

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## THE UNIVERSAL INCARNATION

There is a wisdom like a brooding Sun,  
    A Bliss in the heart's crypt grown fiery white,  
The heart of a world in which all hearts are one,  
    A Silence on the mountains of delight,

A Calm that cradles Fate upon its knees;  
    A wide Compassion leans to embrace earth's pain;  
A Witness dwells within our secrecies,  
    The incarnate Godhead in the body of man.

Our mind is a glimmering curtain of that Ray,  
    Our strength a parody of the Immortal's power,  
Our joy a dreamer on the Eternal's way  
    Hunting the fugitive<sup>1</sup> beauty of an hour.

Only on the heart's veiled door the word of flame  
Is written, the secret and tremendous Name.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 138)*

1. unseizable

## **‘OH! HOW I CALL THEE..’**

**July 21, 1913**

...YET what patience is needed! How imperceptible the stages of progress!...

Oh! how I call Thee from the very depths of my heart, True Light, Sublime Love, Divine Master who art the source of our light and of our living, our guide and our protector, the Soul of our soul and the Life of our life, the Reason of our being, the supreme Knowledge, the immutable Peace!

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 24)*

## **‘ONLY AN IMMENSE HARMONY IS THERE...’**

**July 23, 1913**

O LORD, inconceivable Splendour, may Thy Beauty spread through all the earth, may Thy Love be kindled in every heart and Thy Peace reign over all.

A deep and solemn chant, smiling and subtle, rises from my heart, and I do not know whether this chant goes from me to Thee or comes from Thee to me or whether Thou and I and the entire universe are this marvellous chant of which I have just become conscious.... Surely there is no longer any Thou or I or any separate universe; only an immense harmony is there, sublime and infinite, which is all things and of which all things will one day grow aware. It is the harmony of boundless Love, Love victorious over all suffering and all obscurity.

By this law of Love, Thy law, I want to live more and more integrally; to it unreservedly I give myself.

And all my being exults in an inexpressible Peace.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 25)*

## ASKESIS FOR KNOWLEDGE

THE logical intelligence of man is a great obstacle to the realising of spiritual truths and leading a religious life. This is because it is based on the truth of the material world and on the nature of the gross senses. Its foundation rests on the ways and forms of the external world and that is why the limits of this world determine the boundaries of the logical intelligence. In order to get at the spiritual truth, the support of yet another faculty is required. As the logical intelligence accepts a material impression as sufficient, so also the fundamental truth of spirituality needs to be accepted with a spontaneous and axiomatic faith. No fundamental truth in geometry admits of any proof; so also in life one has to begin with a few axioms and postulates and it is on these things that the proofs of all other things may be arranged and presented. What we see when we open our eyes is called the material world; similarly, seen with an inner vision, we find the spiritual world. The blind cannot see the material world but because of that it cannot be said that there is no material world; likewise one who has no inner vision cannot see the spiritual world, and because of that it cannot be said either that it is non-existent. Inner vision and outer sight—both these things are the spontaneous and natural faculties of man. However, because of the unforeseen turn of events and circumstances as well as the present system of education we find that the one [the inner] is not getting enough scope to blossom like the other [the outer]. That does not mean that the former is less true. But here lies the rub. The logical intelligence has become a dictator taking advantage of the situation; it has only tried to trample its allied faculty to death. That is why logical intelligence is unable to find the Self, to find God. It asks: where is your transcendent world? I can clearly explain all the mysteries of the creation with the help of the power of my gross senses!

But whether logical intelligence succeeds or not in explaining away all the mysteries of the creation, that does not in any measure prove the falsity of spirituality. That is why, the votaries of spirituality distinctly and unstintedly declare: *naiṣā tarkena matirāpaniyā* (this wisdom is not to be had by reasoning). That is why we see that logical intelligence has to expiate before the spiritual masters, its crown has to roll in the dust when confronting them. As logical intelligence is usually a hindrance to spiritual life, spiritual seekers have, more often than not, viewed this faculty with reservation. They have even exhorted the seeker to cut it out and not to tread even on its shadow. The beginning of all the principal religions that exist in this world presents a very curious thing. It is the lowest rung of the society—those who are not so advanced in education or intelligence—that the religious founders first brought under their control and it is with their participation that they laid the foundation of their religious orders. The great masters came as though to uplift only the downtrodden of the society—downtrodden not from the standpoint of social status alone, but from the standpoint of knowledge and intelligence as well—and they could do their work

only in collaboration with them. The field of action of Christ was in particular among the fishermen, among the destitute and the diseased. At the call of Mohammed it was the turbulent buccaneer-souls of the Arabian deserts who first leaped in joy. When the Buddha came out to preach, those belonging to the lower stratum of society rallied *en masse* around him. The same holds good for the smaller sects—all of them got and collected their followers not from the upper layer of society but from its lower one.

It is not difficult to explain this mystery—we have done it in the beginning. Firstly, those who belong to the higher strata of society, that is, those who test and select before accepting the truth and look for proofs after a good deal of reflection and reasoning, do not usually arrive at spiritual truths because they approach the truth with such a yardstick which can neither commensurate with it nor can it seize the whole or the essence of it. Their intelligence is cast in such a rigidly fixed mould, works in such a stereotyped manner that nothing from outside, no new truth external to it gets any scope to enter there, to reflect itself there. The intelligence of those who do not belong to the upper strata of society has not turned so inert like the former: seeds of new truths can easily find space there and germinate as on soft soil. Their mind has not become hard and rigid and so it is very easy to mould it according to one's will. The logical intelligence follows the beaten track in such a way, particularly in its aspect of external event or form, that it does not care at all to attach any importance to any new truth unless the latter matches exactly with the former. Then, secondly, wherever there has been a surfeit of intellectual activity, the capacity of the life-force and that of the organs of action seem to have decreased there in an inverse ratio. As a consequence, it is very difficult to do anything great with the help of the intellectuals. While the intellectuals remain busy in making hair-splitting analyses of truth and falsehood, while they remain engrossed in making profound researches about what should or should not be done, a simple ordinary man will by then forge ahead in his field of work with a sincere faith. The lower classes of society have, if not anything else, vitality and dynamism and they feel somehow content clinging to the truth. They demonstrate the truth in such a living and vibrant manner that a thousand logicians with their heaps of proofs will not be able to do likewise even a hundredth part of it.

That is why we see a constant conflict from age to age between the logicians and the founders of new religions. Socrates had to fight continuously with the sophists i.e., with the learned or the intellectuals—those who never wanted to get at the truth through a spontaneous realisation, through intuition or those whose inner beings did not receive the touch of the Daemon or those who relied on logic—the framework of argumentation. Hence the disciples of Socrates consisted of the young men, the youth of Athens—whose brain was malleable, whose heart was tender, fresh and supple. We find Christ also driving out the Scribes and Pharisees—we hear him say clearly in an intimidating tone: “The wise will be confounded in their wisdom.” Everywhere

and in all ages we witness something like this—the advent of great men is not for the wise and the intelligent, it is as if only to make the dumb eloquent or the lame cross the mountain.

Perhaps by this means their work had been greatly facilitated but it cannot be said that it did not give birth to any concomitant evil. Spiritual life or religious life has more often been embraced by those who are intensely gripped by emotion by the vital passion or by the excitement of the heart—in other words, by the people of such a rung, such a class of society whose intelligence is not so vigorous and keen or has not got the scope to become so or in whom an intense and impure vital force or a severe influx of *tamas* or inertia has accumulated. That is why we find that the people who have succeeded in purifying, in changing this lower play of life and mind and in elevating it to the spiritual heights are far less in number than those who have degraded that spirituality and have submerged it in the inferior play of life and mind. We do not have to go very far for proof, we have instances galore at hand to show how religious sects, immediately after the passing away of their founders, begin to decay and disappear. Such abrupt and tremendous deterioration does not take place in the field of human intellect as it does in the field of spirituality and religion. It is true that a dry logical faculty is a hindrance to religious consciousness, to spiritual realisations; but, from that, we should not jump to the conclusion that an absence of the logical faculty is the best means for attaining spiritual truth. The logical faculty may be an obstacle, but the vital passion, the heart's excitement also are an obstacle—it is not very easy to determine which one is a trifle greater or a trifle smaller.

In truth, for a solid foundation of spiritual life, a simple receptive mind and a vigorous vital are as necessary as an alert intellect and a power of reflection. However, as it is necessary to purify the mind and the vital, so is there the necessity to purify the intellect also. As the mind and the vital cannot be discarded because of their being an obstacle, so the intellect too cannot be set aside. Rather, it can also be said that the purification of the mind and the vital is achieved by the power of reflection of the intellect; not only that, it is by relying on a calm, composed and flawless intellect that the truth of spirituality can manifest in its purity. That is why so much stress has been laid in the Gita on the firmly settled wisdom—'*sthita-prajña*'. Of course, this '*sthita-prajña*' and logical intelligence are not the same thing—but an essential element of knowledge is reflection and reasoning, though they may not be the whole of it. If you want to rise above reflection and reasoning, that is well and good; but rejecting reflection and reasoning or regarding them always with a suspicious eye or with apprehension are not the only means or signs of ascension.

A very interesting thing is more often discernible in the nature of spiritual seekers. The taste of spirituality comes first through an unquestionable feeling—a light, a faith and a joy surge up in the heart or in the mind of the seeker and, keeping this feeling alone in view, relying only upon it, the seeker forges ahead on the path of *sadhana*. The yardstick of his natural intelligence and reflection cannot, however,



grasp that feeling; the normal logical intelligence will rather instil in him a sense of aversion towards it. Therefore, we want to keep what we have got in a state of joyful absorption and continue to be surrounded by that feeling alone; we do not want to dry up the joy of spiritual ecstasy that we have experienced previously in the scorching heat of reflection and reasoning. Is it not for this reason that Nemaï [Sri Chaitanya], the scholar, giving up all his erudition, got so intoxicated with the spiritual *rasa*? Whatever may be the fact regarding Sri Chaitanya, we know very well what becomes of those who are not as strong as him, whose capacity is rather limited. We also find in those who do not literally shed a stream of tears in a state of rapt emotion that they have cried halt the moment they have experienced some kind of ecstasy and that they have remained absorbed in it considering it as their highest attainment. And those seekers, who have an urge for work coupled with an emotional impulse, have longed to realise it hurriedly in the outer world and life and have remained all too busy in building society in conformity with its mould considering it as the highest truth.

At the same time it should not be forgotten that in the spiritual world too there is a truth and a semblance of truth and that there is even falsehood. As the external senses deceive us, so do the inner senses. As our physical eyes wrongly show us that the sun moves and the earth remains stationary, so also spiritual experiences could be false, however clear and axiomatic they may seem to us. It is here that we require testing and selection, reflection and reasoning and an application of intelligence. We find very rarely in those who lead a religious life the presence of an unwavering askesis [*tapasyā*], a wakeful straightforwardness needed imperatively for an unflinching quest for truth. The votaries of *ānanda* in spiritual life are as good as the votaries of physical enjoyment in outer life. There is no doubt that spirituality is a thing of intense *ānanda*; but this *ānanda* can be obtained by that person alone who with a calm regard and a cool head tests it on the touchstone of intelligence, heightening his experience of this *ānanda* from level to level. If there is no clinging to truth or if there is no discerning mind controlling the enjoyment of pleasure or the lower activities, then a good amount of filth and dirt belonging to the impure material consciousness intrudes into the spiritual experience of that *ānanda* or into any activity. A tiny spiritual realisation can bring in its trail far-flung imaginations and rosy hopes and desires of an easy-going life. And it is indebted for this reason that all the religious sects meet with the inevitable consequences to which they are prone.

In the realm of spirituality there are truths and higher truths and still higher truths—the more one aspires to higher levels of truth, not remaining caught in the lower level, the more one ascends to higher truths and reaches the essential nature of the Truth—the foundation of one's mind, life and physical activities also becomes to the same extent true and solid. Otherwise, a small truth of the spiritual world beats a retreat easily before a big truth of the material world. As a matter of fact, there are only two pure truths: one is the sheer truth of Matter and the other the sheer truth of Spirit. Those who usually dabble in spiritual practice or in religious life do not attain

any of these two truths, their endeavour follows a course which is in between: they play with a little bit of this world and a little bit of that world and by this hotchpotch they lose both the truths. He who moves keeping the intellect as a wakeful sentinel, piercing the truth with the instruments of knowledge will arrive at the ultimate truth and gain an absolute mastery over the ultimate material truth. Otherwise, his attainments, however great they may be, are bound to be transitory when he, losing his intelligence or his power of discrimination between truth and falsehood, stops short on the way.

Logical intelligence is fraught with defects but in spiritual practice as one proceeds on one's way purifying and transforming other human faculties, so too one takes the help of logical intelligence only after purifying and transforming it. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "You need not be stupid in order to become a monk"—indeed, the ordinary monks lack very much the sense of reality. It is sure and certain that he who does not have this sense of reality with regard to external things, will not have this sense regarding inner things as well. Logical intelligence, if it does nothing else, at least tries to keep this sense of reality alive as it does not allow spiritual romance to run riot and strives to restrain it within certain limits. Of course, the logical intelligence that plays only with words, pulls and tugs at the name of the thing instead of the thing itself, becomes also devoid of the sense of reality. Such a logical intelligence is in fact a perversion of intelligence or a corrupt form of it and even there lies in it a hidden urge to evoke romanticism. This too is a form of imaginative faculty and hence it has also to be restrained and yoked to the pursuit of Truth.

The sadhana of spiritual 'emotion' or *bhakti* may bring realisation but the sadhana of spiritual knowledge reveals the inner essence of this realisation cleansing it from the dirt and dross and keeps the path open for newer realisations. A kind of harmony between this emotion and knowledge is perhaps effected within those who are realised beings, who are the discoverers of new spiritual truths or the founders of new spiritual communities. But we, who come after them, who become their disciples and grand-disciples take up only their emotional aspects and try to absorb the whole thing realised by others—we tend to forget this simple fact that the realisation to which we cling without subjecting it to tests at every step, without refining it in the light of our knowledge and intelligence soon becomes lifeless and its force diminishes—it turns out to be a blind passion and gradually sinks down into our *tamasic* nature and finally vanishes.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

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

# THE SPIRITUAL LIFE AND WORLD-PROBLEMS

## TWO LETTERS TO A SEEKER—1

I BELIEVE you have sincerity of search. It seems to me that what you have to do is to let this sincerity take as much effect as possible by bringing up the true Godward strain in you which at present appears to be a little mixed up with the ethico-social urge. Not that the two need be at loggerheads; but the former should subsume the latter and not *vice versa*.

I come now to the specific points you have raised. A person who is frustrated and unhappy can make others happy by doing his best to keep his frustration and unhappiness in the background and by being good and considerate and helpful. It can also be that if one is loved by somebody, one automatically gives happiness of a kind, even though one is frustrated and unhappy. But frustration and unhappiness are serious impediments and they can often distort one's attitude and spoil one's conduct. What is required is some sort of "sublimation" if one's desire to serve people and make them happy is to prove fruitful. And there can be no greater sublimation than the turning of one's frustrated and unhappy self towards the Divine and away from the feverish attachments to ordinary things which has brought about that unfulfilled and miserable state of mind. When such a turning is done, that state of mind is not a drag but an occasion for the calling down of a supreme light and bliss. Filled with this light and bliss one is the natural radiating centre of a constant happiness which does not even need to speak or do things but invades and envelops other people's consciousness, so that the very presence is sufficient to make broken spirits whole. And this radiated happiness does not merely make people comfortable in their own little holes of all-too-human imperfection: it lifts them up, kindles in them a sense of the ideal and the perfect, draws out the secret soul of them and helps them to find in themselves the strength and the peace which no circumstance can defeat or destroy. Authentic and truly evolutive happiness, therefore, can only be given by those who have caught something of the Divine's delight and fullness.

What you call "self-knowledge" and consider "the beginning of wisdom" is precisely the awakening of one's real soul whose spontaneous movement is always to be in communion with the Divine and be charged with the Divine's Truth, Rightness, Beatitude and Wideness. The more this movement develops, the more self-knowledge comes and wisdom grows. The development has, normally, to depend on two powers. One is the direct power of the soul itself—the intense aspiration, the passionate devotion, the unconditional surrender to the Divine. The other is an indirect power—the clearing of the way or the soul by the mind's will towards an inner detachment from things and persons, a large equanimity and disinterestedness, a freedom from anger and rancour, a tranquil strength, a calm generosity, an untroubled accomplishment of all work, a remembrance of the Divine Presence everywhere and a quiet

yet concentrated offering of all one's work into Its hands. I may add that some time may be reserved for what is called meditation—the getting alone, the cutting off of contacts, the turning inward, the stilling of thought, the one-pointed flowing of the consciousness towards the Supreme.

Your question about the prevalence of so much suffering in the world would require a long philosophical discussion for a complete answer. But, for practical purposes, it is enough to know that we ordinarily live in a consciousness which is not in union with the perfect Being of God but is limited and divided: suffering is the badge of all limited and divided living. And, as long as this limitation and division lasts, it is not possible also for people to abstain from hurting one another or bring to one another understanding and love. I don't mean that people cannot be or are not good at all. But there is always an uncertainty in their intentions and actions: whatever effort they may make, there is an easy slipping back into selfishness and cruelty. Conflict is the second badge of a living that is limited and divided. To get rid of the two baleful badges we have to change our poise of consciousness. Such a change cannot be compassed by merely will-power attempting to follow certain mind-made rules of ethics. The ethical endeavour has considerable value, but it cannot eradicate the evil from the roots. Our present mental-vital-physical status lacks the light and the force by which alone suffering and conflict can be avoided. We have to explore our deeper ranges of being, bring into the forefront the inner self, the true soul, call down into the mind and the life-energy and the body the Divine Consciousness by a direct process of Yoga. By Yoga I don't imply a sitting in a fixed posture or breath-exercises or any special ascetic regime. Yoga is simply the leap of the consciousness towards the Eternal, the Infinite, the Divine in order to achieve a union with that Perfection, a union both in rest and activity. When one has this union one knows and becomes the single Spirit that is all things and more than all things in the universe. And don't you see that if the same supreme Self is experienced to be in all beings the very ground of conflict disappears and a wonderful harmony takes its place?

As for social work, I think there can be no real social work unless one proceeds from the living sense of the single supreme Self in all beings. Then alone one's action will be pure and powerful. Mind you, I say "real social work". Short of this there are various degrees of social service of a good kind; but always the limited and divided consciousness that is man will bring in its greeds and egoistic motives and competitions and lust for fame and for position. The authentic idealist in you will always be disappointed, for ordinary social work is a very mixed affair and even at its best it does not escape the taint, however subtle and refined, of the limited and divided ego. Well, I suppose you have to accept certain conditions. But if you are in the field of social work, what you have to do is to work there in the spirit of a Yogi and inwardly dedicate all your work to God by a constant remembrance and offering. For, whether you do one kind of work or another, you as a Yogi serve not any persons or institutions or merely human causes but only the Divine and have to manifest His will and His

light and His joy. Also, there should be no attachment to one kind of work in preference to another. You may certainly choose what you are inclined towards or what you think you are best fitted for; but you should have the capacity to give it up without uneasiness and disturbance if ever the call comes to do so. And I can assure you that if you live in constant touch with your true soul you will have such a fund of causeless and unconditional happiness within you that no changing of work or any other vicissitude can upset you or make you feel that you have lost something.

Now your last query. Of course it is possible to do Sri Aurobindo's Yoga even outside his Ashram. But at some time or other it is always advisable to go for a stay, short or long, in the Ashram in order to have the Mother's direct contact and get into the luminous atmosphere of the life there. However, a genuine contact with the Mother is quite possible while staying in Bombay. And the best way of doing Yoga is to have this contact. Think of her and feel her to be your Guru. Inwardly open your heart to her. Keep remembering her always and dedicate your actions to her. Aspire to have her guiding word within yourself. And now and again write to her, freely and frankly, as if you were her child both in soul and body. Fellow-aspirants can give you whatever advice they may be capable of and their advice can be of help. But the Mother alone can be your Guru and in important crucial matters her advice and guidance are essential.

*(To be continued)*

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

(From *The Indian Spirit and the World's Future*, 1953, pp. 213-18)

[A new edition of the book has just been published, for Amal Kiran's Centenary.]

*It is not helpful to abandon the ordinary life before the being is ready for the full spiritual life. To do so means to precipitate a struggle between the different elements and exasperate it to a point of intensity which the nature is not ready to bear. The vital elements in you have partly to be met by the discipline and experience of life, while keeping the spiritual aim in view and trying to govern life by it progressively in the spirit of Karmayoga.*

*It is for this reason that we gave our approval to your marriage.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 849)*

## SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

*(Continued from the issue of February 2005)*

THE French Revolution, in 1789 gave to the world the triune formula of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. On the first of these words, liberty, was based the dominant political ideal of the next century—a free democratic nation. This ideal was accepted by all go-ahead peoples in Asia, Europe and America. But before it could work itself out everywhere, a new tendency intervened. This is the idea of a perfectly organised State, centred round the second watchword of the Revolution—equality. The great movement of liberty had ushered in a very limited kind of equality and had left untouched its most important aspect—“the preponderance of the haves over the have-nots”, the difference between the successful and the unsuccessful which no society based on competition can eliminate. Thus did Socialism come to occupy an important place in the thoughts of men. Still the older ideal of individual freedom was hard to give up, and a compromise was attempted between the two ideals in Democratic Socialism. This kind of compromise could please nobody and the followers of equality ranged ahead and prepared to hand over all individual liberty to the control of the organised national State. Sri Aurobindo says in a new footnote—“This was done with a stu-pendous beginning of thoroughness in Bolshevist Russia, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the necessity or the choice of it threatened at one time to spread everywhere.” Sri Aurobindo has explained in detail in his *Human Cycle* that man will never acquiesce for any length of time in the killing of the individual, in turning him into an absolute nothing in an all-devouring State. A psychological reaction in favour of no-government—a philosophic or spiritual Anarchism—is bound to set in. This we have amply set forth in the first part of our review.

In the Chapter we are at present dealing with, Sri Aurobindo has added a footnote on p. 350—“The appearance of Hitler and the colossal attempt at German world-domination have paradoxically helped by his defeat, and the reaction against him entirely altered the world circumstances: the United States of Europe is now a practical possibility and has begun to feel towards self-accomplishment.” Of course the overthrow of Germany does not necessarily mean the elimination of Nazism from the world. State interference and State control of the German kind has entered into the administrative systems of many “democratic” countries, possibly for good. Besides, we must always remember that the last war was won with the help of a communist State, and that at the commencement of the War, Cripps and Goebbels were vying with each other for Molotov’s favour. Not only that; one section of British politicians was definitely pro-German, as was indicated by the flight of Hesse to the estate of the Duke of Hamilton in England. Still another pertinent fact. During the decade before the Second War, England and France, each behind the back of the

other, was coquetting with Hitler. All this goes to show that political leaders are, as Sri Aurobindo has said, not over-burdened with scruples. Those who are talking of the United States of Europe should take care not to let such men get a hold over things. Another factor to be reckoned with—a factor unavoidable in the present circumstances—is the fear of a third world war. That fear is resulting in rival blocs being formed by the two major powers of the world—Russia and America. No doubt, America has to create a European bloc to support her against aggressive totalitarianism, but this is not the same thing as a genuine European federation. If there is a next war, how will the two blocs stand after it is over? What we fear is that they would both crumble to pieces. There can be no U.S. of Europe without the co-operation of the U.S. of America and there can be no United States anywhere to the exclusion of Asia and Africa. In fact an Arab League and a League in South East Asia are in sight. The position of Europe is dubious. On the one hand, it is strongly conscious of being separate from Asia and Africa and superior to them, while on the other hand it is inextricably mixed up in the affairs of the other continents. What Sri Aurobindo wrote after World War I can well be repeated today: “If, therefore, any new supra-national order is to evolve sooner or later as a result of the present upheaval, it must be an association that will embrace Asia, Africa and America as well as Europe...” But no arrangement is likely to lead man in the right direction unless there is an ethical advance, an advance towards straightforwardness, fair-play and justice. Imperialism masquerading as philanthropy will no longer do. Quite enough mischief has been done in the name of discharging the White Man's Burden.

There seems to be a demand, today, for some kind of unity, a first step towards the political unification of the race. The demand is due to various causes—sentimental, idealistic, economic and political. It also proceeds from a sordid desire in the stronger power to exploit the weaker. Whatever be the urge, a result of some sort may not be long in coming. The first step will possibly be a kind of understanding in order to arrive at the satisfaction of the most urgent common needs—arrangement of commerce, of peace and war, for the arbitration of disputes, for the policing of the world. In time, all this may lead to a closer union, along with the establishment of a Supreme Court and a Supreme Executive. Possibly no new principle will be evolved, the change will, more or less, be an adjustment. Still one can never say what surprises Nature may have in store for man: a gospel of philosophic anarchism, a religious or spiritual upheaval, anything of this sort may intervene and direct human life to an unforeseen *dénouement*. But leaving the unexpected aside for the moment, we can say that an attempt at a political unity of a kind is in sight. It will probably be transient, and will be a resultant of all the previous experiences of man in group life.

Now there is a natural tendency in the formation of a larger aggregate that we must take note of. When a new political unity is created, the prime need is to enforce that unity, and in order to attain that end, much that the group had before has to be sacrificed—“diversity, harmonious complexity, richness of various material, freedom

of inner relations". An all-powerful centre has to be created, a focus of State authority to make the larger unity firm and sure. Side by side with it, there has to appear a rigid social formation and a gradation of classes and orders. We see that all this actually happened in history before the advent of the modern world. In Europe, the free life of the cities and their guilds came to an end with the appearance of monarchs like Henry VII in England and Louis XI in France. In India, all regional liberty began to dwindle with the rise of empires like the Maurya and the Gupta. As in politics, so in society, a certain amount of democratic equality was inevitable in a small community. The example of Athens is cited by Sri Aurobindo: the highest offices and civic functions were open without distinction to all classes; in social functions, too, there was a free association and equality. We see the same democratic equality in the earlier records of Indian civilisation. In Sparta and Venice, a different system was kept up by artificial means. To sum up, "Theocracy, caste and absolute kingship grew in force *pari passu* like the Church and the monarchical power in mediaeval Europe under the compulsion of the new circumstances created by the growth of large social and political aggregates."

Sri Aurobindo describes in eloquent language the richness and vividness of life in the early city states, Greek, Roman and Indian, which man had to forgo when he created the larger units. Many problems, says he, might have been solved with a greater simplicity and direct vision if the old city states could have transformed themselves without losing their own life in the larger aggregate. But that was not to be. Those earlier units had some incurable vital defects. In the small free State of Greece neither the Helot nor the woman was allowed to participate in the full civic and cultural life of the city. There was the same disability in Roman and other States in ancient Italy. India was better off; there was no slavery and the Woman held a freer position than in the Mediterranean States. But this condition of things did not last. The Sudra and the Woman gradually lost that favourable position and came down to the level of the corresponding classes in Greece. Likewise, the early form of society everywhere failed to solve the question of mutual relationship between community and community. War remained the normal method of adjustment. The old States therefore had to dissolve and disappear in the larger aggregates—into the Maurya, Gupta and other empires in India; into the Macedonian, Carthaginian and Roman empires in Europe. The creation of the Nation-unit was postponed to the period following the collapse of Rome.

The ancient world was made up of small units like the city states and the small regional States—minor units standing in the midst of other units of a similar type. Each such group was marked, as it were, by a common culture, common language and common blood. Greece, Italy, Gaul, Egypt, China, India, all were such culture-units before they became nation-units. When the component parts of such an aggregate were too vigorous or assertive, national unification was more difficult to achieve. Still there were attempts to form a nation in most countries. In Egypt and India, the



effort was successful, though in the latter country full success did not come till after a foreign occupation. In some countries unity was brought about by one component part conquering the other, as in Rome and Macedonia. Sometimes, before the nation-idea got firm hold of the mind, the dominant State was led by military ambition to invade outside countries and establish a large empire, as in Assyria, Persia and Macedonia. These premature empires did not last except in such cases where there was some sort of national consciousness at the core. Rome, which had more points in her favour than any other large aggregate, certainly endured longer, but ultimately it accomplished neither the Nation-unit nor a firm empire-unity and collapsed like other ancient empires.

We must understand why. Sri Aurobindo brings in the analogy of the creation of vital organisms. For the organisation of group life man has used the same methods as physical energy uses for creating living forms—first, smaller distinct units are formed in a larger loose unity with a strong mental sense, a developed body and a distinct vital ego. In the larger mass, the psychological sense and the vital energy are less organised and the body is only half solid—a plasm rather than a body. This has to be transformed into a firm body, a well-defined vital and a clear consciousness and a will-to-be developed. This process is to be repeated till we find something like the original phenomenon of smaller distinct units in a larger but looser unity. Only, both units are now bigger and more complex. Smaller city states forming a Greek or a Latin union give place to nation-units like Greece or Italy, England or France, in a Christendom—or a number of Islamic nations forming parts of a Caliphate.

There can be a number of organisms consciously subordinating themselves to a general unity. Some of these are killed and used for forming new organisms; but all cannot be devoured by one dominant unity, for then there is no unification, no continued greater life, “but only a temporary survival of the devourer by the digestion and utilisation of the energy of the devoured”. In the formation of larger human groups, then, the problem is how to unify the smaller groups into a newer and wider group without killing them out. In history, Rome, for instance, killed and digested Gaul and Spain and Egypt after she had conquered them. The result was deadly for Rome herself in the long run. For a short while, energy and intellect poured into the voracious centre but only to be followed by a mortal exhaustion. Rome crushed out all local freedom, but in India the huge empires—Maurya, Gupta and Andhra—all-powerful though they were “never succeeded in passing a steam-roller over the too strongly independent life of the subordinate unities”. It has needed the dominance of a foreign nation alien in culture to do in one century what two thousand years had not been able to accomplish.

After the removal of the Roman pressure, the city and regional States acquired fresh life as elements of a new construction. In Italy, they offered serious obstruction to the growth of a national unity. But elsewhere they did not. In France, Flanders and Germany, where they survived as, more or less, free municipalities they rather helped

in the larger unification. The old class-units vanished in most countries which had been rolled out flat by the weight of Rome. In Ireland, in the Scottish Highlands, in the remote parts of Germany they survived and resisted the national unification. We see thus the difference between the ancient cycle of nation-building and the European cycle. The creation of a new form of unity out of a jumble of old material has to be done in the first instance by external methods, helped by the pressure of circumstances, and thereafter, when stringent organisation has been effected, it has to be consolidated by internal development, by the awakening of psychological consciousness. Both “in Europe and Asia there was a common tendency” towards the development of a social hierarchy—the four castes of India and the four classes in mediaeval Europe. Everywhere the urge was to evolve a larger “effective form of common social life”. Except in Islamic society this form was marked by fixity of status. Islamic insistence on brotherhood and equality gave its social evolution a totally different character. Till a very recent period, it proceeded along its own lines. Otherwise, the first stage of development was very similar everywhere, with a few local variations. Taking, for instance, the Federal period in Europe, we find that it is very similar to the fourfold order of India but the variation is there, too. “The Indian system took its characteristic stamp from a different order of ideas more prominently religious and ethical than political, social or economic.” Still there was, in practice, a social economic aspect of the Indian caste system and one wonders why Indian life did not follow the same evolution as Europe. The reason is not very difficult to understand. Sri Aurobindo puts it thus in brief: “In mediaeval India,... [evolution] turned towards the social dominance of the sacerdotal class and the substitution of a common spiritual for a common political consciousness as the basis of the national feeling.” Regarding Japan and China, too, Sri Aurobindo characterises the trend of evolution, in a few words. The best thing we can do is to give a short extract: “Japan with its great feudal order under the spiritual and secular headship of the Mikado... evolved one of the most vigorous and self-conscious nation-units the world has ever seen. China with its great learned class uniting in one the Brahmin and the Kshatriya functions of spiritual and secular knowledge and executive rule and its Emperor and Son of Heaven for head and type of the national unity succeeded in becoming a united nation.”

An important feature of European history during a certain period was the conflict between the King and the Church. One of the early instances thereof was the quarrel between Henry II and Becket, which culminated in the murder of Becket. By this act of violence, Henry established the supremacy of the King over the Church in all matters of law and administration. Generally speaking, the Monarchy was victorious in this struggle, not only in Protestant countries, but even in a fanatically Catholic country like Spain. The supremacy of the King was definitely established and Papal authority in matters mundane repudiated. In France, the paramount position of the royalty was put forth and made good by the two famous ministers, Richelieu and Mazarin, both princes of the Church. In Japan and China, as in Tudor England, the

monarch became the temporal as well as the spiritual head. In India, the Rajputs who first developed a national consciousness vested all power in the King. In the Sikh State all power, spiritual and secular, was vested in a common body—the Khalsa. In Maharashtra, the people so secularised themselves that all castes became, for a time, one single people of soldiers, politicians and administrators. The fixed social hierarchy, so necessary in the first stage of a people's growth, had to modify itself gradually and had ultimately to be eliminated, a priestly caste, as such, is unwanted in a community that is striving to build up a nation-state. It can be otherwise only in a country like Tibet where Lamas are the ruling class.

The second stage of nation-building is stringent organisation. A masterful monarchy is here very useful. The nation was moulded into a firm form round the Tudor kings in England, round the Capets in France, round the Romanoffs in Russia and round the House of Castille in Spain. Remarkable was the part played by the Hohenzollerns, at a later time, in moulding the nation-state in Germany. The Mikado played a similar role in forming a modern state in Japan. This tendency to sacrifice all individual freedom at the feet of an absolute monarch—an Elizabeth, a Henry IV, a Philip or a Peter the Great—has been very harshly judged by the modern mind, but rather unfairly. For, this stage of the New Monarchy was essential to the growth of the nation—not only New Monarchy in form, but as an unrestrained absoluteness. It was probably an “outrage on the human soul”, but an inevitable stage in the growth of the united nation. It was not necessary in England after Elizabeth, and liberty “could progress by natural gradations.” Absolute monarchy destroyed the liberty of all classes—one after another—of all classes, except the common people who had no liberty at all. The inevitable end was a revolt against all vested interest. Liberty then becomes the watchword of the race. But we have seen already that Liberty is not enough if there is no Justice and Equality. But even Liberty and Equality are not sufficient. The greatest of the three principles of the Revolution, Fraternity, “though till now only an empty word on man's lips”, must be added to the other two.

In this Chapter, Sri Aurobindo has, by quoting numerous instances from history, explained to us the methods by which the Nation-unit was formed. In the next chapter, there is not so much history as political philosophy, and he indicates the line of man's advance from National to International unity.

*(To be continued)*

C. C. DUTT

(This instalment first appeared in October 1951 in *Mother India*)

## TWO INTERVIEWS WITH JAYANTILAL PAREKH

(Continued from the issue of February 2005)

(2)

(Interview with Shraddhalu, Sanjay and Raman on 14 September 1992)

*I would like you to elaborate on how you got interested in painting.*

I THINK I took to painting rather late, when I was about 15 or 16 and went to High School, what in Bombay we used to call 8<sup>th</sup> standard. I had finished the 7<sup>th</sup> standard in one school, then shifted to another school where the four classes were there 8, 9, 10 and now what you call 11. Now this school was one of the most advanced schools in Bombay. It was the first to start co-education and it was started by the Theosophists, that is, most of the members were Theosophists. They had their own idealism and they wanted to spread education. I think, Mrs. Annie Besant inaugurated the school.

*What was it called?*

It was called the Fellowship School. It was just on the front of the Bombay Chowpatty—a very nice bungalow—and the teachers were excellent. Some of them were involved in the independence struggle of India and some were active members of the Theosophist Society. So there I came in contact with very good teachers. Somehow I did some painting work in the class and it was appreciated. Then I took more and more to painting. Now there was a Bengali artist called Pulin Behari Das. He had taught the children of the industrialist Ambalal Sarabhai in Ahmedabad. So he came over to Bombay and was employed in this school. He took interest in me and I began to do painting after the school hours. Then some of my paintings were published in a Bombay journal and a lady got interested in them and a representative came looking for me. My father was not very keen that I should go in for painting, because it was understood that this was only a hobby and one does it for pleasure but not for earning one's living. So when he saw this—that lady bought some paintings of mine—he thought that maybe I could be [*an artist*]. Now, by this time I had finished my matriculation and, since I did not go to college, I went to the school of architecture. I spent one year there and I passed the first year's examination. But still, after the school hours, I used to go and do painting with this teacher. Then my father agreed to send me to Shantiniketan—I had already the idea of going there. So I applied and went to Shantiniketan. I was there from 1932 to 1935. There I had the very good opportunity of coming in contact with Nandalal Bose. There were very few students then; in the art classes, I don't think we were more than 20 to 25 students. My interest grew and I did a lot of paintings there. I had the opportunity of meeting some of the

very well-known artists of the time. I came to know Ramkinkar, the sculptor; then, Binode Behari who also became very famous—he was practically a blind man, but, in the beginning, he could see. Satyajit Ray made a film on him. There was a lot of freedom in work. I spent there more than three years. It gave me a good background. Then I wanted to go to Japan, but that did not become possible because one of my brothers was already in England and my father said he could not support two boys in foreign countries. So from there I came here in 1935. Then this work in the Mairie was given to me and Krishnalal and I did that work. When I could not stay here any longer, I went back to Bombay. From Bombay I went to a friend of mine who had taken up some work in Cochin. There were some very old paintings and the State wanted them to be copied. So he asked me if I could take up the work, because he couldn't do it. I took up that work. I stayed there for more than a year, both in Trissur and Cochin.

*What exactly was the work you were doing?*

There were old paintings. What we did was to trace those paintings, transfer them on a board and paint them as they were painted, in the same kind of colour, the same technique.

*In the same place?*

No, separate place, because they had to be broken up. Now, in Cochin, these paintings of Ramayana are done in a very old style. There are four walls and they are completely covered with paintings. There are no demarcations as we have today—we make a frame, and within that frame, we paint. There, it is a continuous thing. One thing goes on, then the other thing is completely joined with it, things are done like that. So subject-wise they had to be broken up.

*On the wall?*

On the wall. So I copied those things and coloured them. I got two assistants locally. It was a big work. Then a book was published giving details about it. I wrote one or two articles explaining the technique. Then again, from there, I went to Bombay and I got an invitation from Ceylon. I was for about five months in Ceylon. I did some painting and sketching there. From there, I came here. Then life continued.... In the beginning I did not do painting, but later, from 1939, 1940 or so, I did regular painting.

Now, around 1945, I was painting in the the Mother's corridor upstairs. Inside, Krishnalal had done paintings of different fishes and all that under the sea—he was very good at it. So, for the outside, I decided to do the sea as you see it, and I did that. You were asking me the other day how I got into different kinds of work. It began when I was doing painting there. I used to hear what was happening and I heard that

Mother was looking for a car in which to go out, because the two cars she had were very old and not very useful. They were even wanting to buy a *Rolls Royce*. So once I suggested that I had some contacts in Madras and, if she liked, I could try [*to get a car*]. So, thus it began.

I went to Madras, saw my friends. I also went to the Government and spoke to one of the secretaries. I was told, "We will see about it." At that time, Government sanction was necessary because they allotted the cars. Then when I came back the next day or the third day, Mother received a letter saying, "We are very sorry, we cannot afford to give you a car." When Mother showed me the letter, I said, "They gave me to understand that they will consider us. Anyway, I will go again." So I went again, met the manager of the *Ford* company, who had a showroom and told him about the difficulty. He said, "Don't worry, I will make an application to the Government to sell a car in Pondicherry." So he applied and got the permission and we got a *Ford V-8*. At that time, we paid about 8,500/=. Now, before this man delivered us the car, I had spoken to another friend of mine in Madras. He said, "Why don't you take our car? Mother can use it till she gets her car." At that time, there was a *Ford Ten*, small like a *Fiat*. I told Mother, "My friend is offering his car." She said, "All right, get the car." So we got that car and Mother used it for one month and when this *Ford V-8* came, that car was sent back. Mother didn't allow Pavitra to drive it. The driver was sent from Madras for a month.

*Are you sure it was a Ford V-8 and not the Humber that was bought from Madras?*

Now we made so many enquiries. When they got this car, somebody else from Madras, *Simpson and Company* (they were the agents for *Humber* and, I think, also *Rolls Royce*), their representative came here and he went and saw the Mother. Mother called me and I was there when he said, "Now there is a strike, I can give you in a month or a month and a half a car like this..." and he described it and Mother agreed. 500 rupees or some advance had to be given. So, in a month or two, that car was ready for delivery in Madras. Pavitra said, "No, I won't allow the drivers to drive. It's a good car." (It's a very good company, the *Humber*.) "They don't know how to drive. I will come to Madras and bring it." Now, this *Ford* which we had taken, had to go for servicing. So we went to Madras in it. I stayed back there and gave it for servicing and, in the meantime, Pavitra took the *Humber* and came here. The next day, after servicing, I came back in the *Ford*. It is in that car that Mulshankar passed away. We took it out at night, on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947. I was there when we took him to the hospital. He died practically in the car itself, he bled to death. The doctors couldn't find out from where the blood was coming.

Then I went to Madras and made some contacts. Just after the war, some other problems arose. Nothing was coming from outside and even things coming from Madras State were controlled by the Government. Once there was no wheat at all. So

we went there, got the permission for some wheat. From Cuddalore we got a release order of some 5 tons of wheat. Like that, I used to take care of the problems which came up, and it continued. Then from 1949 when the *Bulletin* was taken up, Pavitra asked me whether I could look after the magazine, sending the photos and getting the blocks made. So I used to go there every three months for getting the blocks done.

*To Madras?*

To Madras. We were getting all the blocks made there, we did the printing here.

*Were you driving yourself?*

No, in those days, I used to go by the night train. I didn't take the car. After some years, when we had 2-3 cars (we bought one car directly from England, an *Austin*), then, I went by car several times.

*You drove?*

No, no, I could not drive. The driver was there. In that way, I got involved in this work. Then I had some contacts in Madras who were interested in publishing Sri Aurobindo's works in foreign countries. Until then, nobody had come forward. They wanted to publish poetry. Now Ravi's father was there in *Higginbothams*, he was the manager of one section and he was very enthusiastic about it. He told me that they had a representative in New York and he would call him up. So when he came to see Mother (he was a great lover of Sri Aurobindo's works), he asked permission from the Mother. The permission was given and in 1949 *The Life Divine* came out in one volume. Then those three, four, other books also came out. He published them...

Then in 1950 when Sri Aurobindo passed away, this question of photographs came up. And we asked this man to negotiate and get the thing. I was doing the correspondence. Then we wanted to preserve Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts. So I got interested in microfilming, got the equipment. Several attempts were made. But that work was not at all good. Then by that time Kiran and Kamal<sup>1</sup> had come.

*Kiran came in 1972.*

He came in 1972? I don't remember the date. We sent them to Delhi to learn. We made some arrangements at the National Archives. So they went and stayed there for some time. Then they came here and we got another set of equipment from Japan. They started work. Then it was done regularly and they more or less completed the microfilming work. So like that I got involved in publication. Then, in between, we

1. Kiran and Kamal, two ex-students of the Ashram School, were sent by the Ashram Trustees to the Archives to microfilm the original manuscripts of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

had to bring out Mother's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday volume, *The Golden Book of The Mother*. For that, I had to do some running about. Then for Huta's *Meditations on Savitri*, I went to Calcutta, got some things. I got more and more involved in the Press work. Though I was not a full-time worker of the Press, because of this, I got involved in it. Then we had to get a good machine, so I was involved with the *Heidelberg* machine—we got it in 1961.

*You got it?*

I mean I had to negotiate for it.

*Some say that Mother was opposed to buying the machines and still you bought them.*

No, she was not opposed to it. It was recognised by all that we needed a good printing machine, but there were people who had suggested to her to buy it from Japan. But they were not really conversant with these things. I was doing the correspondence. Then I got some letters from East Africa where people connected with the Ashram were using this *Heidelberg* machine. They said these were the best machines. Even then, Mother was not convinced. She wanted a good opinion from reliable people. Then we wrote to Hans Karpes. Mother said, "If he says yes, we can go for it." Then Hans Karpes also wrote back saying that this was one of the best machines and Mother sanctioned it. So we took the necessary license and got the machine. And Mother came to the Press in 1961, August 23<sup>rd</sup>. It was André's birthday and Mother came to see this machine. She never came afterwards.

Then the Centenary work started. So there everything had to be done. I gave an estimate of 10 to 12 lakhs of rupees for doing this work and nobody was prepared for it. I gave in writing all the estimates: if we do work commercially, how much it would be; if we do it in a different way, how much; two, three calculations; the size of the book, all that we gave. We got a sample made from America for the size of the book. Then Mother said, "All right, do it, if you have the money." She was not in a position to provide the money. That meant we had to arrange for it. So I went to Bombay. The first time, I didn't succeed; afterwards, I succeeded. We had to collect money, purchase machinery and paper. I went and got the paper made from the paper mill. I used to go here and there, Delhi and other places, move about.... Somehow the work was finished in 1972.

Then around 1973, I wrote to Mother that I wanted to start this department and give up the Press work. From that time we started the Archives. Before that, a lot of manuscripts which Nolani used to keep, had come into our hands. We gathered all the manuscripts, started microfilming them. That has been continuing.

*(Concluded)*



## JAYANTILAL PAREKH—A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

MOST of us at the Archives<sup>1</sup> knew very little of Jayantilal, the artist. We were in contact with Jayantilal, the administrator, who practised a most “unbosslike” style of management bordering on total non-interference, which nowadays would be called irresponsible, but which worked. All of us worked hard without ever being told to do so. He created a natural work environment in which you could plunge yourself and get lost for the next twenty years. He encouraged research and study along with the massive spade-work of organising the manuscripts without forming a rift between the two activities. It was clear that archival research went hand in hand with archival organisation, the one helping the other. People threw themselves diligently into the mundane activities of arranging, repairing, microfilming and databasing the manuscripts and, after a few years, produced noteworthy research work or became experts in their own fields. In other words, there were no drones who would sit indulging in idle intellectual gossip while the worker bees collected the honey. Everybody was busy, including the “boss”. Perhaps I have depicted too ideal a picture, but this was the core of it and it should be stressed, because nowadays people tend to over-emphasise the blemishes. There were, of course, human problems. But Jayantilal dealt with them in his own unique way by giving them such a patient hearing that difficulties vanished by their very expression, and you realised that, after all, it was a storm in a tea cup. Or he would make a slight adjustment which would tilt the balance to the right side. If things went persistently wrong, he waited for them to self-correct or self-destruct and quietly faced the flak, expecting the Grace to act. Mostly it did, even if you didn’t want to admit it. Finally, he had a wonderful way of saying “No”—by not saying it at all! The silence would make his opinion pretty evident. If he was occasionally trapped, he would squirm out of the situation with a gentle “No” with so much hemming and hawing, that no gentleman could insist further.

Then there was that aspect of universality in him. He had broken free from all narrow bounds of parochialism. Ashramites did not have the clout they were supposed to have with him *vis-à-vis* outsiders (in the sense of non-Ashramites). Everyone was treated equally, for all were doing the Mother’s work and the Mother’s world was the wide, wide world, not merely the Ashram at Pondicherry. Thus, outsiders, be it from the Pondicherry locality or other Indian states or Westerners from other countries, felt supremely comfortable in his presence. He took personal care of them, found for them lodging and boarding, got their visas extended, sorted out their personal problems and made them feel at home. Many of them settled down here permanently and have done invaluable work, which might not have been done had Jayantilal stuck to the

1. Jayantilal Parekh was in charge of the Archives Department of Sri Aurobindo Ashram since its inception in 1973 till he passed away on 26 January 1999. The department publishes and takes care of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s original manuscripts.

old-style policy of “let our own people do it”. Ironically, those very “outsiders” have now become Ashramites. It shows how large-heartedness coupled with long-range planning pays off at the end. I remember how he went out of his way to help the Russians start a magazine on Sri Aurobindo’s thought—the result is that now there are more books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in Russian than in many of the regional languages of India. Once he went about looking for display stands for an exhibition of Italian artists—I myself cursed him under my breath because part of the work fell on me. Then a Colombian fascinated by *The Human Cycle* dropped from the sky, a gentleman from Turkey translated the Mother’s *Conversations* into Turkish. Finally a Muslim wrote a thesis on Sri Aurobindo which we had to edit and print. Most of us were angry at Jayantilal, gasping for breath and running errands for “all kinds of people”, but wisdom mostly dawns on hindsight, and now we sympathise with him. Perhaps the best way to understand him is to place ourselves in the shoes of those visitors who never forgot him and forged permanent links with the Ashram.

Then there was Jayantilal, the tireless liaison between the Ashram and the Government offices. He spent his last fifteen years getting tax exemptions for the Ashram. Hectic travelling by air, taxi and bus (when a car was not available) wore him out, and he often fell ill after such trips. He met the bigwigs in Delhi and Calcutta and Madras, tried to convince them of the ideals of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and the material necessities of the Ashram. People generally were convinced of the former but not the latter, and there was the rub for an unconventional community like ours, which Sri Aurobindo himself did not want to call an Ashram. For the word “Ashram” conjured up visions of leprosy hospitals, *annadanam* (free food for the poor), spiritual instruction, *poojas* and mass meditations for salvation and world peace, all of which were totally absent here. In those days, Jayantilal met Manmohan Singh as Finance Minister, and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to present the case of the Ashram. Luckily, he came from a family of eminent businessmen that gave him access to the corridors of power. His elder brother, H. T. Parekh, had founded the HDFC (*Housing Development Finance Corporation*), one of the premier financial institutions of India, which has enabled over a million Indians to build homes for themselves. Jayantilal too thought in a big way, though within the smaller framework of the Ashram. He ventured to publish the Centenary edition (*SABCL*—30 volumes) when the Mother had no money for it, printed the Complete Works of the Mother (*CWM*—17 volumes) and launched the new edition of Sri Aurobindo’s works (*CWSA*—37 volumes) when we were hardly ready to undertake such an enormous work of publication. He ceaselessly brought in innovation and modernisation to keep abreast with the changing times. The Ashram Press acquired the best available machines within the affordable range and the Archives got the latest computers and photographic equipment. Now we can hardly think of working without them, for what were once considered hi-tech luxuries have become indispensable necessities.

During his last years, Jayantilal’s quest for outer perfection went hand in hand

with a new surge of inspiration from within. He began writing articles full of reflection and foresight on various topics. His work of getting tax-exemptions made him write on the need for the Indian Government to recognise *Institutions of National Importance* such as Shantiniketan and the Ashram. Helping the Westerners who worked with him at the Archives to get their Visas renewed led to his article on *Dual Citizenship*, which incidentally has now become a reality for N.R.I.'s (non-resident Indians). The TV serials on *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* that galvanised India for a few years made him reflect on *dharma* and Indian culture. Not that what he wrote was never thought of or suggested before, but you could see in him a fresh approach to old subjects and a new vigour which came from deeper sources. His *Random Thoughts* serialised in *Sri Aurobindo's Action* in the nineties is the best example of this deeper view of life. In 1998, a year before he passed away, he was asked a few questions on the future of the Ashram by a batch of ex-students of the Ashram School. Jayantilal's answers impressed me so much that I would like to reproduce here one of them at length:

*You have been seeing the Ashram for a very long time. Over the years what exactly do you think has changed? Has there been a dilution in the intensity of the atmosphere, in the sadhana? If so, why?... Are there any immediate practical steps that can be taken to improve the situation? Do you think there is a need to review the administrative structure of the Ashram, the way it functions?... Are you worried about the future of the Ashram? What do you expect would happen when the last of those who have been personally guided by the Mother will be no more? Do you feel like some, that the Ashram will slowly acquire the status of a "religio-cultural community"? Or is there a danger that we will begin stressing material sufficiency and that the utilitarian / commercial aspect will gain ascendancy?*

These questions relating to various changes in the organisation and make-up of the Ashram during the last twenty-five years since the Mother left her body can only be raised profitably after another fifty or hundred years, when no one who knew the Mother would be alive and when the ideology and its truth represented by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother will stand on their own intrinsic strength. These questions deal only with the organisation and not with the teaching, its relevance and acceptance by humanity which is the real determining factor.

We cannot afford to forget that a strong religion like Buddhism with its sure base in rationalism and roots in transcendentalism could be driven out of the country of its origin leaving only a few stone images and stupas for admiration. And yet the Buddha is considered to be an incarnation of God by Hinduism. History may not repeat itself but there is nothing to prevent it if it so desires.

The vision Sri Aurobindo puts before us, in its final analysis, has an evolutionary goal and unless there are a few individuals and groups who are prepared to put all their eggs in this basket, we shall have to wait and see how it is accepted by humanity. Let us not judge too hurriedly—time and patience are expandable. In any case, if the Truth of which Sri Aurobindo speaks is the fundamental question, its realisation has to begin somewhere. If so, why not now and here? It may take many turns and twists, go up and down, forward and backward, or change its course. We shall have to patiently wait and see. It is a great adventure of consciousness and of the recalcitrant earth and must move wherever its flow finds the way. You and I are not the determinants and yet we do count in a small way.<sup>2</sup>

So that was Jayantilal towards the end of his life, mature and humble, leaving things wide and fearlessly open for the Divine to work out in the unforeseeable future and yet acknowledging that “we do count in a small way” and have a role to play. He himself played a many-sided role during his long stay of sixty-five years in the Ashram. He was first a painter, then a liaison between the Ashram and the world outside, a wonderful administrator of his own department and finally a thinker in his own right, making him truly a man for all seasons. Through all this ran a profound yogic trait which is best evinced in his own words—I quote one of the finest gems from his *Random Thoughts*:

In spiritual life there are no prizes to be won, no elevated positions of power to be secured, no achievements for history to record. Here you begin to sound the various depths of being, emerge into a self-expanding universe. Here you discover grades of light, experience an all-inclusive wideness and fullness. Here you step into a freedom with gratifying breezes blowing around you, above all gravitational pulls. Here there is an all-fulfilling power at your elbow for whom everything is within its easy reach.

And, above all, here is an emptiness, void of wants with only transparent spaces of solid peace for intimate company.<sup>3</sup>

RAMAN REDDY

2. *The Golden Chain*, April 1998, pp. 16-17.

3. *Sri Aurobindo's Action*, February 1992, p. 6.

## MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of February 2005)

In the evening, at the Playground, the Mother used to read out Sri Aurobindo's *The Mother*. Once, a question was put to Her about the line: "The youngest of the four..." The question was: "Sweet Mother, why is Mahasaraswati the youngest of the four?"

The Mother answered:

Because her work came last; so she came last. (*Silence*) It is in this order that they manifested, in the order given here. These aspects are like the attributes of the Mother, which manifested in succession according to the necessities of the work; and the necessity of perfection was the last, so she is the youngest.

"All the work of the other Powers leans on her for its completeness..."

Mahasaraswati. Yes, because she is... (*silence*) precisely the goddess of perfection. For her everything must be done down to the last detail, and done in an absolutely perfect way. And she wants, she insists that it should be done physically, totally, materially, that it should not remain in the air, you see, like a mental or vital action, but that it should be a physical realisation in all its details, and all the details be perfect, that nothing be neglected. So all that the others undertake in the other domains she concretises and brings to its material perfection.

It is quite amazing even to imagine that during Durga-puja the Mother used to come down bringing Durga with Her. On Lakshmi-puja day She would come to the Meditation Hall below along with Lakshmi. And then on Kali-puja day Mahakali came with the Mother. On Mahasaraswati-puja day the Mother came down in Her Aspect of Mahasaraswati. We were able to have the Darshan of these different Aspects of the Mother without having to make any effort.

When the Mother would read Sri Aurobindo's *The Mother* and explain to us in Her simple, clear way about each of Her Powers, we were overcome by a strange experience. Mother Adishakti was describing Her own different Forms to Her children. We could do nothing but stare at Her with unceasing wonder.

Arjuna's fortune lay in finding out from Krishna himself who He was. We were born with that same good fortune. How many questions have been put to the Mother about Sri Aurobindo's *The Mother*, about every Power of the Mother! With exemplary patience has She always answered all these questions.

In the Gita the Divine revealed Himself to Arjuna in the form of Sri Krishna and showed him his way of working. While studying *The Mother*, the Mother Herself, the One Eternal Mahashakti, explained to us so clearly Her various Powers of

realisation and their working. Sri Aurobindo has revealed to us in such detail who She really is in His book:

The four Powers of the Mother are four of her outstanding Personalities, portions and embodiments of her divinity through whom she acts on her creatures, orders and harmonises her creations in the worlds and directs the working out of her thousand forces. For the Mother is one but she comes before us with differing aspects; many are her powers and personalities, many her emanations and Vibhutis that do her work in the universe. The One whom we adore as the Mother is the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence....

Four great Aspects of the Mother, four of her leading Powers and Personalities have stood in front in her guidance of this Universe and in her dealings with the terrestrial play. One is her personality of calm wideness and comprehending wisdom and tranquil benignity and inexhaustible compassion and sovereign and surpassing majesty and all-ruling greatness. Another embodies her power of splendid strength and irresistible passion, her warrior mood, her overwhelming will, her impetuous swiftness and world-shaking force. A third is vivid and sweet and wonderful with her deep secret of beauty and harmony and fine rhythm, her intricate and subtle opulence, her compelling attraction and captivating grace. The fourth is equipped with her close and profound capacity of intimate knowledge and careful flawless work and quiet and exact perfection in all things. Wisdom, Strength, Harmony, Perfection are their several attributes and it is these powers that they bring with them into the world, manifest in a human disguise in their Vibhutis and shall found in the divine degree of their ascension in those who can open their earthly nature to the direct and living influence of the Mother. To the four we give the four great names, Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati.

The Mother has opened Her doors wide to all Her children. Young or old, everyone would wait at the Playground to listen to Her words with an eager heart. Even those who did not understand French would be present there to have the Mother's Darshan, to hear Her unearthly sweet voice. Devotees and disciples from far-off countries would also come to the Playground on the day of the class and sit quietly. The Mother was everyone's Friend, everyone's dearest Friend, She was everyone's Mother: this was experienced by many of us here and in many parts of the world during those days.

Here, an extraordinary experience of the Mother when She was thirteen comes to mind. Every night that little girl would go out of Her body, go out of Her city and keep mounting very high in the sky. She wore a very beautiful golden gown. This gown was much longer than the Mother and quite big. And the more the Mother mounted skywards, the more the gown would cover the space all around Her in a

circle. It was as if a huge roof had been laid over the city. Then the Mother would see people converge from all corners of the city to assemble under this shelter, girls, children, old men and women, the sick and the miserable. And they would ask Her for help and tell Her about their sorrow, suffering and unbearable pain. The Mother's gown would spread in a living way and provide solace to each one of them. And by their being merely touched by the Mother's gown they would feel reassured, consoled and they would regain their health. They would re-enter their bodies much happier and much healthier than before. This marvellous experience every night made the Mother extremely happy. She did not feel so enthused by any other activity.

We can guess from this incident how liberally the Mother spread Her love and tenderness over the multitudes of the earth.

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The Mother's mother once got a little chair made for Her. On this chair the Mother would sit for hours in solemn silence. It was undoubtedly an astonishing thing for a little girl to do. Nobody could understand, looking at Her, why this tiny little girl was sitting so solemn-faced. What was she thinking about? One day her mother ended up asking:

“What's the matter with you? Why do you keep sitting with such a serious face? It is as if the world's entire burden is weighing on your shoulders!”

That little girl answered with the same seriousness:

“Yes, indeed, I have to take upon myself this earth's full burden of suffering. That is why I am so serious all the time.”

That little girl, our little Mother, sits throned today as the Universal Mother amongst us. And whenever we call Her from our depth in pain and suffering, She responds at once. Even little children would rush to Her to somehow convey to Her their sorrow and the Mother would understand them perfectly even though they could not yet speak.

Once a cousin of mine went to the Mother with a five or six-month-old boy. The baby was in Manoj's arms. As soon as they approached the Mother, the baby started crying, crying so soulfully that my cousin, her mother and Manoj were terribly embarrassed. It seemed that the baby, incapable of speech, was trying desperately to say something to the Mother. He had understood at once that the Mother was his only true sympathiser, his truest friend and one to whom he could say everything even without speaking. The Mother understood his complaint perfectly well and handed him a red rose. She showered him with Her tender caresses. As soon as he received the Mother's touch and the rose he immediately quietened down. And in this way all our lives have been linked with the Mother's golden string: innumerable lives strung together in a single string.

\*

Every year the 3<sup>rd</sup> year students of 'Knowledge' passing out of school used to meet Nolini-da. They would go and bow down to him before starting a new phase in their life. Nolini-da would tell them some very beautiful things. What lovely discourses these used to be! Once he spoke to them about the true meaning of the 'golden chain':

Mother said many times: "Whoever gets my touch, whoever has a second of true aspiration, true love for me, he is finished for this life, for all lives—he is bound to me. I have put a golden chain round his neck, his heart is bound eternally to me."

Nolini-da explains:

It is a thing nobody can see, you yourselves don't see; but it is a fact, it is there. The golden chain is there within your heart. Wherever you go, you drag that chain, it is a lengthening chain. How far you may go, it is an elastic chain, it goes on lengthening, but never snaps. In hours of difficulty, in hours of doubt and confusion in your life, you have that within you to support you. If you are conscious of it, so much the better; if you are not conscious, believe that it is there. The Mother's love, Her Presence is there *always*.

This chain is the Mother's love, Her presence in each and everyone. In times of pain and sorrow, in times of turmoil in our lives the Mother's love gives us strength to fight the battle, gives us faith. This is the Mother's infinite friendship, Her inexhaustible love for everyone. That is why I repeat once more: The Mother is our Mother, the Mother is our Friend, everyone's Friend.

The Mother loves us, loves all human beings and trusts them. By taking support of this power of the Mother's trust a new 'I' takes birth in us. The 'I' that used to stumble and fall at every step suddenly starts changing by coming in contact with the Mother's infinite Love and Friendship. It is such a mysterious thing.

*He who can, can in this way,  
He can make the flowers bloom.*

The Mother has entered the dense darkness of our mind and with Her golden wand of Love awakened the sleeping 'I'. Slowly our self-confidence begins to increase. After that whatever the Mother asks us to do, our new 'I' says: "I will try with all my heart and soul. I will surely be worthy of the Mother's trust."

How many complaints about us would reach the Mother's ears! The Mother used to repeat these to us with Her sweet smile. She just would not believe those allegations.

"You know," She would say with a laugh, "how many letters come to me with complaints and reproaches against me! One day I'll show you those letters. Don't be troubled or upset by these small things. Make yourself large. Imagine you have become



as large as your room. Then make yourself even larger. Become as large as this town. Spread yourself into every being. Love them all. Spread your 'I' till the farthest corner of the world."

The heart would be filled with awe, joy and gratitude. Our inner being would humbly bow down to the Mother. This is how we can make everyone our own, through Love! And we did not even know this!

Here I remember another incident. The Mother used to come at about noon and stand at the lower landing of the staircase. We would all be sitting in the hall. She would come halfway down the stairs and throw toffees to everyone. One, two or sometimes three together! The time for this toffee-throwing to the younger ones was not fixed. At times it would occur as late as half past one. Madhuri and I would sit near Nolini-da's room and wait, memorising little poems. It will not be out of place to quote one such poem here:

*Conflict, malice all around,  
An end it seems cannot be found  
If only you forgiveness find  
Tranquillity will fill your mind.*

This is what I have learnt from the Mother:

*Love one and love them all,  
Then from your being all rust shall fall.*

When I was studying in a higher class Sri Aurobindo's *The Ideal of Forgiveness* was one of our Bengali texts. I loved the story and would keep on wondering how one can forgive even one's enemy in this way! The description that Sri Aurobindo has given of Sage Vashishtha's character touched our young heart very deeply indeed. How can a man be so vast! Sage Vashishtha loved Vishwamitra, forgave him and won him over. Our being too, by reading this writing of Sri Aurobindo, would become vast and fill with *ananda*. It was from then that an irresistible eagerness to know Sri Aurobindo was born in us.

This same divine love and forgiveness lay at the root of Sri Chaitanyadev's transformation of Jagai and Madhai's nature.

*With thy pitcher thou hast hit me  
For that, shall I not love thee?*

I still remember the film *Sri Chaitanyadev* I saw as a child at the cinema. It was then that this seed of love and compassion was sown in a young girl's inmost consciousness. We have seen this same film here at the Ashram a couple of times,

sitting next to the Mother. While watching the film I would sometimes keep looking up at the Mother.

In this moment of receiving direction of the new life we learnt from the Mother how to forgive human pettiness and baseness.

*With Compassion Thine  
My life I'll cleanse.  
How clasp Thy Feet  
Without that Grace immense?*

\*

Two memorable incidents of my life occurred on my birthday in 1948.

I had for a long time wanted to get some sweets made and offer them to the Mother. No doubt our mother (Bibhavati) used to often make *sandesh* and take them to the Mother. On this birthday, with the help of a friend, I got some sweets made from carrots. This friend's work was always perfect. Nobody could arrange a plate like this girl,—with all the different items that were prepared in the Mother's Kitchen for Her. On special days she would be called to set the Mother's meal. She arranged the carrot-sweets in such a beautiful way that I was thrilled.

I took that plate of sweets to the Mother and very shyly offered it to Her. Probably sensing my timidity and hesitation, the Mother took the plate from me with both Her hands. She was most happy and exclaimed:

“Bibha must have arranged this for you.”

I was flabbergasted. How did the Mother know? I nodded my head:

“Yes, Mother. It's Bibha. She does it so beautifully and with so much care!”

The Mother went on looking at the beautifully arranged plate for quite some time. It truly seemed as if flowers had bloomed from the plate. I had hardly said “yes” when the Mother picked up a sweet and started eating. I was mesmerised. And thrilled to no end. You just cannot imagine my joy.

But there was more to come. She ate, standing, and from time to time gave me a little of the sweet. I looked more closely and saw Her face aglow with mischievous laughter. Asking me to wait, She went inside with the plate of sweets.

I stood outside and waited quietly. I suddenly remembered my acting in a play called *Sudama*. Isn't it amazing how one thing reminds you of another?

I was only 12 or 13 then. We were staying at Feni. Father was a college professor there. Our group of friends decided to perform the play *Sudama*. I was given the role of Sudama. Tapati was to play Rukmini and one of her friends, Sri Krishna. The play turned out very well. On people's request we performed this play several times.

In this play at one point Sudama is forced by his wife's insistence to go to his childhood friend, Sri Krishna. He packed a few *nadus* (a simple rural sweet) in his *chaddar* (a piece of cloth to cover the upper part of the body) and very shyly walked

into Sri Krishna's royal court. All he had brought for his childhood-friend, Sri Krishna, were some *nadus*. As soon as he saw Sudama, Sri Krishna exclaimed:

"I am seeing you after ages, my friend. Where are the *nadus* I love so much?"

In the midst of all the pomp and glitter, in the presence of the honourable prime minister and ministers, Sudama hung his head in shame. But because of Sri Krishna's insistence he had to give the *nadus*.

Sri Krishna began eating those *nadus* with great relish even while chatting about their childhood days.

Seeing the Mother enjoying those ordinary sweets reminded me of Sudama. I used to play the part of Sudama's friendship with God with a lot of feeling and I felt a strange change within me. On this day I had realised the truth of Sudama's character by the fact that I could make the divine Mother taste those sweets. I could never have dreamt that She would receive those sweets with so much graciousness. This inconceivable incident of my life was indeed like Sri Krishna's receiving the *nadus* from Sudama's hands.

This is how Bibha describes this incident:

"On her birthday, Priti wanted to offer some sweets to the Mother and she told me about it. I did not have any cooking facilities, though. However, I ground some carrots and almonds very fine and then I boiled them with some milk and laid the mixture out as we do when preparing *sandesh*. I shaped them like leaves and set them out on a glass plate. Priti had brought the carrots and the almonds. I used to arrange and decorate the Mother's food in Her kitchen. I could make flowers and leaves with my hands. I was delighted to have been given this opportunity. There was one prayer within me: 'Will She really eat?' And then the news came that She had indeed eaten."

I was absent-mindedly thinking of all these things when I suddenly realised that the Mother was standing before me. And smiling gently. I was a little embarrassed. I noticed a folded paper in Her hands. She unfolded the paper and brought out a ring. She put the ring on my finger. When I used to go to the Mother in the evenings, while talking to me She would pull my fingers and remark:

"How thin you are. Such thin fingers you have!"

Now I understood that the Mother was touching my fingers to check the size for the ring She wanted to give me.

After putting the ring on, She smiled softly and said:

"From today we have become the best of friends. A deep friendship has been established between us."

I had never imagined even in my wildest dreams that I would hear such words from the Mother Herself. My entire being was filled with wonder, *ananda* and gratitude.

The Mother was my Friend. The Mother was our Friend. I remembered another incident from the past.

Every Sunday at about noon a sadhu used to come to our house with his little son to ask for alms. The little boy had a sweet voice and sang beautifully playing his *ektara* (a single-stringed instrument). Right at the end he would sing a song with great feeling:

*Where are you, Friend,  
You I cannot trace.  
Where's your country,  
Your dwelling-place?*

And the *ektara* played on in perfect rhythm. He sang this song so soulfully in his melodious voice while looking up at the sky. And I would feel somewhat saddened by the song. My heart wandering with the song's melody wept and my eyes travelled from field to field towards the distant horizon.

Who was this Friend? No doubt it was God that was meant, it was Sri Krishna. I was overwhelmed with happiness each time I heard the song. I used to give this sadhu and his little boy a lot of rice as alms.

“We'll come back!”

And saying this, they would walk away across the fields. The strumming of the *ektara* would float on from faraway.

The lines from the song kept repeating in me.

*Where are you, Friend?  
You I cannot trace.*

On this auspicious occasion of my birthday in 1948 I had traced my Friend forever.

The Mother is our Friend, She is everyone's Friend, She is my Friend.

*(To be continued)*

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

## INDIA AND EVOLUTION

IN the mid-nineteenth century, Darwin's theory of evolution shook the world. Evidence to support such a theory had been accumulating for a long time. But with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* on November 24, 1859, the storm of public debate began. The impact of the theory of evolution through natural selection went far beyond the sphere of pure science. By apparently contradicting the Christian scriptures and leaving no need for a Creator to account for the diverse forms of life, it seemed to compel the Western mind to choose between a religious and a scientific view of existence.

Religion had already been losing ground in Europe for centuries. The vitality of Western civilisation was due not to its conventional religious beliefs, but to its urge for progress and expansion. The theory of evolution not only called Christian doctrines into question; it also suggested the idea of applying the principle of "the survival of the fittest" (a phrase coined by Herbert Spencer) to social as well as biological evolution. From this standpoint, the laws of nature seemed to justify the ambition of the increasingly materialistic and rationalistic civilisation of Europe to extend its dominion and ideology over the rest of the earth and eliminate or subordinate traditional cultures that could not withstand its onslaught. It could do this with a good conscience in the name of progress, which was only another word for evolution. It was logical to assume that the evolutionary ascent that began some billions of years ago with the protoplasm had reached its climax in Western man. For his scientific mastery over nature gave him an incontestable supremacy in the struggle for survival. If the competition for adaptation to the environment was the mechanism that had driven the process of evolution up to this point, it seemed that this mechanism would practically cease to operate for further evolution with the advent of a creature who could adapt the environment to himself.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, as Darwin's book was being written and published, one ancient civilisation that showed every sign of having lost the struggle for the survival of the fittest was India. A few centuries earlier, India had been more advanced in every way than the semi-barbaric medieval European peoples, who lagged behind Asia by hundreds of years even in technology. But by the nineteenth century, India had passed through a long period when the energies of many of the potential leaders of the society were turned away from practical life to the pursuit of individual spiritual liberation while the collective existence was left to stagnate. Even the Muslim invasion and the slide into chaos that permitted a handful of English merchants to take over the country were regarded with a sublime indifference by enlightened souls whose only aim was to escape from the transient, illusory agitation and misery of this world into the eternal peace and bliss of the Spirit.

In 1857-58, the so-called "Mutiny" was suppressed. This was followed by a consolidation of British power in India that could not be challenged for decades to

come. The last spark of resistance appeared to be extinguished and the Indian people crushed into abject submission by this humiliating defeat. Throughout the nineteenth century, the educated class was steadily being indoctrinated to adopt European culture and reject its own. In short, the prospect for the survival of a distinctive Indian civilisation as anything more than a touch of local colour in a province of the British empire looked bleak.

But even as the fate of India seemed to reach its lowest ebb, the tide was already about to turn—and in a way that was thoroughly characteristic of the genius of the country. In the late 1850s, unknown to the world, a twenty-year-old priest in an obscure temple to Kali on the banks of the Ganga near Calcutta was having his first visions of the Divine Mother. Perhaps this was nothing unusual in India. But these were no ordinary visions, this was no ordinary priest, and the Divine Mother evidently had a special mission for him. In the course of time, a number of young Indians, some of them highly Westernised, were attracted to this remarkable saint. One of these proved to have not only a powerful and original mind, but spiritual aptitudes almost as unusual as those of Sri Ramakrishna himself.

In 1893, Swami Vivekananda voyaged to America. There his speeches at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago electrified an audience of thousands and created overnight a widespread recognition that he represented a great spiritual tradition from which the West had something to learn. In his first letter to his own countrymen after his success in Chicago, Vivekananda unveiled a new vision of India's place among the earth's peoples. He wrote prophetically of

that tidal wave of spirituality which is destined at no distant future to break upon India in all its irresistible powers... fulfilling its mission amongst the races of the world—the evolution of spiritual humanity.<sup>2</sup>

With one bold stroke Swami Vivekananda announced the resurgence of India, at a time when there was almost no visible sign of any such possibility, and overturned the notion of the superiority of Western civilisation by reinterpreting its own idea of evolution and positing a stage beyond scientific rationalism as humanity's destiny. This higher destiny was one to which India was fittest to lead the world.

We must fully acknowledge the brilliance and importance of the work of Darwin and others who established beyond reasonable dispute that life has evolved on earth and uncovered many details of how this happened. But in making this discovery, Western science stumbled upon a phenomenon which it was incapable of explaining more than superficially due to inherent limitations of its method. Interesting as it may be to study gradual modifications in species of biological organisms due to interaction with their environment, the event that cries out to be understood is the appearance of consciousness in an unconscious world. The physical sciences begin and end with material reality and cannot shed light on this miracle or answer questions

about the nature and origin of consciousness as such, as distinct from the organs it uses. Therefore we can legitimately look elsewhere if we want an explanation of where our consciousness has come from and a glimpse of how it might evolve in the future.

Not surprisingly, Indian thinkers and a few Westerners such as the Theosophists who were influenced by Indian thought were among the first to arrive at a deeper understanding of evolution. Whereas the religious-minded in the West were long implacably opposed to the idea of evolution, there was no such difficulty in India. Here, where the first Avatar of Vishnu took the form of a fish and the ideal devotee was depicted in the shape of a monkey, it could easily be accepted that life began in the sea and that man was related to the ape, a scandalous heresy to many Christians in Darwin's time. In India there was a sense of the continuity of all life and the immanence of consciousness in all things that not only was compatible with the theory of evolution, but made it possible to explain what scientists have failed to explain. This unexplained mystery is the emergence of conscious beings in a world that began, to all appearances, in a state of total unconsciousness. The key to solving the riddle is the concept of involution.

The argument that evolution implies involution was made by Swami Vivekananda with compelling logic:

No rational man can possibly quarrel with these evolutionists. But we have to learn one thing more. We have to go one step further, and what is that? That every evolution is preceded by an involution.... In the end we find the perfect man, so in the beginning it must have been the same. Therefore, the protoplasm was the involution of the highest intelligence. You may not see it but that involved intelligence is what is uncoiling itself until it becomes manifested in the most perfect man.... If it was not present in the protoplasm, it must have come all of a sudden, something coming out of nothing, which is absurd.<sup>3</sup>

The hypothesis of involution allows us to avoid the reductionism of the conventional theory of evolution which can explain at most the development of brains, not minds. It enables us to account for human culture, many of whose manifestations have nothing to do with survival or adaptation to the environment and so cannot be explained by the principle of natural selection. Above all, we can now understand the irrepressible vitality of religion and spirituality, which gives a clue to the true secret of the evolutionary process, what it means and where it is going. As Swami Vivekananda said:

It is all He. He Himself is both the material and the efficient cause of this universe, and He it is that gets involved in the minute cell, and evolves at the other end and becomes God again. He it is that comes down and becomes the lowest

atom, and slowly unfolding His nature, rejoins Himself. This is the mystery of the universe.... The whole of this life which slowly manifests itself, evolves itself from the protoplasm to the perfected human being—the Incarnation of God on earth—the whole of this series is but one life, and the whole of this manifestation must have been involved in that very protoplasm. This whole life, this very God on earth, was involved in it and slowly came out, manifesting itself slowly, slowly, slowly.<sup>4</sup>

The Darwinian theory, which appeared to leave no alternative to a stark materialism, was thus transmuted into a vision of the progressive manifestation of God on earth. This interpretation of evolution was later elaborated by Sri Aurobindo. It has the potential to satisfy both the progressive impulse of the modern mind and the perennial aspiration of the human soul. It does not require any denial of scientifically demonstrable truth with regard to the role of natural selection in bringing about the development of physical organisms. What is disputed is only the right of science itself to deny the reality of consciousness and spirit, which its methods are incapable of investigating.

If evolution is the result of a previous involution, then the appearance of living and thinking creatures in this seemingly lifeless, mindless universe becomes natural and inevitable and no longer an improbable accident. But then there is no reason to assume that the arrival of the human species is the end of the process. If more than mind was involved in matter at the beginning, it is sure to emerge sooner or later. What concerns us here is the place of India in this evolutionary scheme. For this country, whose culture appeared in Darwin's time to be a relic of a bygone era and doomed to a speedy extinction, may turn out to possess the key to the future. The logic that seemed to prove Western man with his scientific efficiency to be the end-product of an evolution driven by the competition for survival breaks down if what is ultimately behind evolution is the unfolding of an involved consciousness which may have higher degrees than the rational mind.

In India, the attempt to evolve a faculty beyond mind began long ago and has been going on for centuries as if in a huge laboratory of consciousness research. But this many-sided experimentation in approaching a higher reality from every conceivable angle seems to have lacked a full awareness of its evolutionary significance, since the concept of evolution itself had not been clearly articulated. Without such a concept, positively linking spirituality to the aim of terrestrial existence, the spiritual endeavour came to be seen more and more as a way of escaping from the prison of an irremediably unsatisfactory world. The growth of the otherworldly motive coincided with and reinforced a slow decline in the vitality of the culture as a whole. While the inner life of exceptional individuals was a field of progress and discovery, the outer life of society stagnated in an unchanging groove, becoming vulnerable to disintegration from within and disruption from outside.



Eventually, India's spiritual life itself was endangered by the inertia that had overtaken the collective existence. Then, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mighty spirits arose to revive the languishing *dharma*. But even these could not entirely throw off the *tamas* that had gripped the country, paralysed as it was by centuries of social immobility. Sri Aurobindo wrote about the effect of Swami Vivekananda's work:

Vivekananda was a soul of puissance if ever there was one, a very lion among men, but the definite work he has left behind is quite incommensurate with our impression of his creative might and energy. We perceive his influence still working gigantically, we know not well how, we know not well where, in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that has entered the soul of India and we say, "Behold, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children."<sup>5</sup>

Much the same thing might be said about Sri Aurobindo himself. Whereas the theories of Darwin and Einstein almost immediately revolutionised Western science and strongly affected European thought in general, India has paid hardly more than lip-service to the no less revolutionary work of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. Religion and spirituality in India, where the grand Upanishadic synthesis of revealed knowledge became fragmented long ago into a myriad sects and schools, have continued largely in the grooves established during a period of contraction of the collective life.

Today the threat to the survival of India's distinctive spirit is perhaps more serious than it was even in the time of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda when the power of the British empire looked irresistible. The invasion of an alien culture is subtler, more insidious and pervasive. On the other hand, the violent upsurge of religious conservatism which this invasion has recently provoked is a regressive movement. India's unique culture can most effectively be preserved intact, not by a hopeless counter-evolutionary attempt to avoid modernisation, but by a creative assimilation of what has to be gained from this age of rationalistic individualism and scientific progress, establishing a solid material and intellectual foundation of the national life as the starting-point for a new phase of spiritual evolution.

In ancient times, India pulsed with life and creativity in every sphere. If an excessive otherworldly tendency has contributed to her weakness in recent centuries, it is only natural that some of the country's progressive minds have grown averse to the spirituality that seems to have been partly the cause of this downfall. They forget that an unspiritual India would have relatively little to offer the world and that turning away from the national *dharma* at a moment of crisis could be more fatal than the past mistake of pursuing that *dharma* too narrowly. Surely it would be far better to encourage a dynamic spirituality free of one-sided, world-shunning tendencies. Sri

Aurobindo pointed out the incompleteness of the form of spirituality that is often assumed to be its loftiest type. Proposing an integral, life-affirming alternative, he wrote:

A spirituality of this intolerant high-pointed kind, to whatever elevation it may rise, however it may help to purify life or lead to a certain kind of individual salvation, cannot be a complete thing. For its exclusiveness imposes on it a certain impotence to deal effectively with the problems of human existence; it cannot lead it to its integral perfection or combine its highest heights with its broadest broadness. A wider spiritual culture must recognise that the Spirit is not only the highest and inmost thing, but all is manifestation and creation of the Spirit. It must have a wider outlook, a more embracing range of applicability and, even, a more aspiring and ambitious aim of its endeavour. Its aim must be not only to raise to inaccessible heights the few elect, but to draw all men and all life and the whole human being upward, to spiritualise life and in the end to divinise human nature.<sup>6</sup>

The idea of divinising human nature may sound like an unheard-of contradiction of both materialistic common-sense and the wisdom of the ages, which holds that divinity is not to be found on earth but only in heavens beyond. Yet such an audacious conception is a logical consequence of the synthesis of ancient and modern knowledge that leads us to see evolution as a gradual unfolding of the Spirit involved in matter. In Sri Aurobindo's view, the total movement of India's many-sided spiritual culture has always been directed towards this evolutionary goal, even when its highest explicitly formulated aim was a cessation of the troubled cycle of birth and death and a departure into the everlasting Silence. This negative formulation was at one time felt necessary in order to maintain the purity of the spiritual ideal and avoid lowering it by any compromise with material life. But to confront successfully the challenges of modern times, what is needed is a spirituality that neither rejects life nor compromises with it, but accepts it in order to transform it.

If Swami Vivekananda was right and India's mission among the world's peoples is to lead the way towards the evolution of a spiritual humanity, a humanity open to a deeper and higher reality and aware of the one Self in all, then an awakening of the country to a consciousness of this mission is long overdue. A first step towards such an awakening might be to get rid of the habit of identifying spirituality with traditions of the past and to start perceiving and practising it as a force of the future.

The future spirituality cannot be bound by an existing tradition, but must be an adventure into the unknown in much the same way as physical science is in its own field. To fulfil its evolutionary purpose, it cannot be confined to the time-honoured aim of liberating the soul, but must go on from there to attempt the transformation of human nature in all its parts. The difficulty of such an integral transformation is no

argument against accepting it as an ideal. The character of Indian civilisation in the past was largely shaped by its ideal of Moksha, spiritual liberation, though the attainment of this goal cannot have been common. Integral transformation is a still more difficult goal, but the attempt to achieve it would be supported by the wonder-working force of evolution that has never tired of doing the apparently impossible. An India inspired by this most uplifting of all ideals would be on the way to the fulfilment of the total meaning of its agelong spiritual quest and, imparting its wisdom to all, would deserve a place at the forefront of the nations in a more enlightened and harmonious world-order.

RICHARD HARTZ

### *Notes and References*

1. On the assumption that evolution is a physical process that has reached more or less the limit of what Nature can do by her old slow methods, it has recently been speculated that further evolution could be brought about by human beings themselves using technology to modify their own bodies and brains. “Transhumanists” foresee the creation, by scientific means, of “posthumans” endowed with “superintelligence”, free from irrational behaviour and immune to disease and death. On the other hand, according to an opposite view of the possible outcomes of technological development, modern man’s power over his environment may be the greatest threat to his very survival. Not being accompanied by wisdom and self-mastery, his recklessly misused technology is rapidly destroying the environment on which he depends and could lead to the extinction of the human race along with much other life on earth.

2. “Reply to the Madras Address” in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2002), Vol. 4, pp. 331-32.

3. *Jnana-Yoga* in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 2, pp. 207-9.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 211, 228.

5. Sri Aurobindo, *Bankim-Tilak-Dayananda* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1991), p. 45.

6. Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture*, CWSA, Vol. 20, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2002), p. 197.

*... there can be no doubt that man is full of divine possibilities—he is not merely a term in physical evolution, but himself the field of a spiritual evolution which with him began and in him will end. It was only when man was made, that the gods were satisfied—they who had rejected the animal forms,—and cried sukṛtameva, “Man indeed is well and wonderfully made; the higher evolution can now begin.”*

Sri Aurobindo

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 7)

## A CLEAR RAY AND A LAMP—AN EXCHANGE OF LIGHT

(Continued from the issue of February 2005)

ON 11.8.81 I was surprised to receive yet another handwritten letter from Amal in which he shares the astonishing information that he has revised Sankalia's review in both matter and style! He asks,

Did any letter of yours to me go astray? I have been anxiously waiting to hear that you got my Shakespeare book safely (*I had offered to carry Amal's research on the Sonnets to England to show publishers*). In your present epistle there is no reference to it. So I infer that you wrote of it earlier but the news never reached me. Perhaps the inference was not perfectly Holmesian. "Holmesian", by the way, is to be pronounced "Hol-me-sian" by the initiates. No news of Sankalia disentangling himself from his Gordian knots. But his Intro to my new book is good. I had to revise it here and there, both as to matter and manner. He has fully approved of my work and sanctioned the publication of it... May I see your review of my book, *The Problem*?

Sankalia's review came out in the September 13, 1981, *Sunday Times of India*, and Amal's rejoinder "Dr. Sankalia, Aryan Origins and Sri Aurobindo: An Appreciation and a Clarification" in the 11<sup>th</sup> October Sunday edition. Informing me of this, Amal wrote on 6.10.81 that he was busy reorganising and rewriting his Purana-Megasthenes "masterpiece" which would now be in three parts: the challenge of India's traditional chronology; the crucial evidence of Megasthenes; a reconstruction of ancient Indian history. This is what was published later as *Ancient India in a New Light*. "What is your opinion of this scheme?" asked Amal after intimating, "Two days back I sent you by registered bookpost *King Jesus*,<sup>1</sup> slightly anointed by wiped-off bird-blessing."

Even in a postcard Amal could pack in precious guidance. Thus, on 13.10.81 he wrote:

The best and most reliable translation of the Gita is, of course, in Anil Baran's publication containing notes from Sri Aurobindo and two Appendices. I have heard of Mascaro's rendering but its having taken 20 years to complete and 20 times' rewriting cannot prevent it from having at least 20 mistakes in translation and construing. One must know what the Gita was driving at. This can be found only in Sri Aurobindo's rendering, which in most part is in AB's book.

He went on to update me on his latest publication, *Karpāsa*:

1. Robert Graves' outstanding novel that Amal had not read. So I sent him my copy.

As soon as it comes out of the press you and Goel will have the first copies. Thanks for your eagerness to review *Karpāsa*.... Don't do anything with the Harappa book. It doesn't now exist as an entity by itself. It has been partly cut up into *The Problem & Karpāsa*. *Megasthenes* is getting retyped in somewhat revised form.

After an unusual silence, I received this handwritten postcard dated 1.12.81 where he ends in his typical punning style:

Sorry to have neglected you so long. Or have I forgotten having attended to you some time back? My correspondence at present is in a bit of Lethe-mood. Thanks for the new *Kronos* and your magisterial preview of my *Harappa*. I wonder what the reactions of the old guard—Lal *et al*—will be like. The joke of the season is Sankalia's latest note to me. I am making an accurate copy below: "After reading your elucidating, a friend of mine was wondering whether the spiritual bases has any material bases or not? Or exists simply in air?"

The first two parts of my *Megasthenes* are almost ready. They have been enlarged now and can very well make the first push of a battering ram against the stronghold of the current chronology. If my effort has the Divine's blessings, we may speak of my "Battering Rām" in the Lanka of fixed historical ideas.

Amal's letter of 22.4.82 is a veritable pot-pourri. It revives the Velikovsky theme and shows how Amal kept improving his research on Megasthenes by accepting any reasonable suggestion and adds some 'masala' regarding controversial topics:

Going through *Kronos* I could see that in some places old V needs a bit of revision; but by and large his thesis is upheld by the researchers. A final assessment is still to come. Unfortunately his critics are preoccupied with his scientific "heresies": no accredited historian has thoroughly scrutinised his historical revolution. To come across the name of the French savant Drioton as one impressed by V was rather impressive for me; but Drioton has not wholly declared himself a Velikovskian—he has only kept a very open mind and affirmed that V appears to make a sort of case.... How did you find Chakravarti's arguments? At the moment I am not particular about the Indus script. But I should like to know B. B. Lal's view of Chakravarti. I am sorry to hear that Lal has not turned again to the Dravidian interpretation and made a re-view of Mahadevan's thesis which Mahadevan has tried to modify a little because of Lal's earlier criticism.... He (*Sita Ram Goel*) made a very intelligent suggestion for a small change in the treatment of the Indian Dionysus *vis-à-vis* the number of kings between Dionysus and Sandrocottus. Instead of first identifying the former and then counting the kings downward or forward he proposed that I should count 153 or 154 kings

first upward or backward from Chandragupta Maurya and then from Chandragupta I and see where I arrive. In the one case I arrive nowhere, in the other at Prithu Vainya. After this I should take up the theme of Prithu Vainya and Dionysus. Such a sequence would smack less of a preconceived procedure...

In mid-1982 I left for post-graduate studies at the Manchester University. Amal wrote to me there on 12.3.83 in response to my letter of 7 December. He explains that the long delay has been due to his Shakespeare book that has become "something like what the *Divina Commedia* was to Dante. He writes that for 11 years it has made him lean. "I don't yet have the hollow cheeks which distinguished, among other things, the 'awful Florentine'. But I feel some strain as a result of the expansions and corrections which up to yesterday I have carried out for the last few months." He had done dealing with the Fair Youth and the Dark Lady but found time to reply to me before grappling with the Rival Poet. Apropos the use of 'awful' for Dante, Amal quotes the compliment paid by James I to Christopher Wren after viewing St. Paul's Cathedral: "It is awful, artificial and amusing" which overwhelmed the architect, because in the 16<sup>th</sup> century it meant "awe-inspiring, artistic and amazing". This exchange, like many others in our correspondence, finds place in *Life-Poetry-Yoga*.

The same letter shows how keen he was to pass on to me anything that would be in my line of interest. Thus, he informs me that I would find Ken Wilbur's *Up from Eden* interesting. "What makes me say that it is up your street is the fact that it deals with legends and mythologies and occult lines and touches on Joseph Campbell and Eric Neumann who are mythologists well known to you."

There is a hiatus in correspondence after this. I had left Mussoorie, served in Murshidabad and been transferred to Kolkata where I was shifted about whimsically. Amal wrote a sweetly comforting letter dated 30.8.85:

I am sorry you had to pass through a bitter period. You must have offended some people by being just and fair to their opponents. Blackening your name is their way of trying to show you that only corruption really pays. I am glad you have come out of the gloom this attack had cast upon you. The coincidence of the emergence into light with Sri Aurobindo's birthday prompts me to quote those lines from *Savitri* that are some of my guide-lines:

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

Have you had the time to find out something helpful on the Unadi-sutras and the occurrence of the word "dinara" in them, to which some old commentators have given Indian roots and interpreted as meaning a gold seal or ornament?... When are you visiting Pondi again?

The letter carried the welcome news that at long last his Shakespeare book had been reviewed in *The Hindu* by Shyamala Narayan (reprinted in *Mother India* September 1985).

Amal was now busy completing *The Beginning of History for Israel*. His letter of 19.11.85 states that he has been busy revising it extensively. For the first time one finds Amal regretting that he has had to demolish one of his favourite writers, besides a quite unusual—for him—reference to the weather and the Prime Minister:

You will be interested to know that a long appendix has been added: “Velikovsky’s Chronological Challenge.” I have dealt at full length with his dating of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III, the two Egyptian rulers vital to my thesis on Moses and the Exodus. Velikovsky has been a favourite of mine for long and it was not enjoyable to demolish his basic thesis. I thought of an incident connected with Father Divine, the Negro God on earth who has a large following in the States. He was imprisoned for some legal misbehaviour and was waiting final trial which was to come off a week or so later. In the meantime the Judge who was to try him died. When the news was brought to Father Divine, he said: “I am sorry, but I had to do it.”

Maggi has written a long novel telling the story of the *Mahabharata*. She considers it her masterpiece but Gollancz, her usual publisher, is hesitant to stake money on it<sup>2</sup> ... She has made quite a name for herself here as a homeopath. Not only has she been practising impressively but others have caught fire from her and started treating people with success. Have you been continuing your own practice? We have been having rather an excessive form of what the “brown Englishmen” of the old days of the Raj used to call “home weather”. The devastation was sufficient to call Rajiv to make a helicopter survey of both Madras and Pondi. As he hovered for some time over us I hope he has caught a bit of the Mother’s atmosphere. His actions in the near future will show whether he has caught it or not.

Amal sent me the typescript of his elaborate demolition of Velikovsky for comments. It took me some time to digest and react, and he became impatient. He wrote a long letter dated 16.5.86 which deals with diverse matters such as his newest publication effort from his own slender resources:

The very day your packet came I was thinking of asking you whether my Appendix had reached you or not. For the delay in referring to it was quite substantial. I am glad you have gone through the Appendix, but I have the suspicion that it suggests Appendicitis to you. The one overall remark of yours

2. Her trilogy was published first by Writers Workshop and then the first 2 novels were brought out by ROLI with an Introduction by me that has been reprinted in *M.I.*

that you agree with “Dhruva’s incisive comments” makes me think you are not convinced by my lengthy attempt to demonstrate that Hatshepsut could not be the biblical Queen of Sheba nor Tuthmosis III the Bible’s Shishak. This is disappointing because what Dhruva has said does not really nullify my attempt: it only calls attention to certain supposed showings of Velikovsky outside my theme proper. Dhruva’s contention is that V’s dating of H and T is connected with his challenge to current geophysical and cosmological ideas. True, but the connection can be vital only if that challenge were unanswerable. In fact there has been no certainty about his scientific notions — namely, that Venus broke away from Jupiter and got caught in our solar system and has been moving nearer earth and away from it and also that Mars has been doing something similar. Apart from purely scientific pros and contras, there is the question of V’s claim that his theories are borne out by various accounts in ancient literature. Here his treatment is bound to be rather subjective. For instance, what Greek mythology says is not that Venus sprang out of the head of Jupiter but that Minerva did so. Again, there is a reference to a book called *Ezhurvedam* about which you once queried me. I replied that this was a garbled mention of the Yajur Veda. Since then I have learned that there was actually a book entitled *Ezhurvedam* but it was a European forgery in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A. A. Macdonell writes about it in his *History of Sanskrit Literature*. It was uncritical of V to bring it in.

Leaving all this matter aside, I would like to ask whether Dhruva or you have any direct criticism to make of my thesis. Dhruva’s mind can be read by the question he put to me: “While granting that Hatshepsut was not the Queen of Sheba, can’t we still hold that she flourished in the same age as Sheba and Solomon did?” I replied: “No, we can’t.” And there are several reasons for it. One reason is that Hatshepsut’s account of the range of her empire clashes with the Bible’s account of that of Solomon’s: they would be simultaneously ruling over the same territory! Evidently Dhruva was not able to counter my position *vis-à-vis* Hatshepsut and the Queen of Sheba. And evidently V’s general chronological scheme which is linked with his geophysical and cosmological vision demands that Hatshepsut should be contemporary with Solomon. There is also the Ipuwer Papyrus by which V sets great store: the events sensationally evoked in it he has tried to equate with the miracles listed in the Exodus story. By this equation it seems Hatshepsut must come in time during Solomon’s reign. But all we can study sets the two sovereigns wide apart. If we can’t identify the Egyptian Queen with the Queen of Sheba the contemporaneity of the two sovereigns is out of the question.

The sole telling point Dhruva makes is in connection with Tuthmosis III’s detailed account of the treasures he brought from the sack of Kadesh—an account V has cleverly tallied with the Bible’s narration of the treasures of Solomon’s



house and temple. I have never so far put him to every possible test, but the general impression I get from the historian's story of the rich spoils from Megiddo is that Tuthmosis did not need to ransack Solomon's Jerusalem for the booty he depicts on the wall of his inscription. If we waive my present lack of a minute refutation of V's case in respect of the matter here, I believe that Dhruva has found no weakness in my manifold argument to separate T from the time of Rehoboam and to place Punt far from Palestine—except for the somewhat hair-splitting objection that “south-east” is not sufficiently “east” for the sun to rise from it.

You have two initial problems: (1) “why is ‘inverted water’ = Indian Ocean?” (2) “Nowhere is Pharaoh's daughter cited as the chief wife.” Neither problem has any genuine bearing on my central thesis, but they are not unnatural in the context. The Tigris and the Euphrates are also known as inverted river because, unlike the Nile, they flow from north to south instead of south to north. May be the sea into which they flow becomes because of them inverted water. No doubt, it is the Persian Gulf into which they flow, and not the Red Sea which is involved in the seeking of Punt in a south-eastern direction, but this sea also begins for the Egyptians at its north end, unlike the Nile which starts from the south. Anyway, the expression “inverted water” is interpreted by Egyptologists as the Indian Ocean which comprises both the Red Sea and the Persian gulf, as well as what we know as the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. As for the “Pharaoh's daughter”, she is the only wife of Solomon's who is made much of, being several times mentioned separately as the one for whom a house was built and who entered David's city and for whom Pharaoh burnt Gezer in order to give the captured city as a present to her. She is not openly characterised as “chief wife” but the importance and prominence given to her leaves little doubt of the writer's intention.

Your final problem is the lack of mention in the O.T. of a female Pharaoh. What exactly are you driving at? If you are underlining the O.T.'s omission of any such person in the time of Solomon you are making a point in my favour. Or are you glancing at my thesis that the person who is called “Pharaoh's daughter” in *Exodus* and whom I identify with Queen Hatshepsut is not mentioned as a Pharaoh in the same book? I have discussed this point in *The Beginning of History for Israel* when I endeavour to show that there were several Pharaohs involved in the tale of the suffering in Egypt and the escape from it—and not just two as commonly believed: The Pharaoh of the Oppression and the Pharaoh of the Exodus. While the Pharaoh of the Exodus is one, there are several Pharaohs of the Oppression and in the midst of them “Pharaoh's daughter” can be found to have formed an interlude, covering 22 years of Moses' life before he became 40 years old.

Dhruva at the end of my Appendix has asked how the case I have made

against V would affect V's overall theory. Here he appears to accept my demonstration as definitive but still attaches value to V's hypotheses outside the particular historical context with which I have dealt. I may get a special copy made of my piece and send it, as you suggest, to the Society for Interdisciplinary studies.

You will be pleased to learn that before getting your letter I decided to use Gauri Dharmapal's review<sup>3</sup> in *Mother India*. It will appear in the June issue. You are right in recollecting that Megasthenes refers to Krishna under the name of Heracles. I'll try to locate the passages and send them to you.

I heard from Sukanta Chaudhuri. He likes my book<sup>4</sup> but can't understand why I take the span of life to be 60 years and not the psalmist's well-known span of four score years and ten. I wrote to him an explanatory letter. He should be back now from the Berlin festival. I would be very much interested to hear of the various discussions.

My historical mammoth has advanced considerably in the proof stage. About one-tenth of it still remains to be done. I'll certainly tell Goel to advise the *Statesman* or any other paper to send the book to you for review. I wonder how many reviewers will have the stamina to go through nearly 600 pages and be able to keep the multitudinous subjects in mind.

Thanks for sending me your brother's English address and suggesting that I should request him to help me with my Blake. What I may do is to send him a copy of the first two chapters which had been printed as part of the Doraiswamy Felicitation Volume by Annamalai University. He may show them to whatever publisher he thinks suitable.

By the way I am bringing out in book form *The English Language and The Indian Spirit: Correspondence between Kathleen Raine and K. D. Sethna*, 500 copies in paperback. This is my first—and almost certainly the last and sole—publishing venture with my own money. It will cost Rs. 6,500 at our Press. 1,000 copies will cost 7,000. A businessman may ask me to go in for them, but there is the problem of storing them. [SABDA] can store only a few.

The next letter is dated 7.6.86. I had not been able to attend to Amal's queries because of an extended period of interviewing candidates in the Public Service Commission. It is humbling to see his complete absence of egotism in valuing my verdict on his thesis, although he was so much more senior in age and his reading in the relevant literature was incomparably more profound and vast. The letter also shares little-known information regarding the Mother's earlier emanations:

Yes, the intellectual standard today is appallingly low. I hope by now your

3. Of my *Secret of the Mahabharata*, which Amal had initially put aside as an unsolicited piece.

4. On the Dark Lady and Mr. W.H.

interviews are over and you can attend to what I am enclosing. In my last letter I expressed my idea to take up Velikovsky's strongest point and deal with it critically. Now I have done so and the few pages which have to be added to the Appendix await your verdict. After you have returned them I'll show them to Dhruva.

You have asked me whether I would link my treatment of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III in the Velikovskian context with V's overall scheme. What exactly do you mean by "overall"? His scientific suppositions? I think I should leave them alone. The field is too complex for me and it is very controversial as well. What I can do is at most to deal with his view and dating of the Exodus. Perhaps I should leave aside the dating, which will involve his estimate of the length of the Hyksos period and some other calculations. The pertinent thing for me will be only a consideration of the equation he makes of the catastrophes in Egypt according to the Bible in connection with the Exodus and the catastrophes recounted in the Ipuwar Papyrus, the Ermitage Papyrus and the *Naos* (Shrine) found in el-Arish. The equation forms one of the highlights of *Ages in Chaos*.

Your question about the Old Testament and the female Pharaoh is, I take it, in relation to the Bible's story of Moses where the one female character is the Pharaoh's daughter. I have touched upon the subject in my book. But the absence of a female Pharaoh in the documents dealing with Solomon is a strong point against Hathsepsut being a contemporary of Solomon. Indeed the Pharaoh's daughter is mentioned but as Solomon's wife. If we wish to join up and identify the two daughters—the one of *Exodus* and the one of *I Kings*—we shall suggest Hatshepsut to be Solomon's wife instead of being a Queen of Egypt! And, of course, Hatshepsut can't be at the same time Solomon's wife and the Queen of Sheba. Quite a *khichdi* would come out of such a perspective.

As for identifying the Queen of Sheba, it is not necessary for my purpose. All I can whisper in your ear is that Nolini once said that Sri Aurobindo had been Solomon and the Mother the Queen of Sheba. Nolini has also confirmed that the Mother had also been Queen Hatshepsut. So Velikovsky is perfectly right in visioning the two of them—Sheba and Hatshepsut—as being the same person but in a sense beyond his comprehension and having nothing to do with his chronology. By the way, I may say that it is possible for the Mother to be two different women in the same age. She was both Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots. In an earlier age she was at the same time Mona Lisa, Margaret de Valois and some other aristocratic lady whose name I forget for the moment. Of course we are here speaking of different partial emanations of the Mother, embodying one aspect or another aspect, and not the full central being which found embodiment only in our time.

The "inverted sea" helps my thesis only in that it points to a southern

location of Punt if the expression covers the Indian Ocean in its manifold sections. This coverage is accepted by Egyptologists—at least the sense of the Indian Ocean in its Persian Gulf aspect.”

My reply evoked an enthusiastic response dated 27.9.86 and I still remain astonished at Amal placing so much store by my opinion:

I am immensely bucked up by your seal of approval on my latest treatment of Velikovsky. I'll weave this and the earlier instalment together and make them independent of my book *The Beginning of History for Israel*, and send them to the *SIS Review*. Will you please let me have again the right address?

I would be glad to get a survey of Dr. Gauri Lad's *Mahabharata and Archaeology*.<sup>5</sup> It's a bit of a surprise to me that archaeologically the test could be pinned down to the sixth century B.C. Sankalia himself, I think, had carried the latest additions to the epic to about 400 A.D. Winternitz's estimate, which is generally accepted, is that it cannot be earlier than 400 B.C. and later than 400 A.D. My own view has not quite crystallised, but I am inclined to hold that the main part of the poem was already there in Patanjali's time: Patanjali speaks of a Pandu epic. The beginning could go back to the time of Panini as well as the *Aśvalayana grihya-sūtra* which, according to Mehendale, "knows both *Bharata* and *Mahabharata* as sacred books". Panini is well-known to have written of these books. Mehendale observes that "Panini explains the formation of the names of the epic personages and the word 'Mahabharata' which to him means 'a narrative of the Bharatas' battle." Panini's date is in dispute: the current choice is c. 450 B.C. but Belvalkar, *Systems of Sanskrit Grammar*, p.15, opts for 700-600 B.C. Ram Gopal, criticising Agrawala who has argued for 450, traces Panini to about 600-550. My own line of thought is *apropos* Panini's mention of his native *janapada* Gandhara as a "kingdom". I have to study how such a description would stand *vis-à-vis* the Achaemenid possession of Gandhara from Cyrus down to the Darius who was defeated by Alexander.

As to Dionysus and Heracles, they come in for extensive exposition in the course of my *Ancient India in a New Light* (the light now covered up by the Press's lock-out). I show that Dionysus can be equated to Prithu Vainya. I have found that, if we count back from Chandragupta I of the Imperial Guptas through the several Puranic dynasties of Magadha up to the time of the Bharata War and then backward along a line leading from Sahadeva up to the Manu Vaivasvata and then continue further till we reach Prithu we have exactly the 153 kings who are said by Megasthenes to intervene between Sandrocottus and Dionysus. The alternative number 154 which Megasthenes gives would be met if we either

5. Somehow I have yet to get down to this, although it is an invaluable work that had Dr. Sankalia as the research guide.

count Bharadwaja who is in the list but who did not actually sit on the throne or else accept 31 instead of 30 Andhras, an option open to us from the Puranas. The numerical coincidence amazed me and would confirm my equating Chandragupta I rather than Chandragupta Maurya with Sandrocottus provided I can show how well Prithu fitted the role of Dionysus as delineated by the Greek historians and Megasthenes. The fitting was perfect. The only problem that remained was to understand how Heracles, if identified with Krishna Vasudeva, could be 15 generations after Dionysus. Let me quote some passages from my book...

He went on to type out several pages from the book showing how he arrived at his conclusions. The length to which he would go to convince a correspondent was amazing indeed.

*(To be continued)*

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

*There have been dark spots, positive imperfections, heavy shortcomings; what civilisation has been perfect, which has not had its deep stains and cruel abysses? There have been considerable lacunae, many blind alleys, much uncultured or ill-cultured ground: what civilisation has been without its unfilled parts, its negative aspects? But our ancient civilisation can survive the severest comparisons of either ancient or mediaeval times. More high-reaching, subtle, many-sided, curious and profound than the Greek, more noble and humane than the Roman, more large and spiritual than the old Egyptian, more vast and original than any other Asiatic civilisation, more intellectual than the European prior to the eighteenth century, possessing all that these had and more, it was the most powerful, self-possessed, stimulating and wide in influence of all past human cultures.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Renaissance in India, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 79)*

## FOUR POEMS BY THÉMIS

### MAGDALEN

When my soul grows rich like scented oil,  
I will pour it out at your feet;  
Till then, O Love, leave me to walk  
Alone the wild night street.

Till then, O Love, let my dark hair  
Yet hide me when we meet;  
But give me strength, at last to come  
And wind it round your feet.

### ASSURANCE

When all your life has gone to pieces,  
Smashed on the stillness of your soul,  
I'll shine within the interstices  
And come and make you new and whole.

Be brave, fling all your being's treasure  
Within the fires I have lit;  
My Love has neither stop nor measure,  
So prove your love too infinite.

## REED OF THE YAMUNA

Reed of the Yamuna,  
The flute-boy is come,  
But ere through your body  
The mad rhythms hum,

O reed of the river,  
Much sorrow and strain  
Will be yours—the cleansing,  
The shaping, notched pain.

From touch of sweet waters  
And cool fragrant sand,  
The strong hand shall wrench you,  
The passionate hand.

But when it puts through you,  
With swiftness and poise,  
The small knife of silver,  
Be glad and rejoice.

Reed of the Yamuna,  
The mute agony  
Will pass through your being  
And set your soul free;

Will pass like a dark spell,  
And you who endured,  
Find music and meaning  
In the breath of the Lord.

## OFFERING

Priestess, what will you sacrifice?  
The altar of the dawn's afire,  
The gods stoop from their paradise  
To taste the ash of your desire.

What can you offer save a dream?  
This body is but dust of earth,  
And life's a purple passion-stream,  
And mind a moon of airy birth.

Within the Fire offer fire,  
Your silent heart's pure lonely flame;  
What have you lovelier or higher  
To burn before his beauteous Name?

O priestess-soul, before He call,  
The Sun-God of the mystic dance,  
Gather your strength and lay your all  
Upon the dawn's red altar-trance.

Then He, the Lord of sacrifice  
Will open his gold-gates of grace,  
And lay upon your new-born eyes  
The lustrous vision of his face.

*(Poems by Thémis, pp. 16, 17, 27, 31)*



## TO THÉMIS

O Poetess, you move me.  
You kindle fire within my heart  
And rhymes within my brain.  
When I had put your book of verse apart  
And needed sleep  
Your cadence rocked me like a lullaby  
And I had psychic tears to weep.  
When I needed to awake, their cry  
Whipped me to aspire and idle dreams unmake.

When I read your Magdalen  
A sort of silent sob was wrenched from me.  
I saw her walking down the wild night street  
Her hair still scented from the oil she poured upon His feet,  
And she is what in me for all soul's yearning fails to give its all.  
And she is too the promise of the passion that  
  one day will batter down the wall—  
The quiet white passion tingling in every nerve.  
Nothing less will serve.

And I am the Yamuna's reed  
That once felt the sharp knife's point  
That, in the pain's ecstatic trance,  
Both sears the heart and gouges out the knotty joint  
To free the notes that call us to the mystic dance.

O Poetess, you evoke the rocks of our resistances  
But never fail to strike them open with your wand  
To let the light stream through their interstices  
So that their role we understand.  
You lead us down repeated lives, both blind and vain.  
You swing us into universes  
Where age after age the stars in endless cycles wheeling  
Toss our souls upon the seas again,  
But ere despair can overtake us  
You bring us home to Love and Light in living  
And always Love has the last word  
That answers to self giving

You have given us the key:  
 When we offer our desire  
 The gods lean down its ash to taste  
 Once we have flung it in the fire.  
 Fire into fire. All else will go to waste.

All else will go to waste.

When to the dreaded sword the heart is bared by our own choice  
 We'll hear the hurried turning of the welcoming key  
 Then will the sealed doors fly apart  
 And we will hear His voice.  
 "Beloved come to me"

O Poetess of whom our Master said  
 You have the power of the revelatory image.  
 You who Mother dubbed of Justice the Goddess,  
 You move us,  
 You do indeed reveal the world.  
 You have the power of the word.  
 In silence now,  
 To you today we bow.

MAGGI

*There is a sovereign royalty in taking no thought for oneself. To have needs is to assert a weakness; to claim something proves that we lack what we claim. To desire is to be impotent; it is to recognise our limitations and confess our incapacity to overcome them.*

*If only from the point of view of a legitimate pride, man should be noble enough to renounce desire. How humiliating to ask something for oneself from life or from the Supreme Consciousness which animates it! How humiliating for us, how ignorant an offence against Her! For all is within our reach, only the egoistic limits of our being prevent us from enjoying the whole universe as completely and concretely as we possess our own body and its immediate surroundings.*

*Such too should be our attitude towards the means of action.*

*The Mother*

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 354)*

## BETWEEN THE ARRIVAL AND THE DEPARTURE

*(Continued from the issue of February 2005)*

IN the month of January 1930 I heard that Barin-da had returned to Calcutta from Pondicherry and was staying on the first floor of the Arya Publishing House. Immediately I went to meet him. Many of his admirers, such as Birendra Kishore Roychaudhury, were already there. I touched his feet and enquired after his health. He smiled at me and asked me to see him the next afternoon. But before I saw him again, I received a letter from Dilip. He wrote, "I have to give you a bad news: Barin-da has left the Ashram. Most probably he will now live in Calcutta. If you meet him, please let me know how you find him and anything of importance that he might tell you. We are all upset at his sudden departure. If such a great sadhak, doing sadhana for so long, cannot continue, what is in store for us?"

Next day I went see Barin-da after lunch. He was alone. "I am sure you want to know what I am doing here," he said. "Yes, I have left the Ashram. No, not for any particular reason. For some time I had been feeling like visiting Bengal. I wrote to Sej-da and asked for his permission. His answer was that I must not leave the Ashram. Something in me was much disturbed. So I came away in spite of his objection."

I listened in silence. What could I say? Barin-da had certainly not done the right thing, as he himself knew only too well.

\*

I had a sudden longing to go to Pondicherry. February 21 was near at hand—a day of Darshan, celebrating the Mother's birthday. We would see the Mother and Sri Aurobindo together and receive their blessings. I wrote to Dilip about my desire. I also wrote to the secretary, Nolini Kanta Gupta. Dilip's letter came, "Mother has given her permission. Come for the Darshan." I saw Barin-da and informed him about my forthcoming trip to Pondicherry. He was very happy. He said, "Come and see me before you go. I would like to send something with you." When I went to him just before my departure, he gave me two beautiful flower vases and said, "Please give these vases to the Mother as my offering."

Taking a fortnight's leave from the Radio Office, I left for Pondicherry. There was no bus service as yet from Madras. I took the night train from Egmore Station and reached Pondicherry early in the morning. Dilip had come to receive me. He took me to his house. After breakfast, I set out by myself to see the Ashram. I found a marked difference between the way things had been nine years ago, when I had come here in the year 1921 and stayed for five months in close proximity of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and as they were now. There were very few people then, not more than ten or twelve. We all lived together in a pleasantly informal manner. Now the environment was totally different. Everybody looked very serious and talked

very little. I met Sahana Devi inside the Ashram compound. She too seemed to have changed. She merely said, "So you've come!" That was all the greeting I got from her. It was as though she was reluctant to waste time through unnecessary conversation. Dilip too had changed but had not yet become as stern about his sadhana as some of the others. After I returned from the Ashram Main Building, I recounted my observations to him. Quite naturally, our conversation drifted to the subject of Barin-da's decision to leave the Ashram. We speculated that perhaps he was upset that he could not see Sri Aurobindo as freely as in the olden days or perhaps he was not happy with the new rules governing the Ashram life. When I showed him the flower vases that Barin-da had sent for the Mother, Dilip was pleasantly surprised.

The much-awaited February 21 arrived. A few visitors had come from different parts of India and abroad for the occasion. Together with the Ashramites, about two hundred people would have the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's Darshan. The Darshan would begin at seven in the morning. A notice had been put up near the staircase in the Meditation Hall, listing the names of those who had been given permission to come for the Darshan and the time allotted to each person. Following the serial order, we started to go up to the first floor, some carrying an offering of flowers, some bouquets while others garlands. Each person came down after seeing Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as though moving in a trance. My turn came. Slowly, I climbed the stairs and reached a corridor upstairs. In a room at the end of the corridor, I saw the Mother and Sri Aurobindo sitting still on a sofa; Sri Aurobindo was on the left side of the Mother. I bowed, placed my bouquets before them and did my pranam touching their feet. Both of them placed their hand on my head and blessed me. It was an indescribable experience for me.

After the Darshan, everybody sought solitude to sit quietly for some time in total silence. This was the time when they received almost palpably a touch of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's grace in various ways.

When visitors to the Ashram returned to Calcutta after having Sri Aurobindo's Darshan, they invariably commented on the beauty of Sri Aurobindo's appearance and especially his golden complexion. I too was now wonder-struck on seeing his divine countenance. Nine years ago when I had seen him everyday for five months, I had seen a great yogi, but of a rather dark complexion. This great godlike transformation amazed me no end.

In later years, inspired by my experience of this Darshan I had offered my pranams to Sri Aurobindo in the form of a hymn, *Kanakajyoti-kalebaradhari*:

O Thou of luminous golden countenance,  
O Thou who dwellest in my heart during my meditation,  
O Thou, the liberator of the whole world,  
I bow to Thee, Sri Aurobindo, Lord of the Yoga.

\*

At the beginning of 1934, I shifted to a new house, known as Jatindra Mansion, in North Calcutta. My younger daughter, Bokul, was born here on April 19, 1935. I had rented a four-room flat on the first floor. My second-floor neighbour was Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri, the world-renowned man of letters. But at that time he was still far from achieving his present fame, although we, who knew him intimately, were astonished by the breadth, the depth and the versatility of his knowledge. Literature, history, science, painting, architecture, military strategy, even western music—his unbelievable scholarship embraced everything. I would like to mention an incident. The gramophone company, His Master's Voice, had just released a record of my songs. I thought of playing the record to Nirad-babu. When I asked him if he would like to listen to it, rather reluctantly he said, "Your songs recorded? Oh, all right." He did not have a phonograph. So I took my machine and the record to his flat and played both the sides.

He commented, "Perhaps they have done the recording quite well, but it does not sound good. The root cause lies in your machine and the needle which went over the record. In our country nobody has yet produced a gramophone machine or a gramophone needle of sufficiently good standard, which can reproduce the voice of the singer with any fidelity."

Saying this Nirad-babu brought out an English book from a cupboard and showed me an illustration of a phonograph machine with all the details about its mechanics. The machine was specially fitted with a four-foot high, horn-shaped loud speaker for a faithful reproduction of the singer's voice. The needle was not of metal but made with fibreglass. Hitherto I had been totally ignorant of all this information. Nirad-babu said, "I'm going to get this machine from England. Then you'll mark the difference."

Later, I heard from friends that Nirad-babu had imported such a machine and proved his point.

\*

I did not know about Nirad-babu's love of music. One day when he heard me speak about the orchestra that we had in our All India Radio, he told me that he would like to hear it. I readily agreed to take him with me to the Radio Station and let him hear our instrumentalists play. "Instrumentalists?" he asked in a tone of wonder. "What instruments do they play?"

When I named some of the instruments, he burst out laughing, "You can't have an orchestra with those instruments." Then he spoke in a most erudite manner on the nature of a symphony orchestra and the proper musical instruments required.

I was most impressed. I said, "I could never imagine that you would know so much about western music." Nirad-babu pointed at an almirah and said, "Those books are all on music." He got up and taking out a tastefully bound volume showed it to

me. I saw that it was a collection of staff notation. I was amazed, “You know staff notation too?”

“Yes,” was his simple answer. “I have taught myself.”

\*

Nirad-babu is well known for his writings in English, such as, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, *The Continent of Circe*, *A Passage to England*, etc., but few know that he was an equally powerful writer in his mother tongue, Bengali. His editorials, critical essays and satires bore witness to his independent mind and his novel outlook. Often he had to resign his position because he refused to shed his controversial views and come to a compromise.

In the early days of World War II, Nirad-babu had been invited by the All India Radio to broadcast a weekly assessment of the war situation. From the very beginning, Nirad-babu held the opinion that ultimately the Allied Powers would win. This was his personal view, not prompted by the British government. Most of his friends thought otherwise and argued with him, but could not shake his conviction. He had to face much adverse criticism and accusations of being an anglophile from some of the nationalist journals who wanted the British to lose the war, thereby paving the way to India’s freedom. But Nirad-babu stuck to his view.

Being his co-tenant, I knew that Nirad-babu often had to face financial difficulties. He was a regular contributor to the English magazine *The Capital*. But his income from the magazines and his radio talks were nowhere near enough to meet his living expenses. He had to take an additional employment as secretary to the well known barrister and national leader, Sarat Chandra Bose, the elder brother of Subhash Chandra.

At this time an English gentleman came from Delhi, looking for somebody well-versed in war affairs. I requested my immediate boss, the programme director, Nripendranath Majumdar, to suggest the name of Nirad C. Chaudhuri. He pooh-poohed my idea saying that they would never consider a brown skin for such an important position. But after just two days he came to me and said, “Please contact Nirad-babu immediately and tell him to meet the English gentleman from Delhi. It seems that he had made some enquiries on his own and the editor of *The Capital* has recommended Nirad-babu as eminently suitable for the post.”

Nirad C. Chaudhuri accepted the offer and joined the Delhi Radio Station at a starting salary of Rupees three hundred. From Calcutta we kept track of him and were happy to hear of his rapid promotions. In 1946, after my retirement from the Radio Office, I happened to be in Delhi. I paid a visit to the Radio Station to meet Nirad-babu and congratulate him. But a surprise awaited me. In his characteristic fashion, he said, “It’s true that I now hold a high post and my salary is almost four times what I got before, but I’m going to resign. One can’t work under fools. I think

I shall now go to England and seek my fortune there.” He was forty-nine years old at that time.

\*

During my tenure at the Indian State Broadcasting Service controlled by the then Government of India, I made the acquaintance of the famous tuberculosis specialist, Dr. Ramchandra Adhikari. Dr. Adhikari had received his degree of M.B. from Calcutta, M.R.C.P. from London and T.D.D. from Wales. He had come to the Calcutta Radio Station a few times and given talks on the prevention and cure of diseases. That marked the beginning of our friendship. Soon I had the opportunity of witnessing his skill and selfless dedication, when he treated a close relative of mine suffering from the deadly disease, T.B., cured him but refused to take any payment from me. It was not that he had given a special concession only to me, he was known to be a friend and helper of poets and writers, actors and actresses, singers and musicians, and others who could not afford expensive medical treatment.

Although medicine was his profession, Dr. Adhikari was keenly interested in philosophy and spirituality. Often he would drop in at my place and spend a lot of time discussing the Bhagavat Gita. He liked the exposition of Madhusudan Saraswati and with his fantastic memory could quote at will sloka after sloka from the Gita together with Madhusudan Saraswati’s commentary. One day, Dr. Adhikari came to my house and announced, “Nolini-babu, I am just back from Pondicherry!”

“What prompted you to go to Pondicherry all of a sudden?” I was curious to know.

“I had gone to Trivandrum to attend the Conference of the Philosophical Congress of which I am a member. On my way back I visited Pondicherry. My doctor friend, Nirodbaran Talukdar, whom I had met in England, lives there. He looked after me. I didn’t face any difficulty.”

Soon after I had this conversation with Dr. Adhikari, by a strange coincidence, another friend of mine came to see me.

“I’ve come to you for a little advice,” he said.

“About what?” I asked.

“You might have heard that my wife was very ill recently and that Dr. Ram Adhikari has treated her. When I had first approached him, I had told him that it was beyond my means to pay his usual fees and requested him to give me some concession. He said that he wanted to see the patient first and that we would talk about the fees later. In the last two months he has come to my house quite a few times, whenever he has deemed it necessary, to examine my wife and prescribe for her. Now she is well but he refuses to take any payment. I feel that it is my duty to give him something. Please advise me how much I should give him.”

I asked him, “How much can you afford to give?”

“I was thinking of giving him one hundred rupees.”

I said, "Don't offer him money. Go to the Arya Publishing House in College Street, buy a set of Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* in two volumes and present him that set. I am sure that he will value these books more than money."

As luck would have it, that very evening Dr. Ram Adhikari came to my house. He seemed very excited about something. "You know, Nolini-babu, a very strange thing happened today. Sometime back I had treated a lady in Amherst Street. When I had gone to her house for the first time to examine her, I realised that the family was not at all well off. So I didn't expect any fees. Imagine my surprise, when this afternoon that lady's husband came to my house and presented me with a set of Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* as a token of his gratitude for curing his wife. His gift was so precious and so unexpected that it overwhelmed me and I could not thank him enough. I wonder what made him think of such a gift!"

Here I cannot resist the temptation of recounting another anecdote about Dr. Adhikari. Once, several men came from Baruipur and requested Dr. Adhikari to come to their village to treat a patient. They promised to give him his usual fees. Dr. Adhikari went to Baruipur, but on entering the house of the patient saw the telltale signs of stark poverty. Without saying a word, he examined the patient, prescribed the medicines and gave directions for his daily care. When he was about to take his leave, the persons who had accompanied him produced two one hundred rupee notes and offering them to him, said, "Your fees, Sir."

Dr. Adhikari asked, "Is the patient paying my fees from his earnings?"

"No, Doctor-babu. We have collected this amount by getting contributions from all the villagers."

Dr. Adhikari said, "Use this money to buy medicines, fruits and other necessities for the patient. Keep him in a healthy atmosphere with plenty of light and air in his room. Be in touch with me. If necessary, I shall come again."

Dr. Ramchandra Adhikari has written many valuable books on the dreaded disease, tuberculosis. He has also authored with deep insight treatises on the Jain Philosophy which are prized by the Jain scholars. Although he was a much sought-after physician, the desire to devote himself to the study of philosophy and spiritual pursuits obsessed him. One day he took the plunge, left his lucrative medical practice and settled in Benares to study philosophy under the famous Pandit Mahamahopadhyay Gopinath Kaviraj.

\*

March 1937. Dilip Kumar Roy returned to Calcutta after spending nine years in Pondicherry. He had written to me about his impending visit. When I went to 34, Theatre Road to meet him, I found many of his relatives, friends and admirers already gathered there. Dilip was the same old person that he had been before he joined the Ashram,—affectionate, cheerful, always ready to enjoy a joke. The only change was



in the colour of his dress: yellowish saffron, instead of white. When I had last met him in 1930, he had not yet adopted this colour. In Sri Aurobindo Ashram, there were no regulations on how to dress. Many sanyasis from other Ashrams lived here who had discarded their ochre costume, symbolising renunciation, whereas Purnananda, formerly of Bharat Sevashram, continued to wear his ochre dress.

On this occasion Dilip Kumar met a very talented young singer, Uma Basu, daughter of Dharanikumar Basu, Calcutta Corporation Councillor. Uma, affectionately called Hasi, had the makings of a great singer. She had the sweetest, tuneful voice, and was capable of singing the most exacting tunes effortlessly and with perfect accuracy. During his stay in Calcutta, Dilip made it a point to go to Uma Basu's house almost every day to teach her singing. To us he was all praise for Hasi. One day he told us that he had taught her Debendranath Majumdar's well-known song, *Who can know You unless You make Yourself known*. He said, "Hasi sings the song with so much feeling in her voice that your eyes will fill with tears when you hear her."

Hasi never had any formal training in classical singing. Before he returned to Pondicherry, Dilip arranged with Bhishmadev Chattopadhyay to teach her Hindusthani Classical Music.

Next year, after the August Darshan, once again Dilip came to Calcutta. One day, he said, "Come Nolini-da, let us go to Hasi's house and see how she is faring with her Classical singing."

Bhishmadev had done a very good job. In this one year Hasi had learnt a lot. That day Bhishmadev was teaching her a song in Darbari Kanada. Hasi was singing very well. Her voice went trippingly over the notes. But when she faltered on a high note, Dilip said, "Let it be, Bhishma. Don't force her to bring out this high note and ruin her sweet voice in the process."

Bhishmadev was slightly put out. He said, "You are worrying needlessly. No harm will come to her voice if she reaches for this high note. It has happened on earlier occasions that she has failed to strike a particular note. But with a little practice she has achieved it."

But Dilip proved adamant. Hasi left that high note unscaled.

Soon it was November. The Darshan day on the 24<sup>th</sup> was approaching. Dilip returned to Pondicherry with his niece Esha, Hasi and Hasi's aunt, Lila Mitra. For some fifteen or twenty days before the Darshan, Dilip arranged for the Ashramites to hear Hasi's divine singing.

Then came the fateful 23<sup>rd</sup> day of November 1938, the eve of the Darshan. Late at night, Sri Aurobindo had a serious accident and broke his right thigh. The Darshan was postponed indefinitely. Nirodbaran has given his eyewitness account of this incident in his valuable book *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*.

...we arrived at the eve of the Darshan, November 24<sup>th</sup>... Most of the sadhaks

had gone to bed early to prepare inwardly for the great event. Over the Ashram reigned an atmosphere of deep peace and silence. Only one light was burning in Sri Aurobindo's corner room facing the street and keeping a vigil over the pervasive darkness. The Mother too had retired early leaving Sri Aurobindo at his work. He was perhaps busy with *Savitri* now that the 'avalanche of correspondence' had been arrested due to Darshan work. Thus the small hours were reached. Then in Purani's room the light was switched on; it was 2 a.m. He had to prepare hot water for the Mother's bath. At 7.30 a.m. the Darshan would start. But nobody suspected that

*Across the path of the divine Event  
The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone  
In her unlit temple of eternity,  
Lay stretched immobile upon Silence' marge.*

Breaking the profound silence the emergency bell rang from the Mother's room. Purani rushed up and found the Mother at the top of the staircase. She said, "Sri Aurobindo has fallen down. Go and fetch Dr. Manilal." Fortunately he had come for the Darshan from Gujerat. Soon he arrived and saw that Sri Aurobindo was lying on the floor in his bedroom. On his way to the bathroom he had stumbled over a tiger skin. The doctor made a preliminary examination and suspected a fracture of the right thigh bone; he asked the Mother to send for assistants. It appears that Sri Aurobindo while passing from his sitting-room to the bathroom... fell with his right knee striking the head of a tiger... Sri Aurobindo, however, remained unperturbed and tried to get up. Failing to do so, he lay down quietly expecting that the Mother would come soon. As was natural, the Mother in her turn received a strong vibration in her sleep which made her feel that something had gone wrong with Sri Aurobindo. She came in immediately and found him lying on the floor. Her intuition and good general knowledge of medical science made her suspect a fracture. She rang the emergency bell.

When we other doctors came up, we saw Dr. Manilal examining Sri Aurobindo's injured leg. The Mother was sitting by Sri Aurobindo's side, fanning him gently. I could not believe what I saw: on the one hand Sri Aurobindo lying helplessly, on the other, a deep divine sorrow on the Mother's face... My medical eye could not help taking in at a glance Sri Aurobindo's entire body and appreciating the robust manly frame. His right knee was flexed, his face bore a perplexed smile as if he did not know what was wrong with him; the chest was bare, well-developed and the finely pressed snow-white *dhoti* drawn up contrasted with the shining golden thighs, round and marble-smooth, reminiscent of Yeats's line, "World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras." A sudden fugitive vision of the Golden Purusha of the Vedas!

Each gentle movement of the leg by the doctor made Sri Aurobindo let out a short “Ah!” which prompted the Mother to ask, “Is it hurting you?” Throughout the investigation he uttered very few words, only to answer the doctor’s questions. Finally the doctor pronounced that there was a fracture of the thigh bone. Sri Aurobindo simply heard the verdict and made no comment...

The next step was to plaster the leg. Dr. Rao, a friend of the sadhak Duraiswamy and Superintendent of the Cuddalore hospital, was sent for since the local hospital might not have been able to give us the necessary equipment. Purani brought the plaster of Paris from the Government Pharmacy. At last the injured leg was put in a cast as a first aid. The next move was to take the Lord to his bed. We found it quite a job to carry him in spite of our having three muscular figures amongst us, Purani, Champaklal and Satyendra. His physical frame had considerable weight like the spiritual substance it enshrined.

\*

In the year 1938 the Engineers attached to the All India Radio, Calcutta, had built a ten kilowatt transmitter. It was to be installed on August 16. To commemorate this occasion, I got busy editing a special number of our Radio magazine, *Betar Jagat*. I went to Shantiniketan to request Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore to give some message for our magazine. But to my dismay I learnt that the poet was ill. I met Sudhakanto Roychaudhuri, Rabindranath’s personal secretary. Sudhakanto, elder brother of our poet Nishikanto, was a good friend of mine.

He said, “The illness is not anything serious, but whether the poet will agree to see you depends entirely on him. Still, let me ask him.”

After a while he came back and asked me to accompany him. I went to the inner chamber. Rabindranath was reclining in an armchair. I touched his feet and stood before him.

The poet asked, “What brings you here?”

Very hesitatingly I stated the purpose of my visit. “For this special issue of *Betar Jagat*, if we could get your blessing...”

The poet said, “People who run magazines, don’t they read newspapers? Haven’t you read in the papers that I’m not well? And that the doctors have forbidden me to do any writing work?”

I said, “I am not asking you to write an article. Just the word, “Blessings” and your signature.”

Rabindranath smiled and said, “If I open the door for you, who will stop the crowd that is waiting outside?”

I did not want to tire him. I touched his feet once more and took my leave. Deeply disappointed, I returned to Calcutta.

Three or four days later, I received a note from Sudhakanto-babu enclosing a

poem written in Rabindranath's own hand! The note read, "Soon after you left Shantiniketan, Gurudev gave me this poem, saying, 'Send it to Nolini.'"

The first two lines of the sixteen line poem ran thus:

From the courtyard of the earth, O listen,  
Rises the message of the skies.

Shantiniketan  
August 5, 1938

Rabindranath Tagore

Immediately on receiving the poem I went to the Bharat Phototype Studio for block making. In two days I received the block together with some specimen prints. The poem had been beautifully superimposed on a dim photograph of Rabindranath. I selected two of the best prints and posted them to the poet with a covering letter expressing my heartfelt gratitude. That letter of mine together with those printed copies of the poem is still preserved in the Rabindra Bhavan of Vishwa Bharati.

There is a controversial question. Who first changed the name of All India Radio to *Akashvani* and when was this change effected? There are people who hold the opinion that the title of the poem "From the courtyard of the earth" being *Akashvani*, All India Radio later adopted this name. But Tagore did not give a title to his poem. The original manuscript in his handwriting from which the block was made, proves that. However, the poem does contain the word *Akashvani* and the entire poem is replete with images of radio waves—it is that perhaps which inspired the new name of All India Radio.

The matter does not quite end here. Tagore had composed his poem on August 5, 1938. Some three years before that date, on September 10, 1935 the King of Mysore had established his private radio station, calling it *Akashvani*, which was well directed and which continued to broadcast successfully for the next twenty years. In 1955 when the Bangalore station of the All India Radio was opened, the Mysore *Akashvani* merged with it. It is unlikely that while one *Akashvani* was extant in the country All India Radio would adopt the same name. Perhaps the new name gained currency some time after the merger. There is scope for some research here.

(To be continued)

NOLINIKANTO SARKAR

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

# VASISHTHA GANAPATI MUNI

## A Clarification

IN my article “Vasishtha Ganapati Muni: His Association with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo” published in the September 2004 issue of this journal I had written:

It is interesting to note that the Muni did not know English yet many of the fundamentals of what Sri Aurobindo had written in *The Secret of the Veda* were written down by him in Sanskrit. When Sri Aurobindo was asked how it could be possible, he said that when the great truths descend they are received and given expression to by whoever is open to them.

Some of the readers have raised the question that if the Muni did not know English how did he translate into Sanskrit from the book *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo and how did he communicate with the Mother during his long interviews with Her. It is regarding this that I write a brief note here.

When I made an attempt to find some material on the Muni’s knowledge of English, I did not get any written material related to this. Then I asked Sri K. Natesan (a living disciple of the Muni and eldest resident of Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, and the Editor of the *Collected Works* of the Muni), who told me that the Muni did not know English at all. It was from Kapali Sastri that he used to understand the articles on the Veda published in the monthly *Arya*. He translated parts of *The Mother* into Sanskrit, not directly from English, but having understood the contents of it from Kapali Sastri. During interviews with the Mother there were Kodandaraman, Doraiswami, Nolini Kanta Gupta and others present with the Muni. One of them could have played the role of mediator between the Mother and the Muni. So there should be no confusion about what is mentioned in the article of the September 2004 issue of *Mother India*.

SAMPADANANDA MISHRA

## A TALE OF TWO PRISONS

### MY VISITS TO THE ALIPORE JAIL, CALCUTTA AND THE CELLULAR JAIL, PORT BLAIR

SOME years ago, in April 1987, I went to visit Mona-da (Mona Sarkar) with Debika-di. I was then young, reticent, shy and very much in awe of this stalwart of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. As advised by Debika-di I went with a bunch of ‘psychological perfection’ flowers for Mona-da and the purpose was to hear about the revolutionary activities of Sudhir Kumar Sarkar and his association with Sri Aurobindo. Mona-da warmly welcomed us in. We sat on the verandah and without much ado he started recounting tales from those fiery ‘agni-yuga’ years which kept us enthralled. I had, of course, known by then that Mona-da’s father was the famed freedom fighter, Sudhir Kumar Sarkar, although his celebrated book, *A Spirit Indomitable* had not been published then. Everything that I heard that evening was fresh and utterly new. As he shared the memoirs of his father’s association with Sri Aurobindo, his rich baritone echoed the pathos and passions of those times. I often paused to look into his eyes and noticed a deep and quiet acceptance—almost a saintly detachment, even when he narrated the most horrendous atrocities inflicted on the young revolutionaries (including Sudhir Kumar Sarkar) during their incarceration in the Alipore Jail in Calcutta and the dreaded ‘Cellular Jail’ in the Andamans. Later that evening, he showed me many documents and memorabilia associated with his father’s trial and conviction. On my way to the International Guest House I resolved to visit these two places—the Alipore Jail and the Cellular Jail. Soon afterwards, I left for England and although I was very well adjusted to British life, I used to get particularly ruffled with the issue of India’s freedom movement as presented by the British media. In 1997 during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India’s independence there was a series of programmes on the BBC to mark the occasion. Unsurprisingly, the media often described it as ‘the British departure’ from India giving one the impression that they ‘departed’ voluntarily on their own accord without the slightest hint of any freedom struggle having taken place! Another classic example illustrating the cliché that ‘an Englishman never lies, but what he tells is often far from the truth’! And although the Gandhi-Nehru legacy was touched upon, nothing at all was mentioned about the revolutionary movement in Bengal, including the Alipore Bomb trial. This caused me much indignation and frustration. More recently, when I again read Sri Aurobindo’s *Kara Kahini* and as always, was deeply moved by the contributions of these young revolutionaries inspired by Sri Aurobindo, my long-standing desire to visit the two prisons was re-kindled. After a long and patient wait the Mother finally fulfilled that wish of mine.

This essay written as a travelogue in two parts, describes my experiences as I visited the two prisons.

### **Alipore Jail, Calcutta**

I visited Calcutta during the last week of December 2003, and was quite excited to be again in the city where Sri Aurobindo was born. Dear Dolly-di and Bani-di had graciously arranged my accommodation at the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan. The Bhavan has a beautiful Samadhi with Sri Aurobindo's sacred relics enshrined in it. Although it is located right in the heart of Calcutta's commercial quarters, I was still able to feel a pervasive peace and tranquility there. I had only three days to spend and soon after my arrival I expressed my desire to visit the Alipore Jail and pay my homage to Sri Aurobindo in the very cell where he spent a full year from May 1908 to May 1909 as an under-trial prisoner during the sensational Alipore Conspiracy Case. Bengal's Alipore Conspiracy Case (1908) saw 34 revolutionaries who were accused and this included Sri Aurobindo. Some among the accused were later convicted and deported to the Cellular Jail in the Andamans—among these were Barin Ghose (Sri Aurobindo's brother), Ullaskar Dutta, Upendranath Banerjee and Hem Chandra Das. They were sent to the Andamans in 1909.

When I spoke to my friends in Calcutta about the feasibility of visiting the Alipore Jail, I learnt that in the short span of time available to me this was not likely to materialise. Making arrangements for such a special visit needed special efforts. Biswajit-da and Dashu-da at the Bhavan however assured me that they would try their very best. In these troubled times, it is no longer straightforward to visit a prison—it involves a considerable amount of red-tape involving the highest echelons of the Calcutta bureaucracy. The Alipore Jail is still a functional and high security prison (unlike the Cellular Jail which is now a museum) and dreaded convicts are routinely lodged in it. Undaunted, I prayed to the Mother to arrange everything for me. Finally, on the morning of 31 December 2003, I was told that a formal application was sent from the Bhavan to the Inspector General, Prisons, requesting him to grant me permission to visit Sri Aurobindo's cell. I had my return flight from Calcutta that evening. I waited patiently and was continuously praying. Around midday I was told that the I.G. was in a meeting and he could sign the application only upon the conclusion of that meeting. The uncertainty was a bit unnerving, but I was calm and I waited. Then, around 1 p.m. the phone rang and we were told that the I.G. had approved of my visit! I thanked the Mother profusely from the bottom of my heart. The uncertainty had certainly heightened the privilege!

The Bhavan authorities arranged for Mr. Badal Ganguly to accompany me to the Alipore Jail. When we arrived, I was pleasantly surprised that the Jail was renamed as the 'Alipore Reformation Centre'. Like all prisons, this one too had high walls. The building looked rather imposing with its turrets and a fresh coat of reddish-brown paint. We were let in by a sentry after a careful scrutiny of our entry passes. Fortunately they did not object to my carrying some agarbatthies. As we entered the foyer I wondered what it might have looked like in May 1908. Possibly, it was exactly

the same, except for the closed-circuit television camera perched high up on the wall recording all the entries and exits. We had to sign our names in a register and were then escorted by an armed guard as we made our way to the prison cell.

Although the grounds were well kept, there was a faint but nonetheless pervasive malodour in the air. I was quite impressed by the gardens—there was a profusion of roses in full bloom. Since this was a functioning prison, we saw some prisoners on the jail premises, and some were also present in the ‘recreational room’ watching television! After walking a few paces I immediately recognised Sri Aurobindo’s prison cell—his cave of tapasya! The West Bengal Government had installed a bas-relief of Sri Aurobindo as well as a commemorative plaque just outside the cell. It was heartening that the Government had acknowledged Sri Aurobindo’s contribution and we were told that even the common prisoners were allowed to spend time there quietly if they so desired. We stood silently before the courtyard—the very same courtyard where Sri Aurobindo was allowed to walk and exercise during his gruelling confinement. Then we approached the iron grating separating the courtyard from the cell. We were allowed only a few minutes inside. We went in and lit some agarbathies and meditated silently. We were in there for about 5 minutes and all along the armed guard stood outside. As we were led out, I recalled Sri Aurobindo’s matchless descriptions of the courtyard and the cell from his famous *Tales of Prison Life*:

My solitary cell was nine feet long and five feet in width; it had no windows, in front stood strong iron bars; this cage was my appointed abode. Outside was a small courtyard, with stony grounds, a high brick wall with a small wooden door. On top of that door, at eye level, there was a small hole or opening.... There were six continuous rooms like that, in prison parlance these were known as the ‘six decrees’. ‘Decrees’ stood for rooms for special punishment—those who are condemned to solitary imprisonment...

These ‘decrees’ were still in place—in fact, in the very next decree I noticed someone—possibly a prisoner. When I visited Sri Aurobindo’s cell, I found that the floor was done up in mosaic tiles and opposite the iron grating there were pictures of Sri Aurobindo (the well-known photo of Sri Aurobindo during 1908-1909 as an under-trial prisoner), the Mother, and also of Sri Krishna. There was nothing else in the room, except some flowers in front of the pictures. During Sri Aurobindo’s confinement, he had some other ‘fittings’ which are again best described by Sri Aurobindo himself, redolent with his incomparable humour:

As for fittings our generous authorities had left nothing to be desired so far as our hospitable reception was concerned. One plate and bowl used to adorn the courtyard. Properly washed and cleaned, my self-sufficing plate and bowl shone like silver, it was the solace of my life. In its impeccable, glowing radiance in the ‘heavenly kingdom’, in that symbol of immaculate British imperialism, I



used to enjoy the pure bliss of loyalty to the Crown. Unfortunately, the plate too shared in the bliss, and if one pressed one's fingers a little hard on the surface it would start flying in a circle, like the whirling dervishes of Arabia...

Among household utilities there were also a small bucket, a tin water-container and two prison blankets...

In spite of all the rigours and deprivations of imprisonment, Sri Aurobindo had beatific experiences in the Alipore Jail. From his famous Uttarpara speech we learn that the solitary cell, and the coarse blankets, were replete with the Divine Presence—during this period of confinement he had experienced both the Individual as well as the Universal Divine. He writes:

I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me his shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover...

I could but spend only a few minutes in in that hallowed cell—but even in those few moments I sensed a stillness, a Presence that touched my soul. The Samadhi and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram premises are full of Sri Aurobindo's presence—this is very tangibly and palpably felt, and, in the sheltered environs of the Ashram, it is also relatively easy to perceive it. That is also true elsewhere in all the Relics Centres worldwide. But remarkably, there is an unmistakable presence everywhere where Sri Aurobindo was physically present. I have been privileged to visit many such places associated with Sri Aurobindo, and I must confess, the atmosphere in Sri Aurobindo's jail cell still seemed particularly charged—his presence, particularly where he had major spiritual experiences, was bound to leave a fragrance and an aura in its wake.

As I walked out of the Jail premises, I took one last look at the 'Alipore Reformation Centre' on that chilly winter afternoon, I offered my thanks and gratitude to Sri Aurobindo, and made my way to the airport. To me this visit was nothing short of a pilgrimage.

### **Cellular Jail, Port Blair**

I boarded an Indian Airlines flight from Chennai bound for Port Blair one fine morning in February last year. As we approached Port Blair, I saw the glistening Andamans

group of islands nestling on a shimmering emerald sea. Very soon we landed at the Veer Savarkar airport and there was a vehicle waiting for me. I was very lucky to be a guest of my cousin, Mr. Uddipta Ray, the Health and Education Secretary in the Andamans Govt. My cousin, a long-standing devotee of the Mother was until recently based in Pondicherry. My schedule was tight and I had barely a day or two to spare, and it was only because of Uddipta-da that I could visit the famed cellular jail on a day generally not open to visitors. That meant that I was the sole visitor and since the weather was bright and sunny I got a wonderful set of photographs without any obstructions. More importantly, I was escorted by well-informed officials who narrated many interesting facts and anecdotes surrounding the prison.

What struck me most was the pristine and uncluttered cleanliness of Port Blair. It still felt like an Indian city, but was unlike any other. The lush greenery of the place, the promenaded walk-ways, the well-maintained buildings, all added to the overall 'feel-good' factor, and to top it all one could see the turquoise waters of the Andaman sea all around. All this made me wonder: 'What an unlikely place to build a prison!' Of course, the British had their own reasons to have a prison built here—they wanted the political prisoners fighting for the Indian independence to be as far away from the fervour of the mainland as possible.

The revolutionaries involved with the freedom movement were sentenced to transportation to the Andaman Islands, and this island-exile was termed *Kalapani*. Often the prisoners were subjected to much torture. Although there were sporadic uprisings among the Indian peoples ever since British rule was formally established in India, the first nationwide uprising happened in May 1857. A large number of prisoners were convicted on charges of waging war against the British Government and were sent in batches for transportation. In January 1890, C. J. Lyall and Surgeon Major A. S. Lethbridge were sent to Port Blair by the Government of India to supervise the convict management there. The report submitted by them in April 1890 revealed that the convicts preferred transportation to Port Blair rather than a mainland Indian prison: (I am not at all surprised at this, considering the exceptional beauty of these islands!) Hence, it was recommended that the life of the convicts in the penal settlement of the Andamans should be made harsher. This paved the way for the construction of the Cellular Jail which was started in October 1896 and was completed in 1906—around the time when the revolutionary movement in Bengal was at its peak. The Cellular Jail, even as it stands today, is a huge burnt-ochre brick building with long sprawling wings consisting of more than three storeys. The jail comprised of 628 cells for solitary confinement.

The swadeshi movement, the partition of Bengal, and the consequent revolutionary activities—all these started during the early part of the twentieth century. Such activities were not confined to Bengal only, they quickly spread to the Punjab and Maharashtra as well. (In fact, the airport is named after the famous Maharashtrian freedom fighter, V. D. Savarkar.) However, the *Anushilan Samiti* was the most impor-

tant organisation in playing a pre-eminent role in the planning and execution of armed attacks on British officials and had its headquarters in Bengal. These revolutionary activities supplied the political prisoners in the Cellular Jail and among the very first in the series were the convicts from the famous Alipore Bomb Case.

As I was led in through the gates of the prison, which is now a museum (unlike the Alipore Jail), I expressed my desire to first visit the section dedicated to the Alipore Bomb Case. I was elated to find that it was given a very prominent coverage. There were short biographical notes accompanying framed photographs of the revolutionaries including Sudhir Kumar Sarkar, Upendranath Banerjee, Hem Chandra Das, Ullaskar Dutta, Indubhushan Roy and Barindra Kumar Ghose. As in most prisons, the prisoners here were also identified by numbers—Barindra Kumar Ghose and Sudhir Kumar Sarkar were prisoners 31549 and 31597 respectively.

I learnt that the jail officials were often ruthless in their treatment of the inmates. Unreasonable workloads were a common feature. Insufficient amounts of substandard food was served. Unduly harsh and humiliating treatment by jail officials was common.

When Collector Jackson of Nasik District was assassinated, Veer Savarkar was convicted in the Nasik conspiracy case and sent to the Cellular Jail on 7th April, 1911. According to Savarkar, the freedom fighters were subjected to hard labour. They had to peel coconuts, and had to go round and round relentlessly like bullocks to extract oil from mustard seeds. They were often escorted outside the prison where they were forced to clear the jungles and trees on the hillside, and were flogged on every refusal. On top of this they did not even get a square meal every day.

I was shown some of the prison clothes on display—some of these were unimaginably coarse and undignified. I was also horrified to see the metal shackles that were often used on the prisoners. Personally, I felt that the displays were tastefully put up—there were life-size models depicting the appalling sordidness of prison life. I was also shown around the premises where some of the convicted prisoners were hanged. This was accomplished in a chamber right in the middle of the central courtyard—I could peer through that dreaded space where the hangman's noose was on display. I was also allowed to walk along the long corridors that housed the individual cells where the prisoners were lodged.

On that very evening I attended a *son et lumière* show in the central courtyard of the Cellular Jail. I was advised to go for a show with a Hindi commentary rather than an English one. I was greatly impressed with the composition and choreography. An ancient Peepul tree still stands today in the central quadrangle with its gnarled branches and profusion of leaves as it did when the Cellular Jail was fully functional. The highlight of the show was that this tree was made the chief anchor of the show as it stood witness to the unfolding saga of the life in the jail. The tree's utterances through Om Puri's voice were exemplary—the deep and booming voice in the stillness of the night was sheer magic. The show vividly recreated the horrors of prison life, and was often spine-chilling. I also learnt about the legacy of the Japanese invasion of the island in 1942 and their barbaric methods of torture. Finally, it also described

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's visit to the island from 29 to 31 December 1943.

As I silently walked out from the jail after the conclusion of the *son et lumière*, I paid my homage to these freedom fighters, many of them inspired by Sri Aurobindo himself, and pledged to the Mother that this visit of mine should enable me to find a new meaning and context to my existence in free India.

SATYAJIT GHOSH

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## SHE WHO LABOURS HERE

Then shall we stand iron-willed for Life  
 Against the tides of time that on us rush  
 While death raps daily at the body's door,  
 Or to our human weaknesses succumb  
 And many lives' travail sum up to nought,  
 Or call a higher power in the cells,  
 A flame to light the darkened cave of mind  
 And calm's descent into the frantic pace  
 Of impulses, antagonists of peace  
 That move our arms to slay, our hearts to hate  
 And boil the blood with insatiable desire  
 Or drown us in a torpor of malaise?

I have seen a power incarnate on earth,  
 Divinity put on the human form  
 Unblinded glimpsed the living deity  
 Who wakes the consciousness to its true birth,  
 The birth of truth, a dwelling place of light  
 Resident within the human breast  
 And the unexplored dimensions of the soul.  
 It is SHE and not ourselves who labours here  
 To fashion from the clay more perfect man,  
 Transport our lives beyond the temporal,  
 Who wraps the earth in fathomless arms of bliss,  
 Our seas, our skies, in spiritual fire.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

## INDIAN CULTURE IN THE HYMNS OF SIR WILLIAM JONES

SIR WILLIAM JONES and Charles Wilkins are the two Englishmen who should be remembered for their contribution to the cause of generating the right kind of attitude required for understanding India and its rich cultural heritage. They wrote about India at a time when it was no more than a land of rope dancers and snake charmers for the people in the West. If Charles Wilkins is known for his translation of the *Gita* (which is the first translation of the holy book, not only in any European language but also into any Asian language, except Arabic, from which it was later translated into Persian), Sir William Jones is the first person to translate Kalidasa's play *Shakuntala* into English and thereby introduce the greatness of Sanskrit poetry and Kalidasa to the West. It will not be out of place to mention here that it was this translation that Goethe had read. The praise that Goethe profusely showered on Kalidasa after reading *Shakuntala* is too well known but what is not known to many is that it was *Shakuntala* which prompted *Faust's* prelude, the work he is lauded and known for throughout the world.

Sir William Jones who was a judge at the Calcutta High Court was the founder president of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta whose president he remained till his premature death in 1794. Jones wrote a couple of hymns more than forty years before Henry Louis Vivian Derozio who is accepted as "the first Indian English poet of note" published *Poems*, his first volume of poetry in 1827. It is said that "Derozio is also a pioneer in the use of Indian myth and legend" but the nine hymns that Jones wrote on Kamdeo, Durga, Bhavani, Indra, Surya, Lakshmi, Narayana, Saraswati and Ganga are still not known to many in India. He is not an Indian like Derozio and hence he cannot be called the first Indian English poet but he can be called the first poet of Indian English because these hymns mark the beginning of Indian English poetry in India. He started writing poetry while still studying at Oxford. The two poems that he wrote when he was still a student at Oxford reflect his interest in Indian mysticism. *The Palace of Fortune* and *The Seven Fountains* are the two poems that he wrote more than fifteen years before he became the president of the Asiatic Society.

He sums up the theme of the hymn in the argument which precedes each hymn. The first hymn which he wrote the year the Asiatic Society was founded is on Kamdeo, the god of love. He welcomes the Omnipresent Kamdeo in the opening stanza and concludes that he is the source of happiness of all beings in the cosmos:

Hail, pow'r unknown! for at thy beck  
Vales and groves their bosoms deck,  
God of the flow'ry shafts and flow'ry bow,  
Delight of all above and all below.

He also describes how Lord Mahadeva burnt him to ashes:

But, when thy daring arm untam'd  
 At Mahadeo a loveshaft aim'd,  
 Heav'n shook, and, smit with stony wonder,  
 Told his deep dread in bursts of thunder,  
 Whilst on thy beauteous limbs an azure fire  
 Blaz'd forth, which never must expire.

The second hymn which he has borrowed from Kalidasa's *Kumarsambhavam* is on Durga. He uses the myth of the slaying of Taraka by Kumara, the son of Shiva and Parvati. Taraka was a demon. Lord Indra goes with other gods to Brahma and requests Him to destroy Taraka. He tells them that the son of Lord Shiva who is going to take birth very soon will destroy the demon. They know that Parvati wants to marry Shiva but they are faced with the problem of diverting His mind from penance to Parvati. Kamdeo is assigned the task of diverting His mind but he is burnt by Him. Ultimately it is Parvati's sincerity which moves Him and they get married. A son is born to them who is named Kumara. He annihilates Taraka and the gods are thus protected. This is the myth that Jones has used but he has made minor changes. The myth has it that Lord Shiva wants to test the genuineness and sincerity of Parvati's love for Him and hence He comes disguised as a Brahmin youth and once satisfied, discloses His identity. Jones has introduced a minor change in this episode. Instead of saying that Lord Shiva came down disguised as a Brahmin youth, he says that Parvati reached a "mystic wood" where Lord Shiva disguised as a Brahmin youth stood before Her. The second change that he has introduced relates to the information that lord Shiva gets about the gods suffering at the hands of the demon. It is Agni who informs Lord Shiva in the myth known to us but in Jones' hymn it is Brihaspati who informs Him. He also describes the slaying of Mahishasura by Durga:

For, when the demon vice thy realms defied,  
 And armed with death each arched horn,  
 The golden lance, O goddess mountain-born  
 Touch'd but the pest—He rear'd and died.

The third hymn is on Bhavani. The birth of Lakshmi from the lotus has been very nicely described by Jones:

Whilst on the placid waters blooming,  
 The sky perfuming,  
 An op'ning Lotos rose, and smiling spread  
 His azure skirts and vase of gold,

While o'er his foliage roll'd  
Drops, that impearl Bhavani's orient bed.

The fourth hymn is addressed to Lord Indra. He describes the feast thrown by Indra where the gods drink the nectar which they get from the demons. The fifth hymn is addressed to Surya. This hymn reminds us of the hymns to Savitur and Surya in the *Rigveda*. It may not be out of place to mention here that Jones had studied the Vedas and he was so much impressed that he even translated one of the riks, the *Hymn to Night* into English.

The sixth hymn is addressed to Lakshmi. The description of Lakshmi's birth reminds us of the description in the *Shrisukta* from which he got his ideas for this hymn:

Her eyes, oft darted o'er the liquid way,  
With golden light emblaz'd the darkling main;  
And those firm breasts, whence all our comforts well,  
Rose with enchanting swell;  
Her loose hair with the bounding billows play'd.

He has very nicely presented the idea contained in the sloka *yadā yadā hi dharmasya* of the *Gita* which fascinated him, in these lines of the hymn:

And oft, as man's unnumber'd woes they mark,  
They spring to birth in some high-favour'd line,  
Half human, half divine,  
And tread life's maze transfigur'd, unimpair'd.

He also describes the incarnation of Lord Vishnu as Krishna and the stories related to His life. He discusses also the destructive power of Lakshmi and concludes the hymn with a prayer requesting her to be always benevolent:

From ills, that, painted, harrow up the breast,  
(What agonies, if real, must they give!)  
Preserve thy vot'ries: be their labours blest!

The seventh hymn which is addressed to Narayana is the best and this shows his deep understanding of Indian philosophy. The hymn which can be rightly called a poetic rendering of Indian philosophy tells us about the many names of the Omniscient, the Omnipotent and the Omnipresent Narayana whom he calls "Spirit of spirits". The universe is the manifestation of Narayana whom we cannot see but who is present everywhere and in all the objects:

Spirit of spirits, who, through ev'ry part  
 Of space expanded and of endless time,  
 Beyond the stretch of lab'ring thought sublime,  
 Badst uproar into beauteous order start,  
 Before Heav'n was, Thou art!

He is the only reality and everything else that we see is simply a reflection of His reality and not the Reality itself. And hence Jones calls meads, lawns, leaves, blossoms “unsubstantial”:

Smooth meads and lawns that glow with varying dyes  
 Of dew-bespangled leaves and blossoms bright,  
 Hence! vanish from my sight:  
 Delusive pictures! unsubstantial shows.

He is aware of “One abundant source”;

My soul absorb'd One only Being knows,  
 Of all perceptions One abundant source.

And hence he concludes that he is no more interested in “fading worlds”:

Whence ev'ry object ev'ry moment flows:  
 Suns hence derive their force,  
 Hence planets learn their source;  
 But suns and fading worlds I view no more  
 God only I perceive; God only I adore.

If *A Hymn to Narayana* reflects Jones' understanding of Indian philosophy, *A Hymn to Saraswati* reflects his deep understanding of Indian music. His understanding of Indian *ragas* fascinates and amazes anyone who goes through the hymn which talks of not only the time the *ragas* are to be sung but also the sorts of persons entitled to sing them. *A Hymn to Ganga* is the last hymn. This hymn also, like other hymns, ends on a note of benediction.

Even serious students of history and literature have not heard of these hymns and are unaware of Jones' contribution to Indian English poetry. The nine hymns that he wrote during a span of four years should be resurrected not simply because they reflect his understanding of Indian philosophy but also because of their poetic qualities. These hymns written by a poet who is called a “Brahmanised Briton” and who “admired Indian culture and deprecated the idea of introducing Western civilisation or Christianity into India” reflect his keen poetic sensibility and clear understanding



of poetic forms. These hymns are not known to many in our country but they were known to many in his country. The fact that Keats and Shelley were inspired by some of his hymns shows the sort of influence these hymns had on his countrymen. It is said that the seventh hymn inspired the opening lines of Keats' *Hyperion* and Shelley's *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* and the similarity between Shelley's *Hymn to Apollo* and the fifth hymn is too obvious. These hymns which have gone unnoticed throw a new light on our rich past and hence efforts must be made to look at Jones' contributions afresh.

MANOJ KUMAR MISHRA

*The fundamental idea of all Indian religion is one common to the highest human thinking everywhere. The supreme truth of all that is is a Being or an existence beyond the mental and physical appearances we contact here. Beyond mind, life and body there is a Spirit and Self containing all that is finite and infinite, surpassing all that is relative, a supreme Absolute, originating and supporting all that is transient, a one Eternal. A one transcendent, universal, original and sempiternal Divinity or divine Essence, Consciousness, Force and Bliss is the fount and continent and inhabitant of things. Soul, nature, life are only a manifestation or partial phenomenon of this self-aware Eternity and this conscious Eternal. But this Truth of being was not seized by the Indian mind only as a philosophical speculation, a theological dogma, an abstraction contemplated by the intelligence. It was not an idea to be indulged by the thinker in his study, but otherwise void of practical bearing on life. It was not a mystic sublimation which could be ignored in the dealings of man with the world and Nature. It was a living spiritual Truth, an Entity, a Power, a Presence that could be sought by all according to their degree of capacity and seized in a thousand ways through life and beyond life. This Truth was to be lived and even to be made the governing idea of thought and life and action.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 182)

## GLEAM

*We do not belong to the past dawns,  
but to the noons of the future.*

Sri Aurobindo

The glorious climb of the cable car. Those views  
the delight of tourists  
and joy of San Francisco!

The bright January day had shifted to a cold, grey  
afternoon of variable winds. I got on  
the cable car at Hyde on the California Line.  
Our car ascended California toward Grace.

The antique cable cars climb these rolling hills  
in a magical but precarious lift with a sense  
of hazardous uncertainty. They ascend  
and descend asphalt and cobbled streets.

Often they run smoothly, but at times  
in stalls and starts, especially in adverse weather.  
And noisy windows rattle on the way  
to corner curves and turns or abrupt stops.

None of this lessens the mirth or glee,  
the perennial favour and smile  
of San Francisco's cable car magic,  
which has charmed riders since August 1873.  
The entire system was rebuilt in 1982.

As our car approached Leavenworth  
my gaze lighted on a child sightseer  
seated among the passengers  
with her mother obliquely across the aisle.

Like a blonde angel, four years old,  
she peered about the car with its brown leather  
handgrips, bare bulbs, cords and round bell. Poets and mystics

are prone to heightened states, visitations, reveries,  
mysteries of trance. And as our eyes met in silent communion

the starry gaze and gleam in her blue eyes  
 captured my interest. And somehow her divine expression

launched my vision of a future  
 super civilisation on earth  
 evolving toward some golden infinity. An advanced world of  
 luminosity

of the Spirit! A harmonious world of creative enterprise  
 flourishing in a play of delight. A transformed  
 creation free of evil, disease, suffering, and ignorance,

where the hidden Self had emerged long ago  
 from its depths in the human  
 and sorrow was not necessary.

It was a progressive realm inhabited  
 by gnostic beings with the integral vision of a Divine Mind,  
 the poise and bliss of a supramental world  
 of Divine Light.

All this transpired in my brief visionary glimpse.

And I smiled and glanced shyly away  
 from the stare of this curious child

back to the sullen fog  
 and noisy Saturday  
 hubbub of our city, its chaotic clamour and clangour.  
 I stepped off the car at Powell, listened to wind  
 sweep over the city, pondered the global evolutionary  
 glimmerings of a gnostic race  
 in the new age.

The crowded cable car trundled down California  
 toward Chinatown, red taillights below,  
 amber lights above, the track illumined  
 by one bright beam.

# THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of February 2005)

## 16. The Vamana-Trivikrama

It came to me as a surprise when I was engaged in studying the works of the Tamil poet Kulothungan who is a rationalist inspired by E.V. Ramaswami Naicker in his college days. Since the mentor was an iconoclast, Kulothungan has no patience with Indian myths and legends as his scientific temper leaves no room for miracles and hagiology. God finds no place in his world. Nevertheless, I found that he draws upon the image of the Vamana incarnation quite often in his poems when he calls upon man to strive and exceed his present state:

Man transcends the scriptures and  
the religions founded on them and  
the codes prescribed by the faiths.  
He is like the Vamana who grows  
Taller than the tallest.  
He is the author of many a system...

If a hard-core rationalist of our times like Kulothungan turns to the Vamana incarnation readily, one may gauge the glorious grip the avatar has had on Indian religious imagination and spiritual aspiration. The Vamana myth is a rare gem, for here there is no villain to be destroyed! The incarnation takes place to subdue a good person. Why did it happen? For that we must go back to the Puranic tale.

By the time of the *Bhagavata*, the Vedic images had percolated widely into the consciousness of the religious and spiritual community and had become the seeds of the legendary structures found in the Puranas. The Vedas have references to the forces of darkness like Namuchi and Vritra. The *Bhagavata* presents this received information as a cogent tale in the eighth skandha. After being deprived of nectar by Vishnu who had incarnated as Mohini, the Asuras were understandably incensed that their efforts had been in vain. In spite of the Devas having drunk nectar, they could not easily defeat the Asuras led by Mahabali. Bali was riding his incredibly powerful aerial chariot, Vaihayasa. The Asuras came close to defeating the Devas by their magical prowess. Feeling helpless, Indra and other gods appealed to Narayana who came to the battlefield. Infused with strength by the Lord's presence, the Devas now had a winning spree. The battle was stopped by them when Brahma sent Narada to appeal to them not to destroy the Asura race completely. The Asuras retired to the Mountain of Sunset (*asta giri*) carrying with them Bali who had been sorely wounded.

By nature Bali was a good person. Though he was a king, he served his teachers

with humility and liberality. With the help of the Bhrigu clan of rishis, he performed a *Vishvajit yaga*.

Out of the sacrificial fire came out a divine chariot inlaid with gold and yoked to horses which vied with Indra's steeds in colour, and having a flag with the emblem of a lion. Also came out a never-exhaustible quiver and an armour of heavenly workmanship. Bali was presented with an unfading garland of flowers by his grandfather Prahlada, and a conch, by the Rishi Sukra.

Presently, Bali took possession of heaven and Indra withdrew into hiding. The mother of the Devas, Aditi, petitioned her husband Kashyapa to help the Devas against the Asuras who were also his progeny by Diti. The *Bhagavata* reports that Kashyapa smiled and spoke words which give us a clue to understand the real nature of Vishnumaya: *aho m̄yābalaṁ viṣṇoḥ snehabaddhamidaṁ jagat!*

Oh, wonderful is the power of Mahavishnu's Maya! This world is bound by ties of affection. Where is this material body which is not the Atman but on which the Atman-consciousness is superimposed! And where is the Atman that transcends material nature! Who and whose are husbands, sons or relatives? Such ideas of relationship are pure delusion.

As advised by him, Aditi observed the *Payovrata* and gained a vision of Vishnu who promised to be born as her child. As it would happen later on to Devaki, the Lord was born to Aditi, four-armed and gleaming with his armament-ornaments like the conch, discus, mace and lotus. Even as the onlookers were wonder-struck, the Lord transformed Himself into a Brahmin boy, as if he were a stage actor, *sam-paśyator-divyagatiryathā nataḥ*. Soon after, his *upanayana* was performed and all the divinities brought him gifts. He also learnt to receive alms by taking his first *bhikṣā* from Uma Ambika. Glowing with brahminic brilliance, Vamana now entered the sacrificial hall of Mahabali. What a welcome for him from the assemblage! Mahabali felt highly honoured by the visit of one who was the very image of tapasya and offered to fulfil any boon the young boy might ask for, cows, gold, mansions, food, horses, chariots, villages.

Vamana was all praise for the generous thoughts of Bali and extolled his ancestors like Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakashipu and Prahlada. Then he requested three paces of earth, *padāni trīṇi*. Bali, incredulous, offered to give him all this and even more but Vamana stuck to his original request. We who are caught in the consumerist Valhalla of the present century get a sharp lesson too from him:

The chief cause of man's entanglement in Samsara is his insatiable longing for wealth and pleasure. It is contentment with what comes by chance that helps the attainment of liberation. The spiritual aura of a holy man is enhanced in its

radiance if he lives satisfied with what chance brings. On the contrary, dissatisfaction with possessions and enjoyments stifles it as water dampens fire. Therefore I shall take only three steps of earth from you, who are the most noted of generous men and capable of granting all the desires of a suppliant. With these three steps of earth I shall feel fully satisfied. Wealth becomes a cause of happiness when it is just enough to meet one's bare needs—neither less nor more.

The Golden Mean! Battered by the news media day in and day out by what is happening in India and elsewhere, and tired of the sensationalism that marks such “revelations”, these words of the Lord in his Vamana incarnation come as the very mantra of sanity for the contemporary Indian. It is very interesting to note that Mahabali was warned by his own spiritual preceptor, Shukracharya, that there could be a “catch” in this insistence upon three paces of earth, in spite of Bali's generous words. Indeed, Shukracharya used no vague words either when warning Bali. He said that this little boy was the son of Aditi and Kasyapa, and an incarnation of the Supreme, *sākṣād bhagavān viṣṇuravyayah*. He even foretold exactly what was going to happen:

This Brahmacharin can assume a cosmic form, and can measure the whole universe with three strides of his. O fool! Having thus given away all your possessions to Vishnu, how will you manage to get on? With one stride he will cover the earth and with the second the heaven, while his body will fill the interspace. Where will there be space for a third step?

Shukracharya then spoke in detail about the need for conservation and careful husbanding of a householder's resources. Even charity must be performed with care. It should not endanger the happy existence that is the gift of domestic bliss. The Vedas themselves have helpful passages in this matter. Hence it would not be wrong if the king withdrew his promise. Mahabali lent a patient hearing and silently meditated for a moment, *tuṣṇīm bhūtvā kṣaṇam*.

Then he uttered words which are worthy of his stature and ancestry. Shukracharya was undoubtedly right, he answered, but was he not the grandson of noble Prahlada? Mother Earth can put up with anything except a liar. As a king, he would have no truck with partial charities. In any case, if this brahmachari were indeed Hari, it would be all the more appropriate for Bali to show his generosity. One does not come across words more gentle and noble than those uttered by Mahabali at this moment:

O sage! In Yagas and Yajnas, you, who are experts in those rites, make sacrificial offerings to Mahavishnu with great reverence and devotion. That being so, if, as you say, this Brahmacharin is that Vishnu, irrespective of whether He has

come as a benefactor to give us boon or as an enemy to destroy us, I shall certainly give Him whatever He has asked for, not barring the whole earth even.

The *pauranika* rivals the ancient Greek playwrights in using dramatic irony throughout this scene. The *Bhagavata* says that Shukracharya was angry at these words of Bali. How dare a disciple disobey a teacher? He cursed the king that he would soon be deprived of his kingdom and his glory, but the curse did not deter Mahabali. He was high-souled, says the *pauranika*, a *mahān*. Bali performed the preliminary rites of worshipping the divine beggar, and prepared to offer the earth by pouring water, *udakapūrvakam*. His queen, Vindhyavali brought him a golden jar of water and even as Bali poured the libation indicating the grant, there was a shower of flowers poured by the celestials.

Now follows a tremendous description of the Vamana expanding as a cosmic form. I have often wondered how Sri Aurobindo engaged in studying the Vedas would have gone to the core of this expansion-idea if he had taken up the myth of Vamana-Trivikrama under his transformatory pen. For, the idea of the Supreme's cosmic figure measuring the earth is very much a Vedic image. The *Rig Veda* says:

*ato devā avantu no yato viṣṇurvicakrame pṛthivyāḥ sapta dhāmabih<sup>1</sup>*

There are several indications of the Aurobindonian approach as in the passage in *Savitri* when Savitri assumes her cosmic form. The second stanza of the sonnet "The Cosmic Spirit", again, touches upon the all-encompassing form:

I have broken the limits of embodied mind  
And am no more the figure of a soul.  
The burning galaxies are in me outlined;  
The universe is my stupendous whole.

The *Bhagavata* and the *Purana*-inspired bhakti poets, however, remain lost in the glory and grandeur of the sudden physical transformation and have given us passages of great wonderment. Shuka describes to Parikshita how everything was found within the form of Vamana:

O dear one! He (Bali) saw Dharma in His heart; Rita (cosmic order) and Satya (truth) in His breasts; the Moon in His mind; the goddess Sri with a play-lotus in His chest; and the Vedic metres and all sounds in His neck. He saw Indra and the Devas in His arms; the quarters in His ears; the heaven in the crown of His head; the clouds in His hair; the air in His nose; the sun in His eyes; and the fire in His face.<sup>2</sup>

1. May the Devas bless us from where Vishnu strode forth through the seven regions of the earth.

2. Translated by A. C. Bose.

The Vamana incarnation that measured the earth and spaces with three strides is a favourite image for the Alvars in their Tamil hymns. After they popularised the incarnations through their mellifluous songs, the *Bhagavata* took shape, drawing a good deal from their mystic wonderment. The *Purana*, in its turn, inspired innumerable Sanskrit works including narratives and stotras. According to Narayana Bhattatiri who condensed the *Purana* as a narrative in *Narayaneeyam*, the Vamana is the most beautiful image of the Lord, the little brahmachari, the moving essence of the Vedas, carrying an umbrella and a post. Vedanta Desika's poetic élan marks the fast-changing views of the starry sky as Vamana grows tall and breezes beyond the spaces of the clouds in his Sanskrit prayer, "Sri Dehaleesa Stuti":

Lord who loves your devotees!  
 When you grew vast, the clusters of stars  
 Appeared as a pearl-roofing for you;  
 Then they were like a necklace.  
 Presently they were the waist-girdle;  
 In the end they were like anklets  
 Studded with pearls.<sup>3</sup>

When these feet gleaming with the stars as anklets reached the Brahmaloaka, Brahma worshipped them by pouring water. Legends assure us that these waters ultimately flowed through the three worlds as Ganges. The Asura army immediately went to war to save Bali and we can only admire this army which was so loyal to a fully deserving king:

A firm adherent of truth, a respecter of holy men, and very kind and merciful by nature, it is impossible for our master to tell an untruth even ordinarily, and more so when he has been consecrated for the performance of a holy rite like this sacrifice. So it is our duty now to serve our master by killing this enemy.

But Bali stopped them saying his preceptor's curse had become active and there was no point in unnecessarily embracing death. In any case, it was wrong to think the Lord was on the side of the Devas. For sometime He had allowed the Asuras to have the upper hand, and now it was the turn of the Devas! Again words of wisdom from our *Purana* that are true for all time:

Man cannot overcome or defeat Time by any of these means—army, competent ministers, intelligence, fortifications, medicinal drugs and Mantras, or by the four techniques of diplomacy. In the past when Time was in your favour you had defeated these followers of Hari many a time. The very same men are now

3. Verse 10. Translated by Prema Nandakumar.



raising cries of victory after defeating us in battle. When Time is again in our favour, we shall conquer these very people. Therefore wait patiently for the coming of that favourable Time.

Bali was now bound by the noose of Varuna by Garuda who knew that this was the way the Lord wished to grant everlasting fame to the Asura king. Having measured the earth and the sky with his two steps, the Lord asked Bali for the third span. The Asura did not lose his cool and by his unflinching devotion proved that he was indeed a worthy grandson of Prahlada. Shall he be condemned as a liar who could not fulfil his promise? But where will he go for the third span to give to Vishnu? Without hesitation, Bali, bound by Varuna's noose, bowed his head and said, "Place your third step on my head, *padam trtīyam kuru śirṣṇi me nijam!* Bali's speech in this critical moment continues to glow with Truth. He had been an overlord but how little has been his attachment to pelf and power! He says nonchalantly that "it is wealth and prosperity that stupefy the mind of man and make him forget the truth that he is ever in the jaws of death."

Prahlada himself then arrived at the spot and praised the Lord for depriving Bali of his celestial seat as Indra! For, such prosperity was sure to destroy the spiritual strength of Bali. Bali's queen Vindhyaivali also saluted the Lord and showed no sorrow that there had been such a reversal of fortune. Brahma joined his prayers as well for the release of Bali from the noose.

The *Bhagavata* now presents a thought-provoking speech by the Lord, and the words are deeply moving. Yes, the Lord first takes away the wealth of those whom he wants to bless and protect, for wealth is indeed the cause of pride and arrogance and leads men to insult the world and the Supreme. But even riches cannot lead astray true devotees and Mahabali is one such for he has conquered Vishnu's own Maya! The Lord then makes Bali and his followers residents of Sutala guarded by Vishnu Himself, and promises that in the age of Manu Savarni, Mahabali would become the Indra.

Each one of the legends found in the Puranas thus have a direct bearing upon our attitude to everyday life in this world of human affairs. In our hurried life today, and puffed up with our *scientific bent of mind*, we forget the area of humanities that had been explored and perfected by our ancients. Prosperity, gadgetry, the comforts of life, the blinding light of conspicuous consumption—where has it all led us? Unless the moralist corrective is applied in time, such power would lead to unimagined destruction of innocents in this world, created with love and affection by the Supreme. With wealth and power in their hands, Asuric people think they know everything! The Vamana legend is not just a miracle transformation or an attempt to prove the *saubhya* of the Lord who does not flinch even from begging to save his devotees. There is more in the legend than meets the eye, because of the constant reference to the corrupting nature of power, pithily put in our own times by Lord Acton: "Power

corrupts: absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely.” The *pauranika* makes Vindhyavali speak in these terms:

Men of perverted intelligence consider themselves masters in this world which belongs to Thee. Such people who shamelessly consider themselves masters and free agents—what have they got as their own to offer Thee, who art the one agent, the one Lord, and the one destroyer of this whole universe?

The twentieth century has seen enough of such Asuric Egos destroying with impunity God’s universe, as though they were the keepers of humanity and not the One Above. Sri Aurobindo saw clearly the warnings spelt out in the Vamana legend in the *Bhagavata* when he learnt about the splitting of the atom. So much power in the hands of man? Man who has been given this garden of Eden to read Shakespeare and listen to Buddha’s words of wisdom to lead a blameless life, was turning away from it all with his scientific discoveries. He has not cared to conserve the gifts. Nor has he tarried to learn a lesson from the futile pursuit of power indulged in by Napoleon. So we have the firm warning uttered by Sri Aurobindo on 25<sup>th</sup> September, 1939:

“A Dream of Surreal Science”

One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink  
At the Mermaid, capture immortality;  
A committee of hormones on the Aegean’s brink  
Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.

A thyroid, meditating almost nude  
Under the Bo-tree, saw the eternal Light  
And, rising from its might solitude,  
Spoke of the Wheel and eightfold Path all right.

A brain by a disordered stomach driven  
Thundered through Europe, conquered, ruled and fell,  
From St. Helena went, perhaps, to Heaven.  
Thus wagged on the surreal world, until

A scientist played with atoms and blew out  
The universe before God had time to shout.

Alas, sometimes this century does appear to be surreal, and so one must needs cling to the greater reality of the Vamana-Trivikrama incarnation.

(*To be continued*)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

## SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of November 2004)

I WAS told by Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna) that Sri Aurobindo intended to write a long introduction to *Savitri—A Legend and a Symbol*. The eagerly awaited introduction never got under way. Instead we have a substantial number of letters that provide various insights into the creative genius of Sri Aurobindo when he was composing his revelatory epic. Most of the letters were written to K. D. Sethna.

I presented here some of these revealing indications:

Savitri is represented in the poem as an incarnation of the Divine Mother. This incarnation is supposed to have taken place in far past times when the whole thing had to be opened, so as to “hew the ways of Immortality”.

1936

(SABCL, Vol. 29, p. 729)

\*

The poem was originally written from a lower level, a mixture perhaps of the inner mind, psychic, poetic intelligence, sublimised vital, afterwards with the Higher Mind, often illumined and intuitivised, intervening. Most of the stuff of the first book is new or else the old so altered as to be no more what it was; the best of the old has sometimes been kept almost intact because it had already the higher inspiration. Moreover, there have been made several successive revisions each trying to lift the general level higher and higher towards a possible Overmind poetry. As it 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.

1936

(*Ibid.*)

\*

You will see when you get the full typescript [of the first three books] that *Savitri* has grown to an enormous length so that it is no longer quite the same thing as the poem you saw then. There are now three books in the first part. The first, the Book of Beginnings, comprises five cantos which cover the same ground as what you typed but contains also much more that is new. The small passage about Aswapathy and the other worlds has been replaced by a new book, the Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, in fourteen cantos with many thousand

lines. There is also a third sufficiently long book, the Book of the Divine Mother. In the new plan of the poem there is a second part consisting of five books: two of these, the Book of Birth and Quest and the Book of Love, have been completed and another, the Book of Fate, is almost complete. Two others, the Book of Yoga and the Book of Death, have still to be written, though a part needs only a thorough recasting. Finally, there is the third part consisting of four books, the Book of Eternal Night, the Book of the Dual Twilight, the Book of Everlasting Day and the Return to Earth, which have to be entirely recast and the third of them largely rewritten. So it will be a long time before *Savitri* is complete.

In the new form it will be a sort of poetic philosophy of the Spirit and of Life much profounder in its substance and vaster in its scope than was intended in the original poem. I am trying of course to keep it at a very high level of inspiration, but in so large a plan covering most subjects of philosophical thought and vision and many aspects of spiritual experience there is bound to be much variation of tone: but that is, I think, necessary for the richness and completeness of the treatment.

1946

(*Ibid.*, pp. 731-32)

\*

As to the many criticisms contained in your letter I have a good deal to say; some of them bring forward questions of the technique of mystic poetry about which I wanted to write in an introduction to *Savitri* when it is published, and I may as well say something about that here.

...Rapid transitions from one image to another are a constant feature in *Savitri* as in most mystic poetry. I am not here building a long sustained single picture of the Dawn with a single continuous image or variations of the same image. I am describing a rapid series of transitions, piling one suggestion upon another. There is first a black quietude, then the persistent touch, then the first "beauty and wonder" leading to the magical gate and the "lucent corner". Then comes the failing of the darkness, the simile used ["a falling cloak"] suggesting the rapidity of the change. Then as a result the change of what was once a rift into a wide luminous gap, —if you want to be logically consistent you can look at the rift as a slit in the "cloak" which becomes a big tear. Then all changes into a "brief perpetual sign", the iridescence, then the blaze and the magnificent aura. In such a race of rapid transitions you cannot bind me down to a logical chain of figures or a classical monotone. The mystic Muse is more of an inspired Bacchante of the Dionysian wine than an orderly housewife.

...Again, do you seriously want me to give an accurate scientific description of the earth half in darkness and half in light so as to spoil my impressionist symbol or else to revert to the conception of earth as a flat and immobile surface?

I am not writing a scientific treatise, I am selecting certain ideas and impressions to form a symbol of a partial and temporary darkness of the soul and Nature which seems to a temporary feeling of that which is caught in the Night as if it were universal and eternal. One who is lost in that Night does not think of the other half of the earth as full of light; to him all is Night and the earth a forsaken wanderer in an enduring darkness. If I sacrifice his impressionism and abandon the image of the earth wheeling through dark space I might as well abandon the symbol altogether, for this is a necessary part of it. As a matter of fact in the passage itself earth in its wheeling does come into the dawn and pass from darkness into the light. You must take the idea as a whole and in all its transitions and not press one detail with too literal an insistence. In this poem I present constantly one partial view of life or another temporarily as if it were the whole in order to give full value to the experience of those who are bound by that view, as for instance, the materialist conception and experience of life, but if anyone charges me with philosophical inconsistency, then it only means that he does not understand the technique of the Overmind interpretation of life.

...I come next to the passage which you so violently attack, about the Inconscient waking Ignorance. In the first place, the word “formless” is indeed defective, not so much because of any repetition but because it is not the right word or idea and I was not myself satisfied with it. I have changed the passage as follows:

Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred;  
A nameless movement, an unthought Idea  
Insistent, dissatisfied, without an aim,  
Something that wished but knew not how to be,  
Teased the Inconscient to wake Ignorance.

But the teasing of the Inconscient remains and evidently you think that it is bad poetic taste to tease something so bodiless and unreal as the Inconscient. But here several fundamental issues arise. First of all, are words like Inconscient and Ignorance necessarily an abstract technical jargon? If so, do not words like consciousness, knowledge etc. undergo the same ban? Is it meant that they are abstract philosophical terms and can have no real or concrete meaning, cannot represent things that one feels and senses or must often fight as one fights a visible foe? The Inconscient and the Ignorance may be mere empty abstractions and can be dismissed as irrelevant jargon if one has not come into collision with them or plunged into their dark and bottomless reality. But to me they are realities, concrete powers whose resistance is present everywhere and at all times in its tremendous and boundless mass. In fact, in writing this line I had no intention of teaching philosophy or forcing in an irrelevant metaphysical idea, although

the idea may be there in implication. I was presenting a happening that was to me something sensible and, as one might say, psychologically and spiritually concrete. The Inconscient comes in persistently in the cantos of the First Book of *Savitri*: e.g.

Opponent of that glory of escape,  
The black Inconscient swung its dragon tail  
Lashing a slumberous Infinite by its force  
Into the deep obscurities of form.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 733-35)

\*

The Mendonça letter [*of 4 May 1947*] was to be, as I suggested, “between ourselves”; there is too much that is private and personal in it for publicity. It is something that can be shown to those who can appreciate and understand, but to an ordinary reader I might seem to be standing on my defence rather than attacking and demolishing a criticism which might damage the appreciation of it in readers who are not sure of their own critical standard and reliability of their taste and so might be shaken by well-phrased judgments and plausible reasonings such as Mendonça’s: they might make the same confusion as Mendonça himself between an apology and an apologia. An idea might rise that I am not sure of the value of my own poetry especially the earlier poetry and accept his valuation of it. The humility you speak of is very largely a Socratic humility, the element of irony in it is considerable; but readers not accustomed to fineness of shades might take it literally and conclude wrongly that I accepted the strictures passed by an unfavourable criticism. A poet who puts no value or a very low value on his own writing has no business to write poetry or to publish it or keep it in publication; if I allowed the publication of the *Collected Poems* it is because I judged them worth publishing. Kishor Gandhi’s objection has therefore some value. On the other hand in defending I may seem to be eulogising my own work, which is not a thing that can be done in public even if a poet’s estimate of his achievement is as self-assured as that of Horace, *Exegi monumentum aere perennius*, or as magnificent as Victor Hugo’s. Similarly, the reply was not meant for Mendonça himself and I do not think the whole can be shown to him without omissions or some editing, but if you wish and if you think that he will not resent any strictures I have made you can show to him the passages relevant to his criticisms.

(CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 358)

(*To be continued*)

NILIMA DAS

## NAVANIT STORIES

### SWEETNESS' GLANCE

“GRRRR! Hai, hai, hai!” shriek the naughty urchins in our narrow lane as they corner a skinny dog skulking by. The startled mutt slips through their ambush and bolts. Armed with stones, the mongrel-boys set off in pursuit, screaming “Grrrr! Grrrr! Hai, hai, hai! Scram! Scram!” Soulless stones, they stone an innocent soul.

But what is this? Even as it lopes ahead, it stops from time to time and glances back. Oh those pleading, hopeful eyes: “Why this heartless mischief? What have I done to you? How can harrassing me benefit you? Resist this inhuman plunge into the devilish pleasures of Hell; express man’s compassion, that sweetness of his which makes me come and lick his feet!”

But snared by Satan, their hearts are immured. The spirit of violence is as blind as it is deaf. The stoning, the chase resume. After some time the dog stops again; the same hurried pitiable look, the same pleading eyes: “Just one loving glance, and I shall become yours forever!”

The rogues change their ploy. There’s no limit to the wiles of the wicked. “Tyu, tyu... tyu, tyu...” they stretch out their hands, as if holding something to eat. Confused, the naive creature stops and stares at the hands; in a trice is forgotten its recent lesson: “Black-headed man can have a lump of tar for heart.” In a trice, tail and head and ears and eyes and mouth wiggling with hope, faith, joy, gratitude, the simple soul approaches the devils. The next moment a volley of stones crashes on its emaciated body and explosions of “Grrrr! Grrrr! Hai, hai, hai! Scram!” hit its shocked face. Yet unwilling, yet unbelieving, it scrams. The happy hunters resume their pastime.

But how strange! Hope and faith have not died yet in that ‘animal’. Just as before, it stops from time to time, the same pleading, hopeful eyes saying: “All is not lost yet! One sweet glance, one speck of affection in the eyes, one loving word, one sincere call—it’s all I ask.”

I will never forget that incredible episode witnessed long ago in my village—that dumb appeal for a touch of sweetness echoes still in my heart:

O Sweetness’ Glance, O Nectarous Eyes! How glorious would earth-life grow, if your subtle occult Presence here became a concrete commonplace reality!

PUJALAL

(Translated from *Navanit*, published by Shivasadan Granthamala Karyalaya, Maddhada, Gujarat, 1945)

## AMAL KIRAN'S CENTENARY

### *A Note*

1. On 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2004, on the eve of Amal Kiran's (K. D. Sethna) 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary, an exhibition was inaugurated in the Exhibition House on Rangapillai Street in Pondicherry. The Exhibition opened at 4.30 p.m with a short meditation to the Mother's organ music. The Lt. Governor of Pondicherry, Lt. Gen. (Rtd.) M.M. Lakhera graced the occasion. Later in the evening Nirodbaran, the other Centenarian, paid a visit and had a brief but poignant exchange with Amal Kiran.

The exhibition chronicled Amal Kiran's life and work. It featured an extraordinarily wide range of photographs of Amal Kiran in different stages of his life, expressing various moods, as well as of Amal with other eminent personages, etc. There was a comprehensive selection of extracts from Amal's writings, giving a glimpse of his many-sided intellectual personality. These included sections on Amal's work in the fields of Historical Research, Ancient Indian Civilisation, Science, Literature, etc. Some letters from well-known figures to Amal—Huxley, Einstein, Brunton, Kathleen Raine, were presented.

The exhibition featured facsimiles of Amal's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, as well a display of the many books authored by Amal.

Many paintings based on Amal's poems and writings added colour and variety. An oil-portrait of Amal was done by Tatiana, a Russian artist, especially for the occasion.

2. On 25<sup>th</sup> November, during the Thursday meditation in the Ashram Playground, a recording was played in which Amal describes how he received from Sri Aurobindo the first lines of *Savitri*. There was also a reading of one of Amal's poems.

3. On 26<sup>th</sup> November, a function was organised to felicitate Amal Kiran on his centenary, 25.11.2004 being his 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. In a packed hall at the Beach Office of Sri Aurobindo Society, Mangesh Nadkarni, Manoj Das Gupta, Sachidananda Mohanty, and Vijay Poddar spoke of the multifarious genius of Amal Kiran, his seminal contributions in many fields of difficult scholarship, his yeoman service to Sri Aurobindo, his protean humour and most of all, his selfless surrender to the Master and the Mother. Anant Patel gave a vote of thanks.

Amal was himself present throughout the function, radiating sunshine, and he recited his best-loved poem, "This Errant Life".

Some students recited a few of Amal's poems.

A festschrift volume edited by Sachidananda Mohanty and published by the Integral Life Foundation, USA was released. Amal's books were available on sale.



4. A short video of Amal and also one of Nirodbaran (who reached a hundred last year) was screened in the School video room.

5. On Friday, 10<sup>th</sup> December, nearly a hundred people gathered in one of the lecture halls of India International Centre at New Delhi, to participate in an evening of tributes to Amal Kiran. Though envisaged initially as an occasion for the release of the Centenary volume on Amal, the evening turned out to be an intimate hour and a half of reminiscences about Amal, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo—suffusing the atmosphere with heart-warming Grace and Love.

The programme began with a short audio-visual presentation on Amal Kiran, prepared by the Gnostic Centre. It was followed by the keynote address by Kireet Joshi (Chairperson, Indian Council of Philosophical Research) during which he shared several reminiscences. Sachidananda Mohanty then spoke about his experience of editing the book, as well as its structure. Finally, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayana (Chairperson, IIC-Asia Project) released the Centenary volume, and spoke a few words. The evening concluded with a recorded rendering by Amal of one of his poems.

A display of some of Amal's books was set up by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch.

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### FOR AMAL, 25<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2004

Dear friend, like climbers on a mountain peak  
 You go in front, we follow from afar  
 Secured by the cord that joins us, as we seek  
 Above high breathless slopes the impossible star.

There earth aspiring meets a descending might,  
 In life after life we have dared that summit trail  
 Turning our questing gaze to the blinding light  
 Of sheer white crests revealed through their cloudy veil.

The knot that links us, though so loosely tied,  
 Is everlasting in Time's endless skein.  
 Oceans will separate and years divide  
 But those who are parted now will meet again.

So be it: dear Amal, companion on the way!  
 With joy we celebrate your hundred years today.

SONIA DYNE