gain freedom from fear, *sarve rūpaṁ nṛsimha vibhayāya janāḥ smaranti*. He then speaks of Vishnu's Maya that causes human birth and how only the Lord's grace gained

through devotion can free us from this grand illusion. All that we see as success and prosperity and power are nothing but *vanitas vanitatum*! The one meaningful approach to life is to make it serve the Divine. With this firm faith glowing within us, what need we fear in life? For the Divine incarnates variously (Hayagriva, Matsya, Kurma, Varaha and so on) to save the devotees all the time in all the three yugas, and hence we hail the Supreme as Triyuga. Indeed, our devotion itself is the gift of His grace.

The Lord is pleased and offers Prahlada several boons but the boy wants nothing but devotion to the Lord. A solitary exception is his prayer that Hiranyakashipu may be freed from the taint of considering the Lord as his enemy. Narasimha assures the boy that Prahlada's birth has already purified twenty-one generations of his family. As commanded by Narasimha, Prahlada performs the funeral rites of his father and then ascends the throne. The Narasimha incarnation withdraws from the scene but not before pulling up Brahma for giving boons indiscriminately. Power in the hands of people with no grace or wisdom can spell doom for humanity!

It is very interesting that the Narasimha incarnation which has been mentioned just in passing in the earliest Purana gets such detailed treatment in the *Bhagavata*. The time of the *Bhagavata*'s production could be any time between 8th century and 13th century. Among the arguments studied by Swami Tapasyananda is one favouring the 13th century as Ramanujacharya (11th century) has not quoted from the *Bhagavata* in his commentaries but uses the *Vishnu Purana* extensively. Advocating an earlier date, the Swami says that Ramanuja may not have used the *Bhagavata* as in his system Narayana residing in the Vaikuntha is the Supreme, an approach favoured by other Vaishnava sampradayas like those of Vallabha and Chaitanya. So Ramanuja "must have considered the *Vishnu Purana* as offering better support for it than the *Bhagavata*, whose acceptance of Siva almost on a par with Vishnu must have been considered by him as militating against his theology."³ Why did this transformation take place? Was it an attempt to unite the Vedic stream that lay disturbed by credal differences?

If we do accept this approach, a new pathway opens up, linking the Purana with historical happenings. For, the transformation of one single reference to Narasimha into the terrible passages in the *Bhagavata* does give some food for thought. This incarnation, in particular, is the Rudra form of the Supreme. It may be pointed out that the first Islamic aggression on India took place in the 8th century. Mohammed Bin Kasim's attack on Sindh resulted in the killing of the King of Sindh and looting of the land. The tenth century saw the repeated attacks of Mahmud of Ghazni that ended in denuding the Hindu temples. Being an iconoclast he did not spare the images either. The eleventh century saw the destruction of Mathura, so sacred to lovers of the Krishna incarnation. With equal ferocity the Shiva temple at Somnath was looted and the huge linga broken into pieces. The pieces were carried to Ghazni and became the steps to enter the grand Mosque of marble built by Mahmud. It is said that when the priests offered to give anything he wanted if he would spare the linga, he is said

to have spat out: "I am not a trader in icons; I am a breaker of idols."⁴

Mahmud of Ghazni was followed by Mohammed of Ghorī. Those were the days of bloodshed, looting and Islamic persecution of infidels. How did the intellectuals react to these changes in the body politic? On the one hand there was a feeling of helplessness and the path of (Prahlada-like) surrender offered hope of divine intervention. On the other, there was an attempt to rouse the heroic tendencies of the people. For this they needed to be inspired by tales of ferocious heroism (like Narasimha) where evil gets destroyed ultimately. A similar situation arose in the early decades of the twentieth century when a fear-ridden nation had to be injected with the heroism of the past. Tamil patriots like V.V.S. Aiyar and Subramania Bharati chose to present earlier heroes like Guru Gobind Singh and Chhatrapati Shivaji. Sri Aurobindo's own "Baji Prabhau" is a thrilling war-cry for the time, of how Baji Prabhau successfully held the pass of Rangana against twelve thousand Mughals of the invading army:

Chosen of Shivaji, Bhavani's swords,
For you the gods prepare. We die indeed,
But let us die with the high-voiced assent
Of Heaven to our country's claim enforced
To freedom.

In the same manner, the Pauranikas kept up the spirit of the people while speaking at night to their small audiences illumined by the dim light of the lantern in remote areas, recreating the heroic myths and legends of India while attempting to bridge credal differences as best as they could. The Vedic fold had to remain united to face the enemy threat from foreign lands. Seen in this light, the transformation of Narasimha appears quite appropriate. The Man-lion image to project the Raudra aspect of the Supreme became even more important later on, and temples began to have the Man-lion face carved and kept at the entrance. One can come across such "guardians" in many temples in the Srirangam complex in South India.

This was also one of the reasons why the celebrated poet Kamban used the myth of Narasimha in his *Ramayana*. In the Yuddha Kanda, Ravana is holding court to discuss war strategies. Vibhishana tries to make him see reason and liberate Sita. Ravana will have none of it as his ego is puffed up. Quite unexpectedly Vibhishana begins to recall the story of Hiranyakashipu and how his egoism ended in his destruction. Whereas Valmiki has been Kamban's prime inspiration, the *Bhagavata* account of the Narasimha incarnation has given us a superb branch-story in the epic as "Iraniya Vadhāi Padalam". Hiranyakashipu's thunderous ego denying supremacy to Narayana and the terrifying appearance of Narasimha as the incarnation bursts out of the pillar give a rare sublimity to the whole epic. V.V.S. Aiyar has translated sumptuous segments of the narration into powerful, Miltonic English. When Hiranya wants

to know whether this much-vaunted Narayana is in the pillar, Prahlada answers:

“What of this column father?” said Prahlad:
 “Thou’lt find Him in a span of space; divide
 An atom into an hundred parts, and thou
 Wilt find my God in every one of them:
 He is in Meru hill; thy very words,
 I say, are filled with Him; and thou wilt find
 ’Fore long my every word a solemn truth.”

And so it comes to be when Narasimha bursts out of the pillar.

He struck, and lo the heavens opened wide
 The universal globe asunder burst.
 And rumbling came the laugh of the Man-Lion fierce,
 Tremendous, ominous!

While Prahlada has remained the prime devotee in the Hindu consciousness, he has also come in for some criticism by a section of twentieth century enthusiasts of the Aryan invasion theory. The Pondicherry-based Bharatidasan (Thiru Kanaga Subburathinam) wrote the drama *Iraniyan Alladhu Inayatira Veeran* (1943) in which Prahlada is shown as a Prince who has fallen in love with an Aryan damsel. When he is being crowned the Prince, he refuses to take the oath in the name of Hiranya and prefers Narayana, the Aryan god. According to the dramatist, the Tamil king Hiranya is killed by conspirators led by the commander-in-chief. However, the commander-in-chief kills Prahlada and commits suicide to atone for his actions. Those were the days when hatred was being spewed on the brahmins of Tamil Nadu by a section of forward castes led by E. V. Ramaswami Naicker, since the brahmins were considered to be Aryans out to subjugate the Tamils (equated with Dravidians). The play was banned in 1948 by the ministry headed by Omandur Ramaswami Reddiar because it wounded the sentiments of the devotees of Prahlada.

But neither time nor opposition has brought any single stain on the image of our child devotee. He remains the darling of devotees, their leader, the inspirer of some of the finest artistic treasures of Indian culture, including Sadguru Tyagaraja’s Telugu opera, *Prahlada Bhakta Vijayam*.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

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1. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *The Nectar of Devotion* (1970), p. 228.
2. *The Integral Yoga: Sri Aurobindo's Teaching and Method of Practice* (1993), pp. 34-35.
3. *Srimad Bhagavata*, Volume I (1980), p. xxvi.
4. See H. C., *Indiya Charithiram: Indu Muslim Atchikalin Varalaaru* (1948), pp.124-26.

O, THE LIGHT!

BEYOND the sky-path I climb,
 Led by what!...
 A glorious Light within.
 A Light so bright
 But not of day or night;
 A Light
 That holds our merit
 And is our only credit.
 No, not the card of credit
 But more dear than that.
 Giver of life, O Light,
 Bring with you your Might,
 O the golden Light!
 O yes, this Light is one
 And always has won
 Against the force of evil.

O Light,
 Always keep us cheerful
 And may we ever be grateful,
 To thee and thee alone...
 O the supramental Light!

SNEHAJEET CHATTERJEE
 (A student)

TIPS FROM THE TOP

WHAT I note below may serve as pointers in our daily work and dealings with others. I also give the stories behind, so that these pointers may be read, interpreted and serve as guidelines in their proper context of time and situation.

Now, each one for himself.

1) Once, long ago, there was a sort of strike in the Lake Estate. Louis Allen was living there alone (i.e., he was the only Ashramite). He was the in-charge and the founding-father too. (It was, of course, the Mother's creation.) Somehow the news reached us here in the evening. We were told that he (Louis) had not eaten nor had probably had enough water even. Some 5 or 6 of us rushed off in a jeep with food and water. This was, may be, after 9 p.m. When we reached there the scene that met our eyes was: a long bamboo laid across the entrance road, 8 to 10 men squatting on one side and Louis standing on the other. A real stand-off, or an eyeball to eyeball. We gathered that the workers had struck work earlier, but were ready to come back on the old terms—but Louis insisted that the strike was illegal—therefore he would take them back on new terms with a written agreement to the effect that they were newly engaged! The workers stood to lose some benefits. So they wouldn't agree. That is why the stand-off. Louis told them *not* to cross the bamboo—they could do it only over his dead body! Anyway, we relieved him and requested him to eat and refresh himself—luckily, he agreed. As I was to come away early in the morning, Louis gave me the above detailed account so that I could report the matter to the Mother. I used to go up to her at 5.30 a.m., before She appeared for the 6 a.m. Balcony Darshan. She heard me out and said: “Louis cannot do that—it is not right. (I think She also said it would be illegal.) Moreover, because the workers have gone down in their consciousness, it is no reason why he (Louis) should also go as low. He should take them back on the old terms.” Then She added: “Anyway, you need not go back to tell him this. You have the Demonstration (2nd December) and Drama (1st December) coming up. I will tell Amrita—and he will see to it.” There then ended my role, and also, now, my story.

2) Once again, long ago, when I was quite young (“kuchcha”) in my work, the following happened. There was a theft of a brass implement from our Sports Ground. Not surprisingly, none of the eight or nine paid workers would say, “Sorry, I did it!” They swore by a fire of camphor and Neem sprig. I hatched up a simple solution, or so I thought. I called them all and told them, “The stolen object costs about Rs. 20. So I will cut Rs. 2 from each one of you and buy a new one.” Then, one of them, the best of men you can come across, questioned my wisdom. He was not angry or aggressive—but gently disturbed the smooth run of my thoughts. He pointed out: “Does it mean, *ayya*, that in your judgement, we are all equally guilty—thieves?” I

had no answer for him or me! I just told them to disperse, swallowed some of my pride, and wrote to the Mother. I told Her that I regarded my workers (paid) as my helpers, not as someone lower than me. Now that the theft had taken place:

1. Should I punish one on suspicion?
2. Punish all equally?
3. Or is the management to be blamed?
4. And is my attitude towards the workers right?

Her reply came, quite prompt and unequivocal:

For Question 4—Yes

For Questions 1 and 2—NO

And for Question 3—YES

So, I had something more to swallow! But some kinks were straightened out in the brain.

3) This, in my reckoning concerns all of us. There was in 1965 I think, a bit of work in the Swimming Pool. Some of our boys came at odd hours, when they were free, and did some hard work. The work lasted several days. Yogananda and I thought we could sort of reward them with a feast (dinner). Actually, I had Rs. 40 belonging to the Swimming Pool that I had collected in about a year. We meant to spend these Rs. 40 for the feast! There arose some last minute self-questioning as to the accumulating and spending of this money. To clear the doubts I wrote to the Mother.

My words (after the above lengthy explanation) were:

“...We thought we might reward them (the boys) with a feast. Is it good? Does it spoil the attitude? They (the boys) have not claimed it, though they would like it.”

The Mother’s answer:

“It goes without saying that the material reward replaces the spiritual gain.”

But how many amongst us all would choose this (the spiritual gain) instead of that (the material pleasure)?

R. PRABHAKAR (BATTI)

A CLEAR RAY AND A LAMP—AN EXCHANGE OF LIGHT

(Continued from the issue of December 2004)

IN his letters of 10th and 24th August 1978, Amal soundly puts down Rajneesh (what he wrote is reprinted in *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo* [1995] along with another letter to me containing his critique of the philosopher Krishna Chaitanya's severe put-down of Sri Aurobindo), and provides a fascinating discussion on the proper adjective from "Aurobindo" and speaks of his part in the *Selections from Savitri*:

To give Rajneesh who has written in Hindi a place in *Mother India* in English would be to disseminate his views unnecessarily. I tackled him in my letter to you because you wanted me to do so, and also because I got a bit of pleasure from pointing out his inconsistencies.

As for the variant adjectives from "Aurobindo", "Aurobindean" is Sisir Ghose's own coinage. Sri Aurobindo never used it. In one place he has used "Aurobindian" and in another "Aurobindonian". I have always plumped for the latter because of its grand sound; I believe Dilip first employed it. Of course, other alternatives are possible: "Aurobindoic", "Aurobindoesque", "Aurobindoan".

I had something to do with the *Selections from Savitri*. Mary Aldridge was the prime mover but she did base herself partly on my old set of extracts and constantly consulted me.

In response to my apprehension that his *The Problem of Aryan Origins* would be a nightmare of typographical bloomers that Calcutta was notorious for, Amal replied with his characteristic humour and provided a trenchant critique of Malati Shengde's book on the Indus Civilisation while expressing his respect for B. B. Lal's judgement:

My Calcutta book will not be marred by printer's devils. I have gone through the proof very carefully two or three times. I agree that our Indian products are quite a nightmare. But at times wonderfully grotesque effects are the result. I remember reading in Sankalia's *Indian Archaeology Today*: "At this point a new elephant entered the culture." It would be such a shame to cut out such a glorious misprint.¹

Yes, I read Shengde's book—a clever affair but pretty wrong-headed and

1. In his letter of 11.4.81 he writes, "Evidently he (Sankalia) does not dream of correcting the proofs. I have offered to edit and proof-read whatever future book he writes. It is indeed horrible as well as hilarious when 'awls' becomes 'owls' and 'element' turns into 'elephant'."

far-fetched, though in some places useful new information from the scholarly world came my way through it. Sankalia has a fine slashing review of it, putting poor Malati down in every respect.... The best critic of any attempt at deciphering the Indus script is B. B. Lal. If he is satisfied, something genuine can be said to have been achieved. Mahadevan hasn't come unscathed from Lal's pen. Perhaps the most attractive reading of the script is the recent one by Walter Fairervis Jr. apropos of excavations at Allahdino. I have dealt with it critically in the sequel I have prepared to *The Problem of Aryan Origins*.

On 10 August 1978 Amal added to this subject, giving an invaluable nugget of information about Sri Aurobindo's view of the Indus Civilisation:

Thanks for your gallant attempt to get my book published. It was an even more gallant venture to make a summary of so many-sided and intricate a thesis.... I have a sort of sequel ready if this book succeeds in waking up our historians from their super-Kantian "dogmatic slumber". The two books together should go far to establish in a less voluminous though not, I hope, less luminous form the results of my long research. Several new considerations have come in while doing these more compact and specialised pieces.

My final typescript on Harappa has not been seen by Sankalia.² Now that the one and only weakness he had hinted at in my thesis has been removed, he is not likely to bring up any major opposition. I have been in touch with him in various matters, either appreciating the highlights of his new books or criticising certain more or less minor points in them. Perhaps a not-so-minor point was the origin of the pipal motif. He, because of a paper of diligent research by one of his pupils, stated confidently that the Harappa Culture was responsible for it. I wrote a short article in the form of a letter contradicting and disproving his opinion. He wrote back that my treatment of the subject was "excellent". I showed conclusively that the pipal motif could be traced to a pre-Harappan period at Mundigak. I also suggested equating this period with that of the Atharvaveda where the pipal first appears as a sacred tree.³... You ask whether Sri Aurobindo said anything in this context. At a time when Marshall suggested a centrally Sumerian origin for the Indus Valley Civilisation Sri Aurobindo chose to call it Proto-Indian.

He added with inimitable Amalian humour at the end:

2. Sankalia's response to *The Problem of Aryan Origins* in 1981 was, "I went through your book as soon as it reached me. I think you have covered all the points, quite impartially. I think for the Aryans and the Indus Civilization, we have to await the accepted reading of the Indus Script. Meanwhile, congratulations." He reviewed it in *The Times of India* subsequently and Amal wrote a response, which was reprinted in *Mother India*.

3. This material was later incorporated in *Karpasa in Prehistoric India* (1981).

P.S. I'm glad your brother bagged a First Class in his B.A. (Honours-English) finals. If he has beaten you hollow, since you got a Second Class though you stood first in that Class, he has knocked me also into a cocked hat, because I missed my First Class (Philosophy Honours) though by merely three or four marks⁴ and though I, a Philosophy student, happened to win the much-coveted Ellis Prize which a Literature-student was expected to capture.

The next significant letter is dated 22.9.1979. Here he provides an incisive critique of B. B. Lal's paper on "The Indo-Aryan Hypothesis *vis-à-vis* Indian Archaeology" that was presented in October 1977 at Dushanbe, Russia, in a seminar on "Ethnic problems of the early history of the peoples of Central Asia and India in the second millennium B.C." Lal, instead of replying to Amal's letter had sent him this paper. After dealing with it, Amal goes on to clarify some of my misconceptions regarding Sri Aurobindo at considerable length, providing a brilliant summary of the change from Vedic spiritual insight to Upanishadic philosophy and ends with a typically humorous quip. Amal praises Lal's paper as having taught him many things:

But its putative thesis that the Rigvedic Aryans whom he takes to be invaders of India around 1400 B.C. may be identified with the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) people whose first appearance in India is archaeologically datable to the same period and placeable roughly in the same area and can be evaluated in terms of cultural life in fair correspondence with the evidence of the Rigveda—this thesis which has never before been so well presented is still not satisfactory to my mind. I intend to point out the holes in it. But perhaps the best reply will be my own book. As soon as it comes out I'll send it to Lal. In the meanwhile I'll touch on the two main joints in his armour. I may briefly mention them to you.

Firstly, the Rigveda, as interpreted naturalistically by non-Aurobindonians, tells a story of war and conquest. The earliest settlements of the PGW people—at Bhagwanpura, Dadheri, Kathpalon, Nagar, etc.—in some of the areas where the Rigvedic "Aryans" lived show no confrontation. On the contrary at Bhagwanpura, where the most extensive excavations have been made, the PGW people and the late-Harappans are found to have lived peaceably side by side. Not the slightest sign of hostility has been found. There were two floods—one suffered earlier by the late-Harappans and the next jointly by them and the PGW people.

Secondly, in the locales of the earliest PGW searched so far, the domesticated horse, the typical animal of the Rigvedic "Aryans", as of all "Aryans", is totally absent. I personally do not lay very much stress on this fact, because, unlike Lal, I believe that the Harappa Culture not only at Lothal in Saurashtra and at Surkotada in Kutch but also at Harappa in the Punjab and at

4. I missed my First by 2 marks in the Part I exam and by 1 mark in Part II.

Mohenjo-daro in Sind, knew the domesticated horse. But Lal has denied this animal for Harappa and Mohenjo-daro and has even played down the very substantial evidence produced by the excavator of Surkotada, Joshi, that this site in all its levels from 2100 to 1750 B.C. had the domesticated horse. So within Lal's own context my second argument should carry considerable weight.

Now I may refer to the centre of my non-Lal stand. There is no allusion in either the Rigveda or any other Indian document that the Rigvedics entered India from abroad and were present in this country as invading foreigners. Archaeology also has provided no evidence of a Rigvedic invasion around 1500 B.C. All scholars admit these facts. Lal's whole attempt to identify the Rigvedics with the PGW culture is based on an ignoring of them. Once we conceive the serious possibility that the Rigveda is anterior to the Harappa Culture, our entire historical outlook changes and we look for quite other cultural significances. Putting the Rigveda from c. 3500 to 3000 B.C. I can show that the Harappa Culture must be posterior also to the three other Vedas and the Brahmanas, if not even the major Upanishads and that it can synchronise only with the early Sutras, so far as the Vedic component of its rather complex life is concerned. Keeping its other components in view, we may hold—as I have done in all my writings on the subject—that it is at once a derivative, a development and a deviation from the Rigveda.

C'est tout about Lal just now. Let me deal with your postcard of the 17th. [...] your queries don't seem quite to arise from a close reading of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo has said that the Vedic Rishis knew the Supermind as *Satyam Ritam Brihat*—the True, the Right, the Vast. He has also taken *Vijnana* and *Mahas* as old Indian terms answering to his vision of the Supramental plane. There appears to be no doubt in Sri Aurobindo that the Vedic seers and the early Upanishadic sages were aware of this level. What he says is that the later sages of the Upanishads concentrated on the Silent Brahmic Self instead of taking it as merely one aspect of the total Reality. The reason for this concentration is threefold. (1) The Vedics found no way to make the Supermind effective for transformation. (2) The Upanishadics came more and more to mistake the Overmind for the Supermind and, considering it the ultimate dynamic side of the Divine, saw that it lacked the power to divinise the nature-part of man's existence and that therefore this part which looked undivinisable could not be a real feature of the Brahman who is all: in other words, it must be a strange anomaly, an unreality wearing the appearance of the real. The world thus was regarded in a way which in philosophical history was the forerunner of the later Shankarite idea of Maya. (3) The experience of the Nirvanic Absolute or the Nirguna Brahman brought home to the post-Rigvedic Yogis the "truth" of their conviction of the world's ultimate non-divinity and unreality, because in this experience the world did actually figure as a floating phantasm.

Both *Vijnana* and *Mahas* came to denote the Overmind. At a still more subsequent time, *Vijnana* got identified with Buddhi, the highest stratum of human intelligence, the pure reason as distinguished from the sense-mind which was labelled as *Manas*. Possibly *Mahas* suffered the same *dégringolade*. Now between the intellect and the Beyond there stood nothing and the Beyond was identified with the silent Brahman or passive Atman. The concept of Ishwara remained and was held to be useful for a devotion-oriented or dynamism-motivated *practical* sadhana preparatory for the realisation of the inactive One without a Second—but, *theoretically* and *in the final reckoning*, this concept was understood as the silent Brahman (*alias* passive Atman) experienced within Maya. Once Maya was got rid of in the experience of the inactive One without a Second, Ishwara would disappear: He was classed as the Highest Illusion,

The last infirmity of noble minds.

In the Gita we have a great attempt to go back to the ancient integrality of spiritual vision. The Purushottama who is superior to the Kshara Purusha and the Akshara Purusha and who subsumes them does strike one as a Supramental reality, especially when accompanied by the concept of Para-Prakriti, the creative Supernature. But this latter concept is rather shadowy and what in the last resort encompasses our minds as Purushottama is the shining shadow of the Supermind in the top-layer, the synthesising crest, of the Overmind from where Sri Krishna who is basically Anandamaya came as an Avatar. He wove together the three Yogas—Jnana, Bhakti, Karma—and suggested the secret of secrets, the abandonment of all dharmas to take refuge solely in the Purushottama who would deliver one from all evil and from the grieving in which it results. But still the world in the Gita's vision does not quite escape being *anityam asukham* (transient and unhappy) for all the field it offers of a great victory of Righteousness. The manner in which the Acharyas have interpreted the Gita, each in favour of his own penchant, is not entirely unconnected with the Gita's many-sided synthesising failure to express what the Overmind fundamentally moves towards yet is unable to point out unequivocally, much less to reveal convincingly. Taking advantage of whatever temporary stress the Gita puts on Jnana, Bhakti or Karma, the Acharyas harp on their spiritual predilections and feel self-justified because the Gita in fact falls short of a fully satisfying unification. The fault with the Acharyas lay in their missing the *nisus* towards that unification. Sri Aurobindo alone has brought it out unmistakably and disclosed the Overmind Godhead as a help towards the Supermind even though it may be a danger if dwelt in too concentratedly. Hence his designation of the realisation on 24 November 1926 as Siddhi and yet his "No" to the Mother when she was ready to precipitate the Overmind creation on earth.

I feel a little out of breath at the moment with all this semi-Overmindish survey. So I'll bung up for the present.

On 17.10.79 Amal clarified this further:

...did I actually say that *vidyana* and *mahas* were terms in the Vedas? In the Rigveda the descriptive name for them is *satyam-ritam*, with the additional *brihat* applied to one or the other as in *ritam brihat* (I.75.5). The full Aurobindonian Vedic appellation for the Supermind, *Satyam-ritam-brihat*, comes only in the first verse of the Atharvaveda's great hymn to Earth. The Supermind is also denoted in the Rigveda by the expression "a certain fourth", *turiyam svid* (X.67.1) whose discoverer is said to have been the Rishi Ayasya just as the Rishi Mahachamasya is said in the Taittiriya Upanishad to have discovered *Mahas*. The Rigveda's *turiya*, however, is not to be mixed with the fourth state going by that name in the Mandukya Upanishad. The Rigvedic "fourth" is not the Mandukyian *grand finale*, the indescribable Supracosmic, but stands in that numerical position both from below and from above: it is above the lower triplicity of *prithivi* (earth), *antariksha* (vital plane) and *dyau* (mind-level) as well as below the higher triplicity (*tridhatu*) constituted by *vasu* (substance), *urj* (abounding force of being) and *priyam* or *mayas* (delight or love), the Rigvedic equivalent of the Vedantic Sachchidananda and the Puranic *satya-tapas-jana*. As for *vidyana* getting identified with *buddhi* in later times, I don't believe that the identification can be laid at the door of the Puranas. The philosophers who started interpreting the religious books seem to have divided *manas* from *buddhi* as sense-mind from the pure reason and interpreted *vidyana* with the latter. As far as I remember, Radhakrishnan does the same.

He went on to Harappan matters:

I was much interested in Hamdi Bey's article in the Statesman [*which I had sent him*]. S. P. Gupta, author of the book which Bey reviews, is of one mind with me who consider the Rigvedics to have been as good as autochthonous and to have formed part of a wide-spread belt of Aryanism stretching as far as the Ukraine from north-west India, Afghanistan and Baluchistan. He does not subscribe to the theory of an Aryan entry into India. But I cannot make out his chronology for the Rigvedics. Most probably it is the current date: c. 1500 B.C., even though their culture was a native-Indian post-Harappan flowering. I differ sharply here. I place the Rigvedics in c.3500-3000 B.C. Bey differs from both Gupta and me. He takes the Rigvedics to have been migrators into India but he refuses to see them as invaders. According to him, they entered India peacefully. ...my book on the problem of Aryan origins—when it does see the light of

day—should give him [*Gupta*] a fillip. It would be a fine idea to have it reviewed by him. Why don't you get into touch with him and obtain a copy of his present work, *Archaeology of Soviet Central Asia and the Indian Borderlands* for reading? The price of Rs. 400 is prohibitive... The article on the Indus script in *Hinduism* does not explain Rao's method. B. B. Lal was far from being satisfied with Rao's pro-Aryan reading just as he was unconvinced by Mahadevan's pro-Dravidian decipherment, when both these antithetical scholars first put forth their rendering. Until Lal is impressed I wouldn't say "Yes". I have great faith in him in this field. It was by him that the Finnish savants, who had made a great impact with their computerised Dravidianisation of the Indus script, were definitively "put paid".

A sweet personal note is sounded at the end of this long letter, capped with a poem, in response to the news of my transfer to the Queen of the Hills, Mussoorie:

Isn't it thrilling news that you will soon be on one of the Himalayan foothills? Mussoorie, as you know, has beautiful memories for me. I'll reserve *Ages in Chaos* for your sojourn in sight of the eternal snows. Do you remember my poem in which the Himalaya finds tongue?

The tides of gold and silver sweep the sky
But bring no tremor to my countenance:
How shall sun-rise or moon-ebb lure, when I
Have gripped the Eternal in a rock of trance?

Here centuries lay down their pilgrim cry,
Drowsed with the power in me to press my whole
Bulk of unchanging peace upon their eye
And weigh that vision deep into the soul.

My frigid love no calls of earth can stir.
Straight upward climbs my hush—but this lone flight
Reveals me to broad earth an emperor
Ruling all time's horizon through sheer height!

(*To be continued*)

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

MANMOHAN GHOSE: A RE-VALUATION

I

MANMOHAN GHOSE continues to remain a neglected poet. His lyrics lie in the dusty corner of the stack under pale covers. Who cares today to verify the remarks of Yeats and Oscar Wilde on his poetry? Overshadowed by his king-size brother and the fondly remembered trio,—Sarojini, Toru and Derozio—Manmohan is now a museum piece.

The nineteenth century in India was an exciting time, both for the natives and the foreign rulers. India was rising with two conflicting ideas helping in the growth of the new enlightenment: the stress on English education initiated by Rammohan Roy and the call for a backward look towards the glories of ancient India. The second note gained an impetus with the coming of Swami Vivekananda on the national scene. Manmohan's father, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, was intent on offering the best possible European education to his three sons. At the same time he wished his sons to be in touch with the nationalist movement in India. He would send clippings from the Indian newspapers to keep his sons updated, as they studied in England far away from their restive native soil. Dr. Ghose wished his sons to be competent in both ancient Indian and European cultures, (*Lotika Ghose*, 1975: 5) as if they were to bridge the gap between the East and the West. The three brothers, Benoybhusan, Manmohan and Aurobindo were sent to England in 1879 and they were left in the care of a Mr. Drewett in Manchester. The trio attended the Manchester Grammar School. Manmohan took keen interest in classical studies; Theocritus, Meleager and Simonides were his favourites.

In 1885 Manmohan and Aurobindo were admitted to St. Paul's School in London. Laurence Binyon in his introduction to *Songs of Love and Death* offers us an insightful description of his first sight of Manmohan in a European class room:

At the back of the room, behind the rest, sat a young Indian with thick hair falling about his forehead, and dark lustrous eyes. It was he who startled us with his impassioned tones... the legendary East seemed suddenly to have projected a fragment of itself into our little world of everyday things and humdrum studies, disturbing it with colour, mystery, romance. (*Binyon*, 1926: 7)

Manmohan did not face any trouble for his oriental pedigree. He had nice warm associations and his friends were very supportive throughout. There was just one note of disharmony, which seems to have been a conflict between atheism and Christianity. We get the reference directly from Sri Aurobindo, although the younger brother does not explain the nature of the religious conflict. He uses the third person singular to speak of himself:

The three brothers lived in London for some time with the mother of Mr. Drewett, but she left them after a quarrel between her and Manmohan about religion. The old Mrs. Drewett was fervently Evangelical and she said she would not live with an atheist as the house might fall down on her. (*SABCL*, Vol. 26, 1972: 2)

Apart from this reference to the issue, we have also information from Sri Aurobindo, in the record kept by A. B. Purani. This time it is the subjective voice.

When we were staying in London, the old lady (the elder Mrs. Drewett) used to have daily family prayers and reading of some passages from the Bible. One day Manmohan said something about Moses which made her wild. She said she did not want to live under the same roof with unbelievers and went to live somewhere else. I felt infinitely relieved and grateful to Manmohan. We were then entering upon the agnostic stage in our development... (*Purani*, 1959: 280)

There were times when Manmohan's father failed to send money for his sons because of his philanthropic nature. He would give away a large amount of his income to the poor. His generosity made his sons suffer financially. In 1887 Manmohan won an open scholarship to Christ Church College, Oxford. (*Lotika Ghose*, 1975: 11) The stipend however was not enough to support him at Oxford. Other than the scholarship he had no other funds. Knowing his condition the authorities decided to increase the amount of his scholarship instantly so that his education would not be interrupted. It shows he was not treated as the "Colonised Other" by the British Institutions. During this period Manmohan started brushing up his poetic faculty. He wrote for *Fox Family Magazine* and the school magazine *Ulela*. At Oxford, Manmohan was associated with Laurence Binyon, Arthur Cripps and Stephen Phillips. They jointly published an anthology of lyrics called *Primavera* in 1890. He contributed poems to it and received a warm review from Oscar Wilde in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (1890):

His verses show us how quick and subtle are the intellectual sympathies of the oriental mind and suggest how close is the bond of union that may some day bind India to us by other methods than of commerce and military strength. Mr. Ghose ought some day to make a name in our literature. (*Ibid.*: 21)

Wilde's appraisal of Manmohan's poetry was followed by other bright remarks. He was described by George Sampson as 'the most remarkable of Indian poets who wrote in English' in *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*. (*Iyengar*, 1943: 14) English was like a mother tongue to him. He wrote in English with an Indian temperament which indicates a queer dichotomy of the persona. He virtually lived with this dichotomy until his death in 1924. His prose and poetry bear the evidence of his conflicting self. Returning to India in 1894 he took up the job of an assistant professor in Patna College. Later he was transferred to Presidency College

(Calcutta). Through it all his literary activity continued. He took interest in Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and the art movement started by Abanindranath Tagore. He also studied Sanskrit literature. As a man of versatile interests, his library contained books on art, history, religion and philosophy along with Greek, Latin, Italian, Hebrew and French classics. Between 1898 and 1899 he got married to Malati Banerjee. Soon after the marriage his wife fell ill. He took her to Darjeeling where she recovered from a paralytic stroke. Malati suffered for five years (from 1905 to 1910). During the summer of 1910 the family rented a cottage in Darjeeling. The hills, the flowers and the wet weather once again brought back the memories of London in the poet's mind. He lived with the memory of London throughout. Even in the garden of his Calcutta residence, one could see English flowers nurtured with great care. He wished to live with the memory of the English soil. He had a dream of returning to England forever. His long-cherished dream was to establish a literary career in England and to live with his old pals. The idea grew strong in him from time to time. Once his daughter asked him whether he would finish the epic, *Perseus*. His reply was, "Yes, my child, if I ever live to reach the free soil of England." (*Lotika Ghose*, 1975: 45) And yet that was not all. There was a soft feeling for the green of Bengal too.

The first few years of the twentieth century were a turbulent time in India and especially for Manmohan because of his 'dangerous' brother, Aurobindo. Manmohan wished to maintain repose. Not always an escapist, he was very much against the exploitation by the coloniser. However, unlike Sri Aurobindo's, Manmohan's responses to India were not aggressively nationalistic. Never an activist against colonialism, Manmohan mostly expresses a mellow love for his motherland in his poetry. In a letter written to Laurence Binyon we see his deep love for his country and a sense of respect for Hinduism. (*Ibid.*: 14) Temperamentally, he was a misfit for active revolution. Because of his tranquil nature, the Indians thought of him as "denationalised", while the governing authority called him "anti-British", suspecting him to be spying slyly for his brother, Aurobindo. Naturally he suffered from a sense of isolation from both the parties. The fear of arrest was a constant trauma for him and for some time he took refuge in C. R. Das's household. His anxiety made him remark: "Yes, Aurobindo still hangs like a halter round my neck." (*Ibid.*: 43) His tension might be due to his two young daughters and his sick wife, whom he nursed day and night tirelessly. Unfortunately he had been denied the motherly love and care throughout his life. In a letter to Laurence Binyon he wrote, "...I had no mother. She is insane... crying for bread I was given a stone. My father was kind but stern, and I never saw much of him." (*Iyengar*, 1985: 35) His disturbed childhood left a deep impact on his psychology. He was slightly inhibited and could not mix freely. Malati was quite satisfying to him but her prolonged illness and premature death could not fill up the void. Malati died in 1918, and after that he composed some of his most painful lyrics:

Down the ghostly staircase, where her lost tread
 Haunts my heart with the music of the days that are dead,
 (Lotika Ghose, 1975:70)

His concentration on his dead wife grew intense and he sought to communicate with her through the means of the planchette.

He had the gift of a deep baritone voice and a pair of piercing eyes. He never dragged himself down to the level of unwanted intimacy with his students. He was a creative teacher by virtue of his interpretative skill. Each text operated on multiple levels of meaning in his class. It happened due to his scholarship and perception. He was oblivious to fame. He had a Yogi-like detachment for things material. He worked for the fixed pay of rupees 600 till 1916 and never asked for an increment. He was mostly preoccupied with his family and his poetic creation, never caring to be a public figure. He kept himself hidden from the public gaze. Friends like Binyon and his daughters knew him to some extent. Outside the family and the circle of friends he corresponded with Tagore. If Tagore interpreted India for the West, Manmohan was his apt counterpart in his interpretation of the West for the East. (Binyon, 1926: 21) More important than interpretations were his simple descriptions of the western landscapes.

From the elm's leafy loftiness,
 The poplar soaring fair,
 Ash, beech, the willow's bending grace,
 The woodland goddess there.
 (Ibid., 1926: 46)

In *Immortal Eve: Songs of the triumph and mystery of beauty*, trees of the foreign land bring in a foreign flavour to the Indian readers. According to George Santayana, the reader of Manmohan's poems "would readily take them as the work of an English poet trained in the classical tradition". (Iyengar, 1973: 89)

Manmohan Ghose lived his working life during the climax of the cultural renaissance in Bengal. It was a time when English was being taught along with the mother tongue, and a body of Indo-Anglian literature had already been formed with the help of Rammohan Roy, Kashiprosad Ghose, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Henry Derozio. English was no more a foreign tongue in India and the Indo-Anglian writers had a considerable body of readership. This readership made Manmohan well known among the educated class. But then, he was singing songs irrelevant for the age. The age demanded nationalistic fervour and Ghose was not expressive of that spirit. His themes were Greek and naturally they were Greek to the Bengalees, who would have been happy to see him dealing with the Himalayas, Hardwar and Saraswati. While his brother, Aurobindo, was a product of contemporary society,

Manmohan became an island and suffered from alienation.

Manmohan Ghose was a passage between the East and the West. He was “torn in two,” (*Binyon*, 1926: 17) living in two lands psychologically, the emotion shifting sometimes from here to there and sometimes from there to here. There was no attempt to synthesise the two parts with an integral vision. The dual self leaves a distinct stamp in his poetry of pain and pathos. The memory of England is a dominant mood because the impressionable period of his life was spent abroad. Boyhood is a time when one starts picking up the language; the expression, forms and the thought processes develop. The environment where one lives naturally leaves a deep impression on the mind. Manmohan’s formative years were spent in England. Hence the western influence on his lyric was a natural affair.

Myvanwy projects the dichotomy—a nostalgic agony for the motherland. One has the impression here that a bud is ripped off and placed in an alien situation. From there he is pining for the “meridian suns” and “summers”.

Lost is that country, and all—but forgotten
Mid these chill breezes, yet still, oh, believe me,
All her meridian suns and ardent summers
Burn in my bosom.

(*Ibid.*: 29)

Aurobindo returning to India had the same feeling, but for him it was a permanent return to his roots. For Manmohan, it was not a permanent return, not a one-pointed love. His lyrics mirror two calls, one from England and the other from India. *Myvanwy* describes the poet’s exile in a land where everything is different from his own country. This land is not green enough to soothe his marooned heart. There is a sense of loss in his early lyrics. He is lost in the ‘throngs’, ‘lights’ and ‘houses’ of London. He is like an ‘unknown leaf’ in the rushing crowd of London. The poet’s persona is restless and very lonely and constantly searches for a secure nest, which can be a substitute for his mother or his motherland.

The image of “sea” stands as a barrier that blocks his journey to India.

My soul may travel to you, but the sea
Sternly puts back the pilgrim feet of life
With the harsh warning of necessity...

The sea was still a painful feeling for the nineteenth century Indian living on foreign soil. It was a long way back to India. The word ‘necessity’ speaks of his father’s dream of seeing his sons gracing the glamorous posts of civil service. The father seems not to have understood the pangs of being uprooted at such an early stage. That affected the sensitive poet. There is an obvious note of weeping in Manmohan’s

lyrics from the beginning till the end of his life. He wept silently in his early poems and longed for some familiar faces, who would enfold him with love and care. He often remembers his mother in the lyrics.

As a poet Manmohan maintains a tranquil tone. There is no outburst of cheap sentiment. Iyengar calls him a ‘chastened muse’ in his book entitled *The Indian Contribution to English Literature*. (Iyengar, 1945: 61) He is quiet and composed. In a short poem called *A Lament* we see how Manmohan is responsive to the wonders of Nature and that has taken away something of the poignancy of the pain of separation, which we see in the first poem of *Primavera*.

In the deep West heavens grow heavenlier,
 Eve after eve; and still
 The glorious stars remember to appear;
 The roses on the hill
 Are fragrant as before:
 Only thy face, of all that’s dear,
 I shall see never more.

(Lotika Ghose, Vol. 1, 1970:5)

The western Nature is something like balm on his separation from home. Unlike some others, Manmohan’s most naturally powerful lyric poetry was written early in his life. I do not mean to say that the lyrics written on his ailing or dead wife are not natural. They have also a ring of sincerity. But then, the early poetry, to my mind, has been the most consistently well-written stuff. No wonder Wilde and Binyon were fascinated. Moreover, the power of lyricism stayed with him even in those disturbed times of *Songs of Love and Death*, which could have been sharper with some revisions. And yet, Yeats could pick up the true stuff from it on receiving the poem in 1926. Let us listen to the words of Yeats along with the lines from Manmohan:

When you sent me “Songs of Love and Death” you sent me one of the most lovely works in the world and even as I write my eyes are wet with tears through suddenly coming upon the words

Your heart
 Cradles august the pain
 The ancient primal woe of man
 And aches to mother Cain.
 As page after page I find a like majesty.

(Lotika Ghose, 1970: jacket flap)

Walter De La Mare highlights the verbal music and “the quality of sound

underlying the words, so to speak—which is surely a very rare achievement for a writer in a language not positively his own”. (*Ibid.*) Sturge Moore speaks of his “wonderful sense of the beauty of English words and rhythm” and sees him standing “like some statue of Buddha”, with “his profound sincerity and gentleness”. (*Ibid.*) John Freeman insists on his having a place in “our anthologies as an English poet”. (*Ibid.*) All these responses came in 1926, when the poet’s daughter sent copies of *Songs of Love and Death* to them after his death.

Before passing on to that anthology, I would like to dwell a little more on the wonderful early poetry of Ghose, which has escaped the notice of Indian critics:

Deep-shaded will I lie, and deeper yet
In night, where not a leaf its neighbour knows;
Forget the shining of the stars, forget
The vernal visitation of the rose;
And, far from all delights, prepare my heart’s repose.

(*Ibid.*: 6)

There are even Aurobindonian moments in Manmohan’s early poetry, moments which anticipate the wonderful later poetry of Sri Aurobindo, like *Rose of God*. Surely, the younger brother must have read poem N^o. VI in *Love Songs and Elegies*:

Heap ruby upon amethyst,
Exhaust the deep seas of their pearl:
My lips are richer, being kissed
By the sweet rose lips of a girl.
Her heart is red with love’s own fire;
She is the snowdrop of my youth
She is the rose of my desire.

(*Ibid.*: 13)

Rose, it seems, has been an obsessive metaphor in both the brothers. They might have got it through Yeats and Wilde. Unfortunately, Manmohan did not have time enough to explore the full psychic implications of the passion flower. Sri Aurobindo’s peaceful and meditative life was beyond his reach. Else, we could have seen Manmohan’s own explorations of the rose symbol.

Poem N^o. XVIII entitled *To His Mother* was placed before Sri Aurobindo for his comments. He picked out the first three lines as having marks of spiritual inspiration:

Augustest! dearest! whom no thought can trace,
Name murmuring out of birth’s infinity,

Mother! like heaven's great face is thy sweet face,
 Stupendous with the mystery of me.
 Eyes elder than the light; cheek that no flower
 Remembers; brow at which my infant care
 Gazed weeping up and saw the skies enshower
 With tender rain of vast mysterious hair!
 Thou, at whose breast the sunbeams sucked, whose arm
 Cradled the lisping ocean, art thou she,
 Goddess! at whose dim heart the world's deep charm,
 Tears, terrors, throbbing things were yet to be?
 She, from whose tearing pangs in glory first
 I and the infinite wide heavens burst?

(as quoted in *SABCL*, Vol. 9, p. 345)

Sri Aurobindo's comments are critical, but that only shows there should be proper critical evaluation of the neglected poet. Based on the proper balance-antithesis scheme, the younger brother's judgement has that usual note of detachment or impartiality. It lacks the sweeping enthusiasm of Wilde and Binyon, simply because Sri Aurobindo's demands from poetry are too high. The fact that he speaks highly of the opening lines is hint enough that there is a need for a re-valuation of Manmohan's lyrics. Here is that illuminating judgement:

Manmohan's poem has a considerable elevation of thought, diction and rhythm. It is certainly a fine production and, if all had been equal to the first three lines which are pure and perfect in inspiration, the sonnet might have stood among the finest things in the English language. But somehow it fails as a whole. The reason is that the intellectual mind took up the work of transcription and a Miltonic rhetorical note comes in; all begins to be thought rather than seen or felt; the poet seems to be writing what he thinks he ought to write on such a subject and doing it very well—one admires, the mind is moved and the vital stirred, but the deeper satisfying spiritual thrill which the first lines set out to give is no longer there. Already in the fourth line there is the touch of poetic rhetoric. The original afflatus continues to persist behind, but can no longer speak itself out in its native language; there is a mental translation. It tries indeed to get back—

Eyes elder than the light; cheek that no flower
 Remembers—

then loses almost altogether—what follows is purely mental.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 9, 1972: 345)

If we look carefully at the critical stance, it becomes clear that Sri Aurobindo is not underrating the poem. He just speaks about the lack of spiritual inspiration from the fourth line onwards and the predominance of intellectual inspiration, which simply goes against his own theory and practice of poetry. Any admirer of Milton or any intellectual poet would have highly appreciated the sonnet. It speaks of the un-Aurobindonian note in the elder brother, which is a sign of another consciousness, another type of creative Indo-Anglian experiment. Again, one must not fail to see that Sri Aurobindo has an eye on the beauty of the poem as an intellectual creation with the touch of visional lines here and there. Let us see his further observations and his appreciative tone in the conclusion of the passage.

Another effort brings the eighth line which is undoubtedly very fine and has sight behind it. Then there is a compromise; the spiritual seeing mind seems to say to the thinking poetic intellect, “All right, have it your own way—I will try at least to keep you up at your best”, and we have the three lines that follow those two others that are forcible and vivid poetic (very poetic) rhetoric—finally a close that goes back to the level of the “stupendous mystery”. No, it is not a “splendid confusion”—the poem is well-constructed from the point of view of arrangement of the thought, so there can be no confusion. It is the work of a poet who got into touch with some high level of spiritual sight, a living vision of some spirit truth, but, that not being his native domain, could not keep its perfect voice throughout and mixed his inspiration—that seems to me the true estimate. A very fine poem, all the same.

(*Ibid.*: 346)

I consider this judgement more valuable than the enthusiastic appraisals of Wilde and Yeats, because it points to the real strength of Manmohan with its detailed examination of a text. The memory of his mother is as painful as his memory of Bengal. And there is an indescribable link between the two. In *London*, he is sad to leave London. In *Home Thoughts*, it is another call. As we have already noted before, Manmohan felt quite out of place. That is certainly the reason why in poem after poem the divergence continues. In the last years, he seems to have been suffering from an acute sense of alienation. In 1916 he wrote about his crisis to Binyon:

With English people in India there can be only a nodding acquaintance or official connection, and with Indians my purely English bringing up and breeding puts me out of harmony; denationalised—that is their word for me. (*Lotika Ghose*, 1970: 251)

Quite often his love for his wife contributes to the tantric cult in his *Immortal Eve*:

Muse of my worship, lean from heaven,
 And touch my trembling lyre.
 I cannot sing your heavenly worth
 Unless you give the fire.

(Binyon, 1926: 81)

This poetry of mother worship is neither Shelleyan, nor Tagorean. In *Lines*, when his wife is no more, he sometimes comes close to the poetry of incantation.

Yet, oak, pine birch and daisies come back in his later life suppressing the images of Ganga and Champak. Why did he wish to return to England? Was it because the native land did not accept him warmly? Nobody knows for certain. Binyon, who perhaps knew his psyche more than others, thinks his “temperament and attitude were Eastern”; (*Ibid.*: 16) but “he hovered between two hemispheres, not wholly belonging to either”. (*Ibid.*: 17) Binyon also uses the phrase “doubly-exiled lot” which appears to me extremely interesting. I suspect that Manmohan was influenced by the flattering interest shown in his poetry by his western friends and that the lack of an Indian appraisal disappointed him. That might be a reason why he wished to go back to England. Emotionally he must have chosen India, especially after his marriage, which was something like a substitute for his mother. Internal evidences in *Songs of Love and Death* confirm his fascination for a typical Indian wife, who expresses something of the mother image. After the death of his wife he could never go out of Bengal, because Malati was typically expressive of the Indian motherhood. He was a home-bound type, very much in love with a quiet life free from the heat of patriotism of Aurobindo. If ever he wished to leave India, it was just to avoid the storms of nationalism and fear of arrest. Manmohan, the lyric poet, oscillates between India and England. Not that the other issues of love of Nature and love for his wife were trivial issues, but the constantly wavering between the two countries created a very rare charm in his lyric poetry. England might mean a return to peace from the heat of nationalism. India held for him a constant appeal with the memories of his wife and mother. The crisis made his lyrics original to a degree. It is an acute psychological crisis, which may make Manmohan a fascinating subject in the wake of a revival. As an original Indo-Anglian poet, he should have received more serious attention from critics. May be he passed unnoticed because of his quiet and gentle style.

SARANI GHOSAL MONDAL

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ONENESS

AN infinite azure expanse of the sky,
 Foam-tipped billows of the long green ocean,
 A flock of swallows that goes flitting by,
 Vermillion red of the setting sun.

Beings and objects separate in space,
 Yet are one to a higher mental eye.
 Vanished now is memory's dragging trace,
 A nameless being this moment am I.

On the promenade the evening rush
 Of people in every shape and size,
 All are enveloped in one vast hush,
 All as moving shadows I recognise.

Moribund now are passions of the will,
 Whirlpools of thought subside and all is still.

HEMANT KAPOOR

MONSIEUR AND MADAME FRANÇOIS MARTIN IN PONDICHERRY

(Continued from the issue of December 2004)

APPENDIX

A HISTORICAL REVIEW

SINCE Asokan times—3rd century B.C.—boats must have plied all along the coast of the Bay of Bengal towards Cape Comorin just as the French, the Dutch and the English had done throughout the 16th and the 17th centuries A.D. as we have seen while describing the work of François Martin as Governor of the settlement in Pondicherry.

After Asoka's conversion to Buddhism when he decided to serve his people, he had the unique idea of extending his empire through other means than warfare. His intentions were genuine and his work so well-planned that his empire soon covered almost the whole of the subcontinent. He built long stretches of road and his influence spread out in all directions. To protect and facilitate the life of the people was not the only aim; he sent delegations over land and over seas to spread the teachings of the Buddha. Trade and exchange must have been undertaken, for coins, among the first of their kind, are found everywhere. Edicts and pillars show that the people were expected to understand and follow the new teaching. Ships must have stopped at the mouth of the great rivers along the Coromandel. Then we may ask, why not at the small river of Ariancoupam on the way to Ceylon, where his own son and daughter had been sent as special envoys to spread Buddhism? ...We are told that this place we know as Pondicherry was a centre of learning and people came to study Brahminism as taught and practised in the South. Tradition has it that the earliest name given to the place was Vedapuri.

Archaeological excavations of the early 1940s show coins, burial urns and other artefacts dating back to the 1st century A.D. These proved beyond any doubt the existence of a Roman settlement here. Quite an astonishing discovery. For who could have imagined such a long sea-voyage and a new city established, which they might have named "Poudu-Cheri" a new habitation, a new town.... Was there any trade? And only with Rome? Was there among them any group of followers of Jesus who had fled or had been carried to these shores in a storm? These sound like questions that cannot be answered: wild vagaries of imagination, the wise will say...

Around the 10th century A.D. when Mahmud of Ghazni attacked the North or Mohammed Ghori ransacked temples in the North—specially the Somnath temple in Gujarat—this little nook on the Coromandel coast flourished as a centre of learning.

We know that during medieval times kings and courtiers enjoyed attending

debates on varied subjects,—philosophy, theology, ethics, literature and so on. They wholeheartedly patronised such gatherings. Here too, in the Pondicherry area we can imagine that learned people must have gathered from different regions on particular occasions for councils or conferences... and reached here—by land? or by sea?

*

Boats were well known all the world over as means of transport and communication. Rivers have always served human civilisations in several ways. Their attraction for adventurous people to discover new places is told in many stories around the world.

The small raft-like catamarans are indigenous in design using sometimes a triangular sail woven like a mat. The other type of boat, deeper and curved, with pointed ends, suggesting a different origin, may be an adaptation of the Roman type made by the 1st century settlers here which evolved into that design. In eastern India also similar boats have been found: other sea-faring people could also have settled here in or around Pondicherry.

If by the 17th century this was already a well-established place and part of the kingdom of Gingee, there must have been smaller land-owners to whom these fishermen had to pay tribute: human life, as everywhere else, went on through all types of give-and-take.

The 17th century accounts speak of boats reaching Pondicherry from Siam, Surat and Hooghly. Tavernier, the French traveller, had been to Java—why then, merchants or other families living in this coastal area might also have had connections with the far-eastern countries and sent people there.

RELIGION AND PLACES OF WORSHIP

Temples—The typical South Indian temple with superimposed granite blocks reminded some of the European settlers of the Roman monuments in the West. But these places consecrated to different divinities of the Indian Pantheon had a character of their own. In the 17th century, François Martin speaks of three temples of which the Ishwaran Coil is perhaps a lone representative, the others could have been converted into other protected buildings or demolished. They could have been dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu and Ganesha perhaps.

The present-day small Ganesh temple here was a later addition built under the patronage of a Frenchman of the 19th century, after he had had a dream which he felt had to be realised.

Mosques—In the 17th century, there were already two mosques here. French settlers constantly speak of fakirs, but have also said that Hindus formed the greater part of the population.

In the 18th century when the French Governor, Dumas, felt obliged to give asylum

to two fugitive families of Sultans, the Muslims secured a different kind of status here.

Churches—The first Church had been built with the help of an interpreter, Lazare de Motta, known at that time as Saint Lazarus Church (“Église St. Lazare”). A second one dedicated to the Virgin Mary was built inside the Fort area, for the settlers here.

In any case, for all the help they received, material, psychological or even medical, many families became Christians. They attended sermons at the Church outside the Fort known also as the “Église des Malabares” and were often allowed to maintain their connections with others of their family who were Hindus and attend their religious ceremonies. These new converts formed an important part of the working community and their faith was as dear to them as their relatives belonging to other religions.

TRAVELLERS' ACCOUNTS

Out of Tavernier's six voyages, four were specifically made to India where he had picked up some personal business in precious stones and diamonds. That is how he became such an important figure, known in the royal courts of Europe and in Constantinople. His first-hand reports of the Mughal courts were very much in demand in the fashionable circles in France. All were impressed by the wealth and the pomp these accounts spoke of, but the ways and the elaborate etiquette, the circumvolutions of the language which had to be adopted in these royal courts amused them very much... The contemporary playwright, Molière, describes these very effectively in his comedies. The portraitist La Bruyère mocks at those who used to pretend to know quite as much as the travellers themselves about these eastern countries.

Regarding the trading companies in India, Tavernier tells us that the Dutch carried a cargo of 5 to 6 thousand bales of silk thread from Hooghly to Surat and Ahmedabad for weaving carpets and making satin with gold-thread finish. This stuff was then sold by them to East Africa on the one hand and, on the other, to Pegu, Java, Borneo, etc.—that is to say, to far-eastern countries.

Cotton was produced in plenty and exported too. Different regions had special types of fabrics very distinct in quality; the muslin, for example, was a speciality of the eastern parts; the indigenous coarse cloth also had a place of its own. It was often used for making bags and packages.

Self-sufficient in matters concerning food and clothing, the country had never been described by anyone of these visitors as a poverty-stricken place. Thomas Roe, in Jahangir's time, seems to have been the first to bring in a map of the globe which was by then quite well known in Europe. It gave rise to some paintings where Jahangir is shown as the ruler of the world, for how could one think of anything beyond the boundaries of his empire?

Accounts of other French travellers include those of François Bernier who had been allowed to visit places within the Mughal empire. He had stayed in India for more than thirty years—from 1656 to 1688—and had always been considered a great authority on the subject. During his visit to Pondicherry he had contributed much in forming the attitude to be taken *vis-à-vis* the people of this country and appreciated François Martin's observations based on his inland journeys to Surat. The other traveller, Bellanger de Lespinay, had much to say regarding the architectural beauty of the palaces and places of worship. His four-year stay between 1675 and 1679 was a long enough time to visit and describe the various sights and scenes. Challes and Chantassin were two others who had published accounts of their journey to India by the year 1690.

All this increased the curiosity of the French nobility and business community. Their view of the world widened. For, after the discovery of North and South America, the knowledge of places like India, Java and Ceylon was quite an important topic in the court of Versailles and other high bourgeois circles of Paris. Business, adventure or wealth were different incentives that took them away from their country. Sometimes of course, it was as part of the army that they were ordered to move out to the East to protect people in their colonies. As all the European countries in the 17th century were at war with each other on and off, their internal problems of unification or expansion affected the colonies and their garrisons. But the French distinguished themselves as a people interested in other peoples of the world and the variety of life in a huge country like India was portrayed in different ways by those who came to the subcontinent.

In a general way, already in the 16th century, the Asokan approach of peaceful political coexistence was obsolete. The Vijayanagar empire in the South along with the sultanates after the Bahmani kingdom broke up, in the North the Lodhi and the Mughal kings—all vied with each other for supremacy, both politically and culturally.

It was the influence of the saints and great yogis, like Mirabai, Nanak, Kabir, Ramdas and Tukaram, that kept the minds of the people alive. The expression of the talented people of the time in arts and letters had to depend entirely on the interest of the kings and patrons of each place.

THE PEOPLE (of Pondicherry)

The larger part of the population of Pondicherry in the 17th century, was of Hindu origin. The French traders have noted in superstitious awe what they had witnessed here with their own eyes among the fakirs and the sadhus of the place: levitation, shifting an object from one place to another, foretelling the future, reading their minds and even making a plant grow out of a seed within minutes! Challes reports having personally seen a ceremony where a few peculiar things were done by some priests to bring about rain after a prolonged drought. And indeed, within a few days a fresh

shower had blessed the soil of Pondicherry.

But the young crew at the Martins were always keen on knowing more about the place where they were to stop over for only a few days. They pressed Mr Challes to tell more stories about the strange things he was recording for his book on India. They had already been told how the Brahmins of the temple had prayed, after sacrificing a black cock, and the drought was over—the rains came soon after that.

Once Martin told the guests about an incident witnessed personally by the great traveller, Bellanger, in 1674 when he was in a great quandary. For months he could not understand how to get his friend de la Haye out of the hands of the enemy where he was being kept prisoner. To break the barricades he needed more soldiers, reinforcements from France. He had no idea whether any French ship was expected to reach Surat or Pondicherry from there. He was then so strongly obsessed by the wish to know what was happening in Europe that he asked to be put in touch with the Hindu priests who professed to be able to foretell the future. They asked for three days and when they were ready, they said the ceremony had to take place in the middle of the night. Bellanger, who was not afraid, went there with one escort and an interpreter. It was a remote temple in ruins. They asked him to wait outside when he refused to remove his sword. After everything was ready, they called him in. A copper basin full of water was placed on a table with some ingredients strewn around it which showed that the worship was already over. A very young girl was staring at the water and an old man was mumbling some words, like an incantation. Bellanger had a strong desire to leave the place, but just then the girl looked at him and signed to him... At first he could see nothing. Then a ship came into view, a French vessel, with the old director Baron of Surat on it. Then he saw the same vessel in front of Bombay; the English soldiers waiting to board their ferry were clearly visible; he even recognised a few Frenchmen who were onboard! After that he was told there was no French boat at sea: he asked if he could be shown San-Thomé. Some fresh worship was done and he could clearly see de la Haye surrounded by soldiers; and when he really could see his friend's face he was much relieved to know he was alive. Bellanger was so stunned that he didn't ask for anything more. At least he was sure that no ship had set sail from France.

But all the religions, including Christianity, have described and believed in miracles that have so often shown to humanity the place of the real action of the Grace. Almost everyone has some sort of adoration, respect or recognition for what is considered superior, or, inexplicable. "If human reason cannot understand that there are many things that surpass it," then it is not worthy to be called by that name, Pascal said in the 17th century.

Culturally, we have little record of the times except through François Martin's memoirs.

But the folk tales of Pondicherry show us several pictures of quite an exceptional quality. A human group growing up near the sea, as all over the world, always speaks

of strange things that happen.... That, along with the folk tunes or festivities, could be considered as the culture of the place. How close it is to the other parts of the sub-continent is a question that is not for us to discuss here. We all know that it was a “low-lying” area on the sea-coast, so its way of life was bound to be very different from that of those who lived elsewhere, farther inland or in the mountainous regions.

(Concluded)

AMITA SEN

The religious liberties of the commons were assured and could not normally be infringed by any secular authority; each religious community, each new or long-standing religion could shape its own way of life and institutions and had its own authorities or governing bodies exercising in their proper field an entire independence. There was no exclusive State religion and the monarch was not the religious head of the people. Asoka in this respect seems to have attempted an extension of the royal control or influence and similar velleities were occasionally shown on a minor scale by other powerful sovereigns. But Asoka's so-called edicts of this kind had a recommendatory rather than an imperative character, and the sovereign who wished to bring about a change in religious belief or institutions had always, in accordance with the Indian principle of communal freedom and the obligation of a respect for and a previous consultation of the wishes of those concerned, to secure the assent of the recognised authorities or to refer the matter to a consultative assembly for deliberation, as was done in the famous Buddhist councils, or to arrange a discussion between the exponents of the different religions and abide by the issue. The monarch might personally favour a particular sect or creed and his active preference might evidently have a considerable propagandist influence, but at the same time he was bound to respect and support in his public office all the recognised religions of the people with a certain measure of impartiality, a rule that explains the support extended by Buddhist and Brahmin emperors to both the rival religions.

Sri Aurobindo

(A Defence of Indian Culture, CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 392-93)

NAVANIT: STORIES RETOLD

[In 1944, Pujalal-ji wrote a series of short stories in Gujarati which were published the next year by Shivasadan Granthamala Karyalaya, Maddhada (Gujarat) under the title Navanit. Some of these stories have been translated for Mother India and will be reproduced as and when space is available.

The following is a summarised version of the Introduction Pujalal-ji wrote for the book.]

INTRODUCTION

It will surprise many to see one capable at most of writing a little poetry leave his own barely-known path and suddenly take up the unknown one of prose-writing. But I was compelled to hazard this excursion, not to brazenly compete with experienced prose-writers and be ridiculed, but because I was afraid that if these stories, which I relished on several levels (and which others will enjoy, whatever their viewpoint) were not preserved in words they would be lost forever with the passing of their creator; it is this anxiety that has pushed me to transgress the poet's natural limits. And with the additional desire to experiment ploughing new fields of literature, I have compiled these anecdotes now being published under the title *Navanit*. While I have merely written down and edited them, their true narrator is Shivjibhai—the Shivjibhai of Maddhada who has been acclaimed inside and outside Gujarat for his manifold social activities. The *navanīta* (butter) they serve the reader is the product of the churnings in his own long life....

Though his fame had reached me in my student days, I could obtain a fuller or personal knowledge of the man only in Pondicherry, when he, who never remains in a place for more than three days, came to the Ashram in 1932 for the February Darshan and stayed for nine months in our house.... Our relationship began with the mandatory namaskar and blossomed, in spite of the difference in our age being as great as one which separates father from son, into a valuable friendship born of mutual goodwill and affection.... Shivjibhai is a living expression of the mantra “Be always happy” with which his guru initiated him at the age of eighteen, telling him, “Nothing is needed beyond this.” Easily identifiable by his bright face and sweet voice, he maintains a harmonious relation with all, is humble with the modest and loving with the affectionate, impartial to the unloving and heroically indifferent towards the hostile....

The study of Sanskrit literature made him turn to spirituality and, at the age of twenty, he sought out Pandit Lalan from whom he learned Patanjali's Yoga for six months. This qualified him for serving his Dharma and society. After dedicating many years to this vocation, whenever the occasion arose in his conversations and speeches, he began to share the vast store of *navanīta* his experiences in these fields had produced.

The anecdotes published here are adapted from those he told me in 1932. In

November 1944, when he came for the Darshan, I requested him to write them down. He would only smile and say, "My pen cannot do that. All I can do, if an assembly gives me the opportunity, is to express myself through words and gestures. But even if those very words were written down they would prove ineffective." And yet during our discussion, I felt that there was a silent suggestion that I take up the task. When I started writing, he seemed satisfied with the result. And so here they are, for what they are worth....

NOT BY POWER, BY SERVICE

The badshah came to know that a fakir owned a *Parasmani*. Covetousness surged up his veins; fantasies bounced around in his mind: "*Parasmani!* Whose mere touch changes iron into gold! The amazing stone that can toss a beggar into affluence and overwhelm even the most affluent! How wonderful it would be to possess it! My treasury will be the largest in the world; with its help I will become the monarch of the whole earth; no enemy would dare stand against me, I would destroy the most powerful; I will become the Lord of this world! Yes, I must have that *Parasmani*. What use it is to the fakir? What is the use of its rotting like that in a beggar's pouch? The finest should be at the service of the best, and who can be better than the badshah?"

Chewing on these thoughts, he went to the hut of the fakir.

"Sai! Is it true that you own a *Parasmani*?"

Annoyed by the intrusion into his meditations over a holy fire, the fakir looked up, "Who is it that disturbs me at this hour? What do you want?"

"I am the badshah, standing in front you, Sai! And I ask you, do you have the *Parasmani*?"

"Yes," said the fakir, and turned back to his fire.

"Eh Sai, look up at me. I have come here for that *Parasmani*, I, the badshah himself."

The fakir raised his eyebrows.

"Sai! Give me your *Parasmani*."

"What are you? Badshah or beggar?"

"The badshah who has come to take your *Parasmani*; or, if you want to call me that, a beggar asking for the *Parasmani*."

"Not possible. I will not give it to you."

"Sai, I am the badshah. Who dares refuse me?"

"I. O beggar-badshah, I refuse to give it to you. I am a servant of the Badshah of badshahs. Go, I will not give it."

"No? Soldiers, arrest this man and throw him into a dungeon."

*

The fakir was in the dungeon; he was as engrossed in tending his holy fire as in his meditations.

One day, a miserable water carrier entered his cell. Falling at the fakir's feet he sobbed out the plight of his destitute wife and hungry children. Even as he poured his heart out, he massaged the old man's limbs. Day after day he came, poured out his woes and served the old man as best he could. One day, he said, "O Baba, our heartless badshah has declared that he will send you to the gallows! Alas, he has evil intentions! Babaji, pray, give me your blessings so that our misery may cease."

Smiling softly, the fakir said, "Don't worry, my son. Fetch me that bag." The water carrier ran and brought it. Taking out a small iron casket from it, the fakir told him, "There is a *Parasmani* inside. Any piece of iron that it touches will turn into gold. Go and be released from your poverty."

"But Babaji, how come this casket has not turned into gold?"

"Oh, have patience. Open it. Take out the stone. Do you see now?"

"Yes, Babaji, it is wrapped in a thin cloth."

"That is the reason. As long as there is even the flimsiest impediment, the full touch is not possible. And how can iron become gold without being touched by the *Parasmani*?"

The water carrier took out the stone and touched it to the casket. Immediately it turned into gold. Falling at the fakir's feet he kissed them again and again.

*

The fakir is now taken to the gallows. The badshah orders him to be brought into his presence.

"Sai! Give me the *Parasmani* and you can still be saved."

"It is not for such as you."

The badshah took out the casket with the stone and showed it to the fakir. "So, isn't this your *Parasmani*? You see, I have got it."

"Yes, you have. But it was through your service, not your imperial power."

The badshah rushed down from his high throne, removed the fakir's chains, and fell at his feet.

"Forgive me, O Baba! Forgive my crime! Indeed, such a divine object cannot be obtained by violence and tyranny."

PUJALAL

I do not give positions to the sadhaks—I give them work; and to all I give an equal opportunity....

*

I have no intention of giving posts and positions before something is done and each one proves by acts what he is capable of doing.

(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 13, p. 165)