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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE GODHEAD

I sat behind the dance of Danger's hooves
In the shouting street that seemed a futurist's whim,
And suddenly felt, exceeding Nature's grooves,
In me, enveloping me the body of Him.

Above my head a mighty head was seen,
A face with the calm of immortality
And an omnipotent gaze that held the scene
In the vast circle of its sovereignty.

His hair was mingled with the sun and breeze;
The world was in His heart and He was I:
I housed in me the Everlasting's peace,
The strength of One whose substance cannot die.

The moment passed and all was as before;
Only that deathless memory I bore.

SRI AUROBINDO

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

[This poem speaks of "the vision of the Godhead surging up from within when in danger of a carriage accident," an experience Sri Aurobindo had during the first year of his stay in Baroda (1893).

In the last line, "that" is written above "its" in the MS.

(Vide, On Himself, SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 30, p. 81; Sonnets, p. 96 note)]

‘THE CALM OF DEEP WATERS’

August 2, 1913

THIS morning, as I was glancing over the month that is beginning and wondering how I could serve Thee better, I heard the small voice within like a murmur in the silence, and this is what it said to me: “See how very little all outer circumstances matter. Why strive and strain so to realise thy own conception of Truth? Be more supple, more trusting. The only duty is not to let oneself be troubled by anything. To torment oneself about doing the right thing causes as much harm as a bad will. Only in a calm as of deep waters can be found the possibility of True Service.”

And this reply was so luminous and pure, it carried within itself such a striking reality, that the state it described was communicated without any difficulty. It seemed to me I was floating in the calm of deep waters; I understood; I saw clearly what the best attitude would be; and now I have only to ask Thee, O Sublime Master, my Supreme Teacher, to give me the strength and clear-sightedness I need to remain constantly in this state.

“Do not torment thyself, child. Silence, peace, peace.”

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 26)

‘O SWEET HARMONY...’

August 8, 1913

O SWEET harmony that dwellest in all things, sweet harmony that fillest my heart, manifest thyself in the most external forms of life, in every feeling, every thought, every action.

All is to me beautiful, harmonious, silent, despite the outer turmoil. And in this silence it is Thou, O Lord, whom I see; and I see Thee in so unique a way that I can express this perception only as that of an unvarying smile. In truth, the real nature of the feeling experienced in the presence of the sweetest, most calm, most compassionate smile has a poor resemblance to what I feel when I see Thee in this way.

May Thy Peace be with all.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 27)

ON THE VAISHNAVA APPROACH

It seems to me that these differences of valuation come from the mind laying stress on one side or another of the approach to the Divine or exalting one aspect of realisation over another. When there is the approach through the heart, through Love and Bhakti, the highest culmination is in a transcendent Ananda, an unspeakable Bliss or Beatitude of union with the Divine through Love. The school of Chaitanya laid especial and indeed sole emphasis on this way and made this the whole reality of Krishna consciousness. But the transcendent Ananda is there at the origin and end of all existence and this is not and cannot be the sole way to it. One can arrive at it through the Vasudeva consciousness, which is a wider, more mentalised approach—as in the method of the Gita where knowledge, works, bhakti are all centred in Krishna, the One, the Supreme, the All, and arrive through the cosmic consciousness to the luminous transcendence. There is the way too described in the Taittiriya Upanishad, the Vedanta's Gospel of Bliss. These are certainly wider methods, for they take up the whole existence through all its parts and ways of being to the Divine. If less intense at their starting-point, a vaster and slower movement, there is no reason to suppose that they are less intense on their summits of arrival. It is the same transcendence to which all arrive, either with a large movement gathering up everything spiritual in us to take it there in a vast sublimation, or in a single intense uplifting from one part, a single exaltation leaving all the rest aside. But who shall say which is profounder of the two? Concentrated love has a profundity of its own which cannot be measured; concentrated wisdom has a wider profundity, but one cannot say that it is deeper.

Cosmic values are only reflections of the truth of the Transcendence in a lesser truth of time experience which is separative and sees diversely a thousand aspects of the One. As one rises through the mind or any part of the manifested being, any one or more of these aspects can become more and more sublimated and tend towards its supreme transcendental intensity, and whatever aspect is so experienced is declared by the spiritualised mental consciousness to be the supreme thing. But when one goes beyond mind, all tends not only to sublimate but to fuse together until the separated aspects recover their original unity, indivisible in the absoluteness of all made one. Mind can conceive and have experience of existence without consciousness or Ananda and this receives its utmost expression in the inconscience attributed to Matter. So also it can conceive of Ananda or Love as a separate principle; it even feels consciousness and existence losing themselves in a trance or swoon of Love or Ananda. So, too, the limited personal loses itself in the illimitable Person, the lover in the supreme Beloved, or else the personal in the Impersonal—the lover feels himself immersed, losing himself in the transcendental reality of Love and Ananda. The personal and the impersonal are themselves posited and experienced by mind as separate realities and one or other is declared and seen as supreme, so that the personal can have *laya* in the Impersonal or, on the contrary, the impersonal disappears into

the absolute reality of the supreme and divine Person—the impersonal in that view is only an attribute or power of the personal Divine. But at the summit of spiritual experience passing beyond mind one begins to feel the fusion of all these things into one. Consciousness, Existence, Ananda return to their indivisible unity, Sachchidananda. The personal and the impersonal become irrevocably one, so that to posit one as against the other appears as an act of ignorance. This tendency of unification is the basis of the supramental consciousness and experience; for cosmic or creative purposes the supermind can put forward one aspect prominently where that is needed but it is aware of all the rest behind it or contained in it and does not admit into its view any separation or opposition anywhere. For that reason a supramental creation would be a manifold harmony, not a separative process fragmenting or analysing the One into parts and setting these parts over against each other or else putting them contradictorily against each other and having afterwards to synthesise and piece them together in order to arrive at harmony or else to exclude one or all of the parts in order to realise the indivisible One.

You speak of the Vaishnava school emphasising the personal felicities, as in the classification of the Bhavas, and you say that these are short and quick feelings and lack in vastness or amplitude. No doubt, when they are first felt and as they are felt by the limited consciousness in its ordinary functioning and movement; but that is only because the emotional in man with this imperfect bodily instrument acts largely by spasms of intensity when it wants to sublimate and cannot maintain either the continuity or the extension or the sublimated paroxysm of these things. But as the individual becomes cosmic (the universalising of the individual without his losing his higher individuality as a divine centre is one of the processes which leads towards the supramental Truth), this disability begins to disappear. The truth behind the *dāsyā* or *madhura* or any other Bhava or fusion of Bhavas becomes a vast and ample continuous state,—if, by chance, they lose something of their briefer intensities by this extension of themselves, they recover them a thousandfold in the movement of the universalised individual towards the Transcendence. There is an ever-enlarging experience which takes up the elements of spiritual realisation, and in this uplifting and transforming process they become other and greater things than they were and more and more they take their place by sublimation, first in the spiritual cosmic, then in the all-embracing transcendent whole.

The difference of view between Shankara and Ramanuja and on the other side Chaitanya about Krishna arises from the turn of their experience. Krishna was only an aspect of Vishnu to the others because that ecstatic form of love and bhakti which had become associated with Krishna was not for them the whole. The Gita, like Chaitanya, but from a different viewpoint, regarded Krishna as the Divine himself. To Chaitanya he was Love and Ananda, and Love and Ananda being for him the highest transcendental experience, so Krishna too must be the Supreme. For the writer of the Gita, Krishna was the source of Knowledge and Power as well as Love, the

Destroyer, Preserver, Creator in one, so necessarily Vishnu was only an aspect of this universal Divine. In the Mahabharata indeed Krishna comes as an incarnation of Vishnu, but that can be turned by taking it that it was through the Vishnu aspect as his frontal appearance that he manifested; for that the greater Godhead can manifest later than others is logical if we consider the manifestation as progressive,—just as Vishnu is in the Veda a younger Indra, Upendra, but gains upon his elder and subsequently takes place above him in the Trimurti.

I cannot say much about the Vaishnava idea of the form of Krishna. Form is the basic means of manifestation and without it it may be said that the manifestation of anything is not complete. Even if the Formless logically precedes Form, yet it is not illogical to assume that in the Formless, Form is inherent and already existent in a mystic latency, otherwise how could it be manifested? For, any other process would be the creation of the non-existent, not manifestation. If so, it would be equally logical to assume that there is an eternal form of Krishna, a spirit body. As for the highest Reality it is no doubt Absolute Existence, but is it only that? Absolute Existence as an abstraction may exclude everything else from itself and amount to a sort of very positive zero; but Absolute Existence as a reality who shall define and say what is or is not in its inconceivable depths, its illimitable Mystery? Mind can ordinarily conceive of the Absolute Existence only as a negation of its own concepts spatial, temporal or other. But it cannot tell what is at the basis of manifestation or what manifestation is or why there is any manifestation at all out of its positive zero—and the Vaishnavas, we must remember, do not admit this conception as the absolute and original truth of the Divine. It is therefore not rigidly impossible that what we conceive and perceive as spatial form may correspond to some power of the spaceless Absolute. I do not say all that as a definite statement of Truth, I am only pointing out that the Vaishnava position on its own ground is far from being logically or metaphysically untenable.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, pp. 79-83)

The Divine Love may not be able yet to manifest on the physical plane, humanity being what it is, as fully and freely as it would otherwise do, but that does not make it less close or intense than the human. It is there waiting to be understood and accepted and meanwhile giving all the help you can receive to raise and widen you into the consciousness in which it will be no longer possible for these difficulties and these misunderstandings to recur—the state in which there is possible the full and perfect union.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 754)

“...AND LIVE ACCORDING TO TRUTH”

9 June 1971

THERE is a rush of adverse forces. A mad rush. But the Response has started coming—it is just a small beginning. In everyone it was as though a hurricane—it has not gone completely. All that was believed to have been conquered and repulsed, rushes back again—in the most unexpected persons—in all forms, but especially in character, oh!... doubts and revolts and all that....

(Silence)

A message was asked from me for the whole of India. I have given it. (*Mother hands the text to the disciple.*)

*Supreme Lord, Eternal Truth
Let us obey Thee alone
and live according to
Truth.*

It is a terrible onrush of Falsehood. It was as though the whole world, everyone were lying, even the most unexpected people—everywhere, everywhere, everywhere. And for me it was a living thing (*Mother makes a gesture of seeing*) oh! horrible, you can't imagine.... A little twist to the right, a little twist to the left, a little twist... nothing, nothing, nothing is straight. And then the body asked itself, “Where is your falsehood?” It looked at itself. And it saw this old story: “The Lord is to be called only when the matter is important! (*Mother laughs*) You don't expect to be with Him all the time!” Then it got a good rap!... It was not aggressive, it looked something like humility—it got a good slap.

It was a mad fury of disagreeable things—more than disagreeable: truly, truly wicked and bad and destructive. A fury, until it got the understanding. Then this feeling came in the whole body, in all the cells, everywhere, all the while—it reached such a point that I was not able to swallow when I was eating—until everything, everything got the understanding: I exist only through the Divine and I cannot subsist but through the Divine... and I cannot be myself but by being the Divine. After that, things were better. Now the body has understood.

(Long silence)

You have nothing to ask? Nothing to say?

I have the feeling that the destiny is bad.

No, it is not true. This is part of the Falsehood; it is this Falsehood. There is no bad destiny, it is a lie! It is a real falsehood.... It is not true at all, at all, at all. There, that just gives you an example: it is like that, like that everywhere (*gesture, as though with claws*). As for me, I feel as though I see goblins with hooked hands that try to clutch at everybody. Ah! You should have a look at them and then laugh—stick out your tongue, like a child with no manners.

(*Long silence*)

In any case, you are attacked on all sides.

Oh!... I tell you it is a massive rush—but it does not matter.... One must rise above, and then (*gesture of seeing from above*).

What I have told you is the Truth, it is the only remedy:

To exist only for the Divine.

To exist only through the Divine.

To exist only in the service of the Divine.

To exist only... by becoming the Divine.

There you are.

There is no “you”, there is no “one must wait”, there is no “it will come in its time”, there is no... all these things very reasonable do not exist any more—it is That (*Mother brings down her fist*), like a sword blade. It is That. It is That *in spite of everything*: the Divine, the Divine alone. All this rubbish of bad will and revolt and... all that (*Mother lifts a stiff finger*), that must be swept away. And that which says that one shall perish or be destroyed by That, is the ego—it is Sir Ego that tries to be taken as the true being.

But the body has learnt that even without the ego, it is what it is, because it is that by the divine Will, not by the ego—we exist by the divine Will and not by the ego. The ego was a means—a means for many centuries—now it is worth nothing, its time has passed. Now... (*Mother brings down her fist*), consciousness, it is the Divine; power, it is the Divine; action, it is the Divine; individuality, it is the Divine.

And the body has understood, felt very well; it has realised, understood that this sense of being a separate individuality is altogether useless, altogether; it is not at all indispensable for its existence, it is wholly useless. It exists through another power and another will which is not personal: it is the divine Will. And it will be what it should be only the day it feels that there is no difference between itself and the Divine. That is all.

All the rest is falsehood—falsehood, falsehood, and falsehood that must disappear. There is only *one* reality, there is only *one* life, there is only *one* consciousness (*Mother brings down her fist*): the Divine.

THE MOTHER

(*Notes on the Way*, CWM, Vol. 11, pp. 258-60)

June '971

Seigneur, Verité Eternelle

Permettez que nous n'obéissions
qu'à Toi
et que nous - vivions selon
la Vérité .



June '971

Supreme Lord Eternal Truth

Let us obey Thee alone
and live according to
Truth .



FROM *THE KARMAYOGIN*

PASSING THOUGHTS

Great Consequences

THE events that sway the world are often the results of trivial circumstances. When immense changes and irresistible movements are in progress, it is astonishing how a single event, often a chance event, will lead to a train of circumstances that alter the face of a country or the world. At such times a slight turn this way or that produces results out of all proportion to the cause. It is on such occasions that we feel most vividly the reality of a Power which disposes of events and defeats the calculations of men. The end of many things is brought about by the sudden act of a single individual. A world vanishes, another is created almost at a touch. Certainty disappears and we begin to realise what the *pralaya* of the Hindus, the passage from one age to another, really means and how true is the idea that it is by rapid transitions long-prepared changes are induced. Such a change now impends all over the world, and in almost all countries events are happening, the final results of which the actors do not foresee. Small incidents pass across the surface of great countries and some of them pass and are forgotten, others precipitate the future....

Great Preparations

Conversely, at such times great preparations, at least in the initial stages of the change, lead to nothing or very little. Pompous associations, largely attended conferences, earnest and careful deliberations all end in smoke; they vanish, leaving no trace behind. This is largely because these great preparations either take their stand on the chimaera that the past can be restored, or they anchor themselves on the permanency of present conditions. But in these periods things move so rapidly that yesterday's conditions entirely disappear today and today's have no surety of being in existence tomorrow. Under such circumstances the rule of the Gita becomes almost a necessity, to do one's duty according to one's lights and leave the results to God. For, when we attempt to gaze into the immediate future, the one comment that suggests itself is in the Homeric phrase,

“These things lie on the knees of the Gods.”

(This piece appeared in *The Karmayogin* of February 26, 1910, when Sri Aurobindo had already left for Chandernagore, and the paper was being looked after by Sister Nivedita.)

24 APRIL, 1964

(A Letter)

Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry 2
April 25, 1964

Sarojini-di,

Yesterday is over—for us it was not an ordinary yesterday but the anniversary of the Mother's final arrival at Pondicherry, a Darshan day, the 24th April.

This time's Darshan was indeed concretely, palpably peaceful. How you would have liked it! We were all remembering you for this special occasion as well as on the unexpected Darshan day on the 29th March.

Mother came to the balcony just a little before 6 p.m. She was dressed in blue and with the azure sky as the background it made the most unforgettable picture—the serene infinity radiant with smile—so sweet and divine that it made your heart turn over. Those who stood below were not very many but I'm sure their aspirations represented the aspiration of the whole of humanity. It was a joyful offering at the Lotus Feet of the Divine and the answering smile was so full of promise that those who witnessed it will never have any doubt of the great future of humanity, the dawning of a new race that will emerge out of the trouble and chaos that now afflict this poor earth of ours. But this radiant serene vision lasted outwardly only for six minutes or so but it's stamped for ever in our hearts. Only let us pray that we be worthy instruments of the Divine and deserve the Grace that is showered on us.

I do hope that I've not bored you with my description of our feelings. But perhaps even now we are too full and therefore it's overflowing a bit.

Please let us know about your experience of the refugees. I'm sure that your loving heart bleeds for them and that you are tied up with their problem. But who knows perhaps this is the ordeal of fire through which India, specially Bengal, has to pass through to emerge fit and pure so as to stand again as the spiritual leader of the world. The very destiny of the earth is in the making so there's bound to be this severe test—our very stuff, not leaving the dregs of our human nature, has to be changed and that's indeed a tall order and a very difficult one. But the Divine is there and therefore we are sure the day is not far off when the result of all this human sacrifice will bear fruit and all this hopelessness vanish. To quote the message of the 29th March:

“Because thou art, men yield not to their doom,
But ask for happiness and strive with fate.”

and the fate of man—the integral transformation, the descent of the Supramental on this earth.

We all remember you, first of all because you've become one of the family, secondly because your love and affection is always there and thirdly and mostly because we are all one in the Love of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

All of us are fine and am sure it's the same with you all over there.

Do write at your leisure.

Yours affectionately,
Sumitra

Aspiration

What is exactly meant by a sincere aspiration?

An aspiration which is not mixed with any interested and egoistic calculation.

12 January 1934

*

It is to the sincerity of your aspiration that the Love answers spontaneously.

20 October 1934

*

Let your aspiration leap forward, pure and straight, towards the supreme consciousness which is all joy and all beatitude.

*

We must aspire with all our being for the manifestation to come soon and complete.

2 February 1935

*

Prayer of Aspiration

Let us go to sleep with a prayer and wake with an aspiration for the New and Perfect Creation.

*

The urge of aspiration: nothing is too high, nothing too far for its insatiable ardour.

*

It never does any harm to express an aspiration—that gives force to it.

(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 14, pp. 75-76)

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE AND WORLD-PROBLEMS

TWO LETTERS TO A SEEKER—II

(Continued from the issue of March 2005)

You have asked: How is one to know that one's search for the Divine is a true quest? I am not sure what exactly you mean. Are you doubting that to search for the Divine is a quest worth making and not merely a pursuit of a will-o'-the-wisp? Or are you wondering whether what you are searching for is the Divine or is something else? I think it is the latter sense you have in mind. If so, my reply in brief is: "Whenever one feels that the things of ordinary life do not satisfy one and that even the best of fortunes commonly imaginable will not answer the need in one's heart, one has known the call and the touch of the Divine. Whether the call and the touch are a temporary phenomenon—an incident in an interval between two phases of ordinary human life—or a permanent event remoulding one's whole being and shaping one's whole future: this depends on the intensity of the inner flame. The intensity may not always show on the surface in its full drive, but a certain inner certitude is its sign for the outer self. When you say, 'I definitely know that I am searching for something, but what I do not know,' you seem to me to give a hint of the certitude I speak of. But you must try to get some sort of silence in the being so that matters may become quite clear and the call and the touch of the Divine may reveal themselves in an unmistakable shape. Don't doubt your destiny, but ask it inwardly to show its true light."

Your next question is about the exceeding care needed about one's company and environment when one is wanting the Divine. The injunction you quote does not mean that you should seclude yourself from common contacts, but it would be wise to refrain at present from the contact of those who are opposed to your quest for the Divine or are very gross in their nature. A lot of influences come to us on the level of the subconscious: we may hardly know what has happened and yet a host of things can take place because all of us are constantly interchanging currents on the submental level where there are not sharp demarcations of individuals but a general amorphous mass flowing through all and passing from one to another. In spite of our best aloofness in mind and heart the interchange can take place: that is why we have to be somewhat careful about our contacts. Of course the invasion can come even from afar, but it is less likely and not so strong, provided one is on vigil within and turned towards the Divine.

Your query about humanity and Yoga brings again the theme of "social work". I should say that humanity is certainly meant to receive the boon of Yoga but our principal and central aim is not merely service of humanity. As soon as you make that service your chief concern you will be attacked by all sorts of doubts about doing Yoga: you will feel that instead of doing Yoga you must absorb yourself in social work, give money to charities etc., etc. You will not want to spare any moment for direct communion with God—and quite naturally because that would take away the attention you should give every moment to humanity. But if, while accepting

humanity as God's creation and therefore meant to receive His boon, you realise that the basic need in the world is more and more of God's direct presence, His superhuman consciousness and power and bliss, and that God is greater than humanity and is therefore our primary concern, then Yoga will be a spontaneous movement and the channelling of its influence to humanity will also be an automatic action and you will be helping to remove the world's evil and suffering from the very foundation. Work in the midst of humanity and ostensibly for humanity need not always cease, but during the work the Yogic consciousness will go on and the work itself will be really done as an offering to the Divine and not either for oneself or for humanity which is after all a repetition of oneself on a huge scale.

Your final question is the shortest but actually a tremendous "stumper". All the books written by all the sages won't be a sufficient answer to it. And yet, I suppose, a few general words could hold the heart of the matter. Let me first repeat your question: "Why do we come into this world and whither are we going?" I'll begin with the words: "this world." What is the nature of this world? It seems to start in brute matter without consciousness. It develops the quiverings of life. It attains the level of mind. It keeps straining beyond the mental. It is a world of evolution in which the initial stage is an apparent negation of the Divine. The open affirmation of the Divine is therefore its evolutionary aim. But such affirmation cannot stop with the soul's inner realisation of God. The outer nature must also become Godlike—and this becoming Godlike is not tantamount only to the outer nature obeying the soul and receiving something of its light. Mind, Life Force, Matter are themselves the Divine concealed, and the soul is just the centre and guide of a world which is not ultimately a contradiction of its divine spark but a veiled perfection which it has to clear of encumbrances and help to unveil. A divine Mind, a divine Life Force, even a divine Matter have to be realised and established. Then alone the aim of evolution will be fulfilled. The complete and integral divinisation of our whole being is the "why" of our coming into this world. If that is so, there is no "whither" in an essential sense. Here and here only must we attain perfection. Of course, the soul passes out of earth at death, moves through subtle worlds and then waits in its own deep world until the time comes to shape forth a new embodiment of new mind and vitality—this happens again and again till a large range of experience has been collected by the soul in its own depths and the hour strikes for it to turn the whole being into divine values and terms. The Yogic call is a sign that the hour has struck or is very near. Another "whither" is the higher and inner worlds which have to be explored and possessed by the Yogi: he goes into the profundities of being and scales the peaks above the mind, but after experiencing and realising them he must strive to bring their wonders into the outer being. So my answer to the query—"Whither are we going"—is: "We are going everywhere but in order to come back to Mother Earth and transform her and fulfil the purpose for which we came."

(Concluded)

AMAL KIRAN (K. D. SETHNA)

(The Indian Spirit and the World's Future by K. D. Sethna, 1953, pp. 218-22)

THE FOURTH OF APRIL

The heart of the earth throbbed with an unknown shiver of delight
The day Thou chosest Thy cave of *Tapasya* and camest over here;
Seers from the luminous realms above looking downwards saw
The mortal world ablaze with the light of some great advent;
The gods from heaven came down to play the flutes in unison
In this grand festival of festivals:
The tune spread wide over the place of pilgrimage
Made holy by the dust of Thy feet,
At the horizon-door of the earth, on the shores of this sea,
While the radiating rays of the rising sun made a crimson offering.

Touched by those rays dormant Time suddenly awoke.
The rays struck like thunderbolts the closed core of inertia,
Lighting the fire of doom
In the sin-dark forest-form of this infernal era;
The heavenly throne of the Supermind at that very moment
Came down upon the soil of the earth
Dreaming of the possibility of its manifestation;
From that auspicious hour, unnoticed by the world, it embraces Thy body,
O Emperor-Yogi, O King of kings, O Enjoyer of the entire empire!

Seated on that throne self-established upon earth,
Thou didst follow Thy path of unshakable inner journey.
The ambrosial realisation achieved in Thy being,
Didst want to bestow on all beings and for that
Hast remained awake for ever, day and night, the marvel-Sun that Thou art;
Since then, again and again, like the cataracts of *Gomukhi*,
Thy Truth-utterances filled the mortal hearing with the mantra of liberation.
Thou didst proclaim in a solemn voice, "I have acquired a treasure
"For you, O sons of Immortality,
"Come to me and share that treasure of self-realisation,
"Discover the hidden riches that lie
"Shut up within the human casket in blind unmanifestation."

Men at present dance like demons
On the breast of the earth with loathsome hilarity;
Mad hearts, they invite hard times as opportunity;
Today the sons of Immortality drink the poison of death;
The field of Union, shaken by bloody strife,

Is loud with the clamours of battle;
 Within the bosom of life innumerable selfish desires
 Raise their hood of greed and thrust out their licking tongues.
 Therefore the flower-cheeks, forgetful today of the mantra of heaven,
 Are stained with a lowly expression of lolling lust—
 The bloom-shaped desire's worm-hankering;
 Therefore the sharp knife of mockery,
 Hidden by the dissembling smirk of delight,
 Is whetting its cruel, crooked blade;
 Therefore today the festive messages
 Are ringing on the strings of the *veena* of destruction;
 Frenzied egoism has risen, defiling the sky
 By raising its smoky spiral of arrogant banner;
 Behind that veil of smoke
 The peaceful, white evening star tries in vain to assert its brightness;
 The moon of heavenly hope
 Entangled in the snares of *maya* falls down again and again;
 The days, perverted in ignorance, forget the mantra of the Sun;
 Some rush along the avenues in *rakshasa-rajās*,
 Some lie in the lifeless pit of *tamas*,
 Some kill,
 Some strangle themselves and die a slow death,
 Some others, incapable and timid, seeking a shelter,
 Head towards the dark abyss of impotence,
 Some openly support untruth and proclaim it aloud,
 Some others, deeming falsehood to be indestructible,
 Cherish it in the heart like a snake milk-fed.

Amidst this war and destruction of blind ignorance
 Thy inextinguishable, fiery message, scintillating,
 Sounds like a blazing OM,
 O wonderful Supreme incarnate!
 O novel Death-Conqueror, the blue throated God of the earth,
 Thy resolve divine, by virtue of Thy infinite, sublime patience,
 Remains unruffled even after kissing the churned poison-ocean
 Of this corrupt century;
 In the act of drinking up the poison-ocean,
 Thy lips, blue foam stained, liberate the sin-steeped earth.
 O *Maheshwar*! Thy *rasa* of celestial delight
 Revives the dying life of this earth!

That is why perhaps they have all come
 Whose hearts pulsate to the rhythm of Thy call;
 In their fiery hearts they know no fear;
 With their bright flame-sword they have burnt
 One after the other the dense, dark meshes of attachment;
 They have come flowing down the cataracts of unchecked freedom,
 Down the untamed course of the surging river
 Into the holy current of bright revealing inspiration,
 And, at every moment they reach Thy Ocean;
 The lamp of Thy gaze guides them on their path;
 They now stand beside Thee
 Intent on the shining *sadhana* of Light;
 Having surrendered themselves with their whole being
 To Thy creative hands,
 They are now moving forward worshipping Thee,
 O Thou great Creator;
 Their life-breath Thou art!
 In this huge wide world there is none except Thyself
 To give to the thirsty lips some water to quench the thirst of the self,
 To tell us about the heaven to be realised,
 That is why the ardent aspirants reach the shore of the shoreless ocean
 By Thy infinite compassion,
 O God and Friend of man!
 What intense pain hast Thou borne in the depths of Thy heart!
 Thou art the pollen in the core of the flower of the aching universe
 Yet harder Thou art than the thunderbolt,
 No fool's paradise can ever escape
 The tremendous and irresistible scorching of Thy fire-reality;
 Striking again and again the traveller-consciousness lost in dreams
 With the hard lessons learnt from life,
 Thou keepest him sleepless night and day
 On the path of the relentless Truth
 In the fiery ordeal of untiring *sadhana*;
 Igniting innumerable lightning flashes in his veins
 Thou ledest him to the realms of Liberty.

This day the lamp of my life
 Has received the undivided flame of those lightning flashes;
 My aspirations, made pure by the rosy kisses from the flame-lips of Truth,
 Are fulfilled; my dreams are realised;
 The cheeks of my imagination are like the crimson brow

Of the *digbadhus*, the goddesses of the directions,
 Kissed by the morning sun;
 So there is no trace of darkness in my light-drenched consciousness.
 I am Thy poet, O Thou Bestower of all my wishes!
 This desert-life, receiving the showers of Thy bounty,
 Becomes a garden celestial
 And chants with a generous, sleepless, ceaseless hum
 A stream of mantras to the listening earth;
 Flowing with the crystal current of the heavenly *Alakananda*
 My rhythm is lucid and spontaneous;
 Harmoniously it unites the dust with the blue of the sky;
 It has held me at Thy heavenly feet on this grey seashore upon earth
 From the very day when Thou didst choose this place
 As the seat of Thy *sadhana*.

With the turn of the year that auspicious day is here once more
 Rocking the earth with surges of light, destroying the dark night abysmal;
 The dawn dances with the rhythm of the anklets of fire
 Attuned to the beat of the revolving universe.
 Here the earth is awake, her heart throbs with immense delight;
 Over that shiver of delight the blessings of the Seven Sages of heaven
 Fall in star showers; wonder-eyed, the gods look down from their infinity
 And sing, welcoming the Advent.

That melody I caught in my finite flute,
 My voice resounded with solemn songs of tribute,
 My rhythm scattered all the pearls of my heart with an enchanting felicity!
 With the conch-blast of my voice
 The sea of heavenly valour flooded each cardiac cell of this earth;
 Thy flaming *veena* lit up the words of this mouth
 With the splendour of the *raga Deepak*;
 O Master, Master of the universe, O Poet, O Poet cosmic!
 Harken to Thy disciple reciting the Mantra of conquest esoteric,
 Accept his offering—
 Accept the music of his total self surrender.

NISHIKANTO

(Translated by Satadal from the original Bengali poem *Chautha April*)

AMAL KIRAN'S BIRTH CENTENARY

A TRIBUTE

(A Talk at the Beach Office on 26.11.04)

I HAVE been asked to say a few words on this memorable and solemn occasion. I am not sure if the organisers are aware of the risk they are taking by asking an Indian, like me, of average intelligence, to say a few words; for, by nature, we Indians tend to be very loquacious and the few words may prove to be unending! If you find that I am taxing your patience, please cough softly and I will get the hint.

My “few words” will comprise of two parts. In the first part I shall try to convey to you “Why I admire Amal-da”; in the second part which, I am afraid, will be in a lighter vein, I shall recount my brief encounter with Amal-da as a student of his English class.

1. WHY I ADMIRE AMAL-DA

You may be surprised, if not shocked, to hear that I admire Amal-da not as much for his intellectual eminence but for something quite different which I shall presently elucidate. That Amal-da is a giant among the present-day modern intellectuals is almost a truism. And this, for us, is indeed a matter of great pride and jubilation. But, and this is a big but, is not the intellect a bar, a great obstacle on the path of yoga? In the *Prayers and Meditations* the Mother says:

December 16, 1913

Love pure and disinterested, Thy love in so far as we can perceive and manifest it, is the only key that can open the hearts seeking for Thee. Those who follow the path of the intellect can have a conception very high and very true, they can conceive the true life, the life one with Thee, but they do not know it; they have no inner experience of that life and they are unaware of any contact with Thee. These, who have an intellectual knowledge and who have shut themselves up for action in a construction which appears to them the best, are the most difficult of all to convert; one finds it harder to awaken in them the consciousness of the Divine than in any other being of good-will. It is love alone that can accomplish this miracle, for love opens all doors, pierces through all walls, crosses beyond all obstacles. And a little of true love does more than finest speeches.

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन।

Nāyamātmā pravacanena labhyo na medhayā na bahunā śrutena.

The Self is not to be won by eloquent teaching, nor by brain power, nor by much learning.

—Katha Upanishad

Does this imply that one has to abandon the intellect in order to achieve the spiritual goal? No, not for those who follow the path of the Integral Yoga.

“But how shall come the glory and the flame
If mind is cast away into the abyss?”

The Mother in her prayer dated November 17, 1914 says:

...This intellectual faculty which makes man vain and leads him into error, is the very faculty which can also, once enlightened and purified, lead him farther, higher, than the universal nature, to the direct and conscious communion with the Lord of us all, He who is beyond all manifestation. This dividing intelligence which enables him to separate himself from me, enables him also to scale the heights to be climbed, without his advance being enchained and retarded by the totality of the universe which in its immensity and complexity cannot achieve so prompt an ascent.

My submission is that Amal-da is one of the best exemplars of those who have succeeded in making the right use of the intellect on this difficult path of the Integral Yoga. And what is the secret of this achievement?—SURRENDER: he has allowed the bhakta in him to have the better of the intellectual. Like Arjuna, he too could say:

शिष्यस्तेऽहं शधि मां त्वां प्रपन्नम्।

Śiṣyaste ahaṁ śādhi mām tvām prapannam.

“A vast surrender was his only strength.”

(Savitri)

Let Amal-da, who from his boyhood had been educated in the western way, speak for himself (Please note the typical Amal-Kiranian humour):

I developed a keen analytic mind, an independence of temper, a certain intellectual pride and a strong individuality, an unbending individuality. Now, this kind of education does not easily lend itself to accepting supra-intellectual truths, still less to accepting humbly a spiritual Guru. But thanks to my habit and practice of falling, without very much difficulty I was able to fall—at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Speaking of falling, let us make a slight digression and hear of the first falling, I mean his first pranam to the Mother, when he had his first interview with her way back in 1928:

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

Let us recall the following words of Sri Aurobindo on surrender, before proceeding further:

The surrender must be total and seize all the parts of the being. It is not enough that the psychic should respond and the higher mental accept or even the inner vital submit and the inner physical consciousness feel the influence. There must be in no part of the being, even the most external, anything that makes a reserve, anything that hides behind doubts, confusions and subterfuges, anything that revolts or refuses.

I now come to the main thrust, namely, the turning point in Amal-da's inner life. In his own words:

It was April 10, 1954. The day proved one of the most decisive in my inner life. I took to the Mother some suggestions with regard to *Savitri*. I had written them down. The Mother looked strange and said: "I can answer without even reading your note. I won't allow you to change even a comma in *Savitri*."

"I won't allow you to change even a comma in *Savitri*"—this is the much abused line, quoted out of context, which some malicious and perverse brains with evil intentions, have tried to capitalise upon in order to malign both Amal-da and Nirodda accusing them of tampering with Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*!—Listen to the sequel of the above conversation and judge for yourself.

"Mother," I said, "I am not wanting you to sanction the changing of commas

and such things. All I want is that in some sort of Publisher's Note we should say that certain passages in Parts II and III did not receive final revision: otherwise critics will think that they are what Sri Aurobindo intended them finally to be."

The Mother exclaimed: "Do you think there is anybody in the world who can judge Sri Aurobindo? And how do you know what Sri Aurobindo intended or did not intend? He may have wanted just what he has left behind. How can you say that he did not give the final revision? How can you judge?"

I said: "It is not only my own opinion. Nirod agrees with me, and I think Nolini also."

"It is presumptuous for anyone to have such an opinion. Who can enter into Sri Aurobindo's consciousness? It is a consciousness beyond everything and what it has decided how can any one know?"

"Mother, from the fact that Sri Aurobindo sometimes corrected his own things on our pointing out oversights we conclude that passages may be there which needed revision."

At this, the Mother exploded like a veritable Mahakali: "Yes, I know. People used to pester him with letters, pointing out grammatical mistakes and other things. He used to make changes just for the sake of peace. He was very polite and did not let people see what a nuisance they were. But when he and I were together and alone and like this"—here she put her two palms together two or three times to show the intimacy—"he used to say: 'What a bother, what a nuisance!' And once he said: 'But I had a purpose in putting the thing in this way. I wanted it like this.' Sri Aurobindo made many concessions out of politeness and a wish to be left in peace. When a great being comes down here to work he wants peace and not botheration. Yes, he was very polite, and people took advantage of his compassion and misunderstood it and got all sort of ideas. Sri Aurobindo was polite—but I have made it a point not to be polite. I am not polite at all. The other day Pavitra brought me somebody's idea about Sri Aurobindo's passing. Somebody said Sri Aurobindo had died because of this or that. I told Pavitra: 'Let him think anything—I simply don't care. The truth will remain what it is.'"

I raised the question: "Take the Epilogue to *Savitri*, Mother. It comes from an early version and is not equal to the rest of the poem. In some places it is almost like a sort of anticlimax as regards the plane of spiritual inspiration."

At this moment Nirod walked in and said: "Sri Aurobindo asked me: 'What remains now to be done in *Savitri*?' I replied: 'The Book of Death and the Epilogue.' He remarked: 'We shall see about them later.'"

The Mother turned to Nirod and said: "That may be his way of saying that nothing more needed to be done. We can't form any conclusions. At most you may write a Publisher's Note to say: 'We poor blind ignorant human beings think Sri Aurobindo did not intend certain things to be the final version. And we

are giving our opinion for what it may be worth....’”

The Mother's whole outburst made me wonder about my discussions through the years with Sri Aurobindo over *Savitri*, the innumerable comments I used to make and he used to welcome and consider patiently. Was he just being polite with me? It hurt very much to think that. It also seemed impossible, non-factual. But I tried to open my being to the Mother and to accept wholly what she had said. I thanked her for the new outlook she had given me, and bowed down to her. She smiled and blessed me. She had made in me a wide opening. I opened out into a sense of Sri Aurobindo's vastness and divineness. Something in the physical mind seemed broken and to make room for the higher and wider Consciousness.

Later, the physical mind attempted a strong come-back and I passed through a whole afternoon of severe conflict. Should I accept the Mother's statement without reservation? May it not be that Sri Aurobindo's discussions with me on *Savitri* were an exception to his practice of being merely polite? But to insist on an exception and to refuse to accept the opposite showed only the resistance of ego, of *amour propre*, the intellect's pride and vanity. I felt I must reject all these self-regarding attitudes and truly grant that Sri Aurobindo might have been nothing more than polite and compassionate in considering all my suggestions to him. Then my ego would be thrown out and my physical mind become clear and grow receptive to the vast divine Consciousness of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I chose to take without any question her words, however contrary they might appear to my own sense of factuality. Moreover, I said to myself: “Your heart will not go anywhere else in search of a Guru. All your hope and help are in this Ashram. Whatever the pain, submit. You have no alternative. But at the end you will surely find light and delight as the Mother's gift through every move of hers.”

Now for the first time, even in my most outer awareness, I realised what she and Sri Aurobindo truly were. The whole poise of physical being experienced a change. A new life began, and I knew then that a fundamental obstacle—intellectual self-esteem—had essentially disappeared.

What is of extreme interest to note is the sequel to the whole incident. Some time afterwards, when I was putting together the letters which Sri Aurobindo had written to me on *Savitri* to serve as a supplement in the last part of the volume, I spoke to the Mother of an introductory note to them. She consented to listen to what I had a mind to write. In that note most of the points which I had previously put to her but which she had rejected came in again, amidst some other matters. She approved of all of them unconditionally. And when I proposed that this note might go as a footnote in small print she expressed her wish that it should go as a real introduction in its own right.

I learned how the state of mind in which we approach the Mother and the

attitude we bring to any situation related to her determines the consequences.

You will all agree with me that Amal-da here has followed to the letter the following injunction of Sri Aurobindo:

If you follow your mind, it will not recognise the Mother even when she is manifest before you. Follow your soul and not your mind, your soul that answers to the Truth, not your mind that leaps at appearances; trust the Divine Power and she will free the godlike elements in you and shape all into an expression of Divine Nature.

This is the aspect that I most cherish and admire in Amal-da—an aspect more beautiful and uplifting than any beautiful poem he may have written!

I shall end the first part of my “few words” (?) by speaking of Amal-da’s last fall, his last physical fall when he broke the thigh-bone of his left leg. When I got the news I went to see him in our Nursing Home. And what did I see? Here was a man who supposedly should be writhing in excruciating pain, lying quiet on his bed with a calm and serene expression on his face. When I enquired if he was in pain, he simply smiled and said: “Yes, if you come to think of it.” I said to myself, “Here is a man who has known himself to be other than the mere physical body (वासंसि जीर्णानि—*vāsāṃsi jīrṇāni*)” and came out of the room, my heart filled with wonder and gratitude. Gratitude, because we have been told that in our collective yoga each victory of a sadhak is essentially a victory of the Mother, making the path easier for others to follow.

2. A BRIEF ENCOUNTER

Since my deaf ears have failed to register any soft coughing, I make bold to continue with my “few words”.

What I wish to highlight now is what I consider to be a very important trait in Amal-da’s personality, namely, his ready wit and sparkling humour. To speak about Amal-da without referring to this side of his multifaceted personality is akin to painting a lion without its mane or a peacock without the plumage!

It was in the year 1955 that we, as students, had the unique privilege of having Amal-da as our teacher of English poetry. During this brief period—alas, too, too brief a period—we literally basked in ‘light and delight’.

Amal-da never tired of making fun of himself—of his lameness. He told us that he had adopted as motto of his life these words of the Chinese sage, Confucius:

“Our greatest glory lies not in never falling but in rising every time we fall.”
“Confucius, by the way,” he said, “means ‘confusion’ in Chinese.”

One day, in a talk, he said:

Let me whisper into your ears at the top of my voice an unbelievable secret. It is this: twice in *Savitri*, which is a legend and a symbol, Sri Aurobindo has referred to the present speaker, symbolically, although the speaker is very far yet from being legendary. The first reference runs:

But Mind, a glorious traveller in the sky,
Walks lamely on the earth with footsteps slow.

Surely the person intended is unmistakable....

We can say today with confidence, in his centenary year, that Amal-da has limped well into the galaxy of legendary figures!

It was from Amal-da that I learned that Satan was no other than the Archangel Lucifer. "Do you know why he fell from heaven?" he asked, "because he was too grave:—he fell because of gravity!"

It reminds me of Sri Aurobindo's beautiful aphorisms:

"To listen to some devout people, one would imagine that God never laughs;..."

or,

"A God who cannot smile could not have created this humorous universe."

While teaching us metric foot in English prosody, he illustrated that his gait was an iambic (–) or a trochee (–), whereas, ours was a spondee (–) or a pyrrhic (–)!

Amal-da was very particular about our correct pronunciation of the English tongue. As illustration of the Indian way of English pronunciation he recounted the following humorous anecdotes. Let me first warn you in Sri Aurobindo's words: "God's laughter is sometimes very coarse and unfit for polite ears; ..."

Amal-da came here in December 1927. Later he was given work in the Furniture Service. One day he had to go to get a sadhak's cot for repair. When he asked: "Where is the cot?"—"The cot is on Barinda," came the reply. "You mean Barinda is on the cot."—"I told you," came the angry reply, "the cot is on Barinda." It took some time for Amal-da to realise that 'Barinda' was the Bengali pronunciation of 'Verandah'!

The next sample (not for polite ears!) goes like this: One day Amal-da was very much intrigued by the excitement in the small Ashram-community. People were saying: "Bachelor is coming with his daughter." How come, a bachelor coming with his daughter causes so much glee and excitement, wondered Amal-da.—The bachelor in question was none other than Becharlal, Dr. Becharlal from Gujarat!

He also gave examples of how the French too find it difficult to pronounce English words—Pavitra-da when he joined the Ashram told a fellow sadhak: “I am a bother to you all.” “No, no, you are not at all a bother to us,” came the polite protest. But Pavitra-da insisted that he was a ‘bother’.—What Pavitra-da meant was ‘brother’, he was only pronouncing it in the French way. Unlike their English counterparts, the French don’t take liberties with the pronunciation of vowels. To the French the vagaries of English pronunciation in words like put-cut or do-go, is not only sacrilegious, it is simply barbaric!

Now comes the *coup de grâce*—Amal-da said that the English are no better when it comes to pronouncing Indian names.—An Indian emissary was invited to a royal dinner in London. The custom is that as the guest comes he presents his credentials to the butler at the door who then announces loudly the name of the invitee for the benefit of others. When our Indian friend presented his credentials to the butler, the butler took some time reading it, looked at the invitee, read the credentials again, looked at the invitee again from head to foot, then after an uneasy silence, announced loudly: “Damn says he, Curse says he. She’s a boy.” The Indian invitee was none other than our eminent Parsee friend, Jamshedjee Cursetjee Jeejeebhoy!

I now come to the grand finale of my “few words”, what I consider to be a *pièce de résistance*: I shall speak about the heroic attempt of Amal-da to bring out the hidden poet in us all. “Look,” he said, “don’t be afraid. To write a verse is one of the easiest things to do. All can do it, because verse exists in the very word universe!” He further encouraged and goaded us by saying that according to the Probability Theory even a baboon if it tries for long to play on a bassoon, will ultimately hit on a tune. So! Methinks the simian analogy was pretty apt for us!

The result of the sweet persuasion was, in my case, the following poem (!) entitled: “A Dream.” This was inspired by the Mother’s New Year Message:

No human will can finally prevail against the Divine’s Will. Let us put ourselves deliberately and exclusively on the side of the Divine, and the Victory is ultimately certain.

The poem was preceded by the following introductory verse:

My dear K. D. Sethna,
Do not burst like Etna,
With anger, pity or sorrow
By reading what is to follow:
I’ve tried my luck on the loud bassoon
But could not however hit on a tune,
And hope you will excuse my fall
In creating the harmony of do-mi-sol.

Having no way by which to retreat
I humbly place this "worse" at your feet.

[Amal-da's comment: Quite enjoyable.

Against "worse" (Indians pronounce it as verse) he wrote: Not worse than I expected—but far better!]

A Dream

Softly in my dream She came
And held me close to Her heart,
Then whispered to my ear:
"This is the year
That shall bear
The Truth for which we stand.
Hearken to the message
That doth presage
The Victory of the Light
Over the Inconscient Night.
So lose no hope, nor fear
The angry frown of Despair;
But with dauntless might
The grand battle fight.
For in the womb of the Dark
There is the Divine Spark
And it shall soon flower
For hark! it is God's Hour.
And now shall man's heart
Grow one with his godlier part."
Then She kissed me and vanished away
Leaving me happy, light and gay.

[Amal-da's comment: The verse is certainly passable—the language nowhere open to criticism, though it touches poetry best in the lines (marked here in bold).]

With the parting of our ways—as student and teacher—my promising (!) poetic career came to an abrupt end. I made no further attempts to amuse the Muse,—the English language is so much the poorer.

Amen.

MANOJ DAS GUPTA

BETWEEN THE ARRIVAL AND THE DEPARTURE

(Continued from the issue of March 2005)

IN 1939 Dilip Kumar again came to Calcutta. He had been invited to sing at some functions in Assam. He organised a group and set out. This time Uma Basu was part of his troupe. With them went Uma's father, mother and aunt. The renowned cine-star and singer Pahari Sanyal too accompanied them. Very happily they toured Assam, enjoying the scenic beauty almost as much as the hospitality of their hosts. The singing programmes were a great success. But tragedy struck when they were on their way to Silchar from Srihatta. While taking a sharp turn the driver lost control and their bus fell into a gorge. All the passengers received various injuries, but Uma's father, Dharanikumar died on the spot. Later, when I heard a detailed account of the accident from Dilip, I realised what a narrow escape he had had.

In the same year World War II broke out. The Government imposed many restrictions on All India Radio. Armed soldiers guarded our offices. The regular office staff was issued identity cards for admission. The singers, musicians, speakers, all had to obtain special passes to gain entry for their programmes. My situation was rather complex. I edited the radio magazine, *Betar Jagat* and my office was situated on the first floor. The nature of my work was such that I had constantly to meet all kinds of people, such as the writers, the subscribers, the advertisers, the agents, even the hawkers. It was impossible to issue passes to everybody. So it was decided to shift my office downstairs and a garage was converted into my new office room where people could have free access. With my two clerks and a peon, I settled down.

In the month of July 1940, Subhash Chandra Bose began an agitation demanding the removal of the Hollwell Monument which commemorated the infamous "Blackhole of Calcutta". He was arrested, given a summary trial and was imprisoned. Promptly he went on a hunger strike in the jail. He was then put under house arrest and closely guarded by the police, twenty-four hours a day. Anybody who entered or left the house was subjected to a body search. Soon the news spread that Subhash had taken the vow of silence and was busy practising yoga. He would see absolutely nobody, not even the members of his family. The meals were to be left outside his door at fixed hours. After he had finished, he would put the dishes out and close the door. In this manner he spent the long days of his house arrest.

On January 27, 1941 all the dailies carried the sensational news that Subhash Bose had disappeared, without leaving a trace. His elder brother, Sarat Chandra Bose, sent telegrams to all the likely places, where he might have gone. He sent a telegram to Pondicherry too, enquiring about Subhash. But the same reply came from everywhere—nobody had seen him.

In the beginning of 1940, I paid a visit to the Arya Publishing House. In those days all the books of Sri Aurobindo were published here. Tarapada Patra was then running this concern. When he saw me he said, “Nolini-da, I have a piece of good news for you. Tomorrow evening in your locality, at No. 14, Duff Street, the inauguration ceremony of the Sri Aurobindo Study Circle and Meditation Centre will take place. Do attend it.”

The address was indeed very near my house, in W.C. Banerjee Street. At the appointed hour, I went to No. 14, Duff Street, although I did not know the house owners. Later, of course, I learnt that the celebrated attorney, Kunjabehari Ghosh and his brothers had rented this house and were living there. When I got there, I found six or seven people assembled in a room downstairs. Among them only one person was known to me. He was the retired judge, Charu Chandra Dutt, I.C.S., whom Sri Aurobindo had befriended in Poona during his Baroda days. Soon I was introduced to the rest of the gathering, two of whom deserve special mention: Gobar Guha, the world champion wrestler, and Debidas Roy, who later settled in the Ashram with his family.

In that preliminary meeting, it was decided that the Study Circle would meet every Sunday evening. One of the books of Sri Aurobindo would be taken up for study. The reading would be followed by meditation for half an hour. Of course, for these activities the necessary permission had to be obtained from Pondicherry, especially for those who had not yet had the Darshan of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Gradually, I came to know the family of our host. One of the brothers of Kunjabehari was the renowned ophthalmologist, Dr. Bankubehari Ghosh. The second brother, Binodbehari, was an attorney. Kunjabehari was married and had recently been to the Ashram and had had the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Theirs was a very cultured, aristocratic and at the same time, warm-hearted family.

On another occasion too, I profited from my visit to the Arya Publishing House. Tarapada Patra was chatting with a very handsome young man, well below thirty, literally shining with the light of intelligence. Tarapada-babu introduced me to Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri, Professor of Philosophy at the City College, Calcutta, who had received his doctorate for his thesis on the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. I requested Dr. Chaudhuri to give a talk on Sri Aurobindo on the All India Radio. When he agreed, I contacted the concerned department of the All India Radio and fixed August 15, 1940, Sri Aurobindo’s birthday, for this talk to be delivered during the evening programme.

Next year, on August 15, 1941 Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir was established at 15, College Square, present Bankim Chatterjee Street, and from November 24, *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Vartika*, the mouthpiece of the Pathmandir, began to be published.

Meanwhile, due to Kunja-babu’s health problems, which did not permit him to come downstairs, the Sri Aurobindo Study Circle was shifted to the big hall on the

first floor. Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri came here regularly and spoke brilliantly on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. Kunja-babu's friend, the lawyer, Siddheshwar Banerjee, too spoke here on many occasions. Later, Siddheshwar Banerjee joined the Ashram and for some time taught philosophy at the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre.

During Kunja-babu's illness, I had composed a few songs which I used to sing to him. My hymn to Sri Aurobindo, *Kanakajyoti-kalebaradhari*, and my hymn to the Divine Mother, *Parama prakriti parameshwari ma*, were both written at this time. I sent both the poems to Dilip Kumar in Pondicherry. Later, he wrote to me saying that he had set them to music, taught them to some of his students and they had sung the hymns in the Ashram Courtyard so that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother could hear them.

The hymn to Sri Aurobindo, *Kanakajyoti-kalebaradhari*, received a wide acclaim after Dilip Kumar sang it for the Gramophone Company and they issued the records. My hymn to the Divine Mother was not so fortunate. It did not get equal publicity. Not many are even aware of its existence.

World War II was taking a more and more serious turn. The Japanese had sunk two heavy British Cruisers in the Indian Ocean.* In Calcutta various rehearsals for defence preparedness were underway. After dusk there was total blackout. From time to time the banshee wail of the air-raid sirens struck fear in every heart. In the narrow lanes, the air-raid wardens were busy practising with stirrup pumps and putting out mock fires. Heavy military vehicles constantly roared through the city streets at breakneck speed, endangering the life and limb of the road users.

In this situation when the citizens were living in constant fear and anxiety, they heard one day, unexpectedly, a familiar voice from Radio Berlin—"I am Subhash speaking from Berlin." This broadcast gave the people a sense of security. Subhash Chandra had joined the Axis Powers; surely the Japanese would not bomb his homeland! Many people who had left Calcutta and sought the safety of small towns and villages, now returned to Calcutta. My family too came back from my ancestral home in Nimtita.

On the night of December 20 at 10 o'clock the sirens began their usual wailing. We had heard them cry 'wolf' so often, that we did not pay much attention to their any more. But this time it was for real. Soon the sky over Calcutta resounded with the distant thunder of the Japanese planes. As the sound drew nearer, it was augmented by the explosion of bombs. Without meeting any resistance, the Japanese returned safely to their bases after bombarding the second largest city of the British Empire.

* In his famous book *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, Nirodbaran reports that in 1927, a sadhak asked "how India was likely to get freedom. The Mother's prophetic reply was, 'When a Japanese warship will come to the Indian Ocean.' In fact, the Mother had visioned India's Independence in 1920 and had told of it to Sri Aurobindo...."

Just as the sirens had sounded their welcome greetings to the Japanese planes, in the same way they now sounded the farewell notes.

Within a few days Calcutta was bombed again. It was broad daylight. The sun was shining fiercely overhead. I was in the Radio Office. The sirens blared. We could hear the bombs bursting. After bombarding the Kidderpore Docks for five minutes, the Japanese flew back.

The next occasion was at night. The target was our Radio Station. The Japanese dropped a few bombs but they missed their mark. Some nearby areas were damaged. But this attempted attack prompted the Radio authorities to engage the staff members to guard the Radio Station at night. The Radio Station was already a protected area, guarded day and night by armed sentries—in these circumstances how a few *dhoti*-clad Bengali gentlemen could provide it with additional security, was something beyond my comprehension. However there was no gainsaying the commands that came from the higher-ups. We were to take turns. Two officers had to spend two nights per month at the Radio Office. The remuneration for this overtime was fixed at Rupees forty per month for each duty officer.

My experience of one particular night is marked indelibly in my memory. A friend of mine from the Engineering Department and I were on duty. In the absence of beds, we had made ourselves comfortable on two long tables. After chatting till past midnight we had fallen asleep. Suddenly the strident ring of the telephone jerked us out of our slumber. The call was for me. My landlord summoned me to come home post-haste. My elder daughter, Gitika, had an attack of cholera!

I set out immediately. It was three o'clock in the morning. The pitch-dark streets were totally empty of men or any mode of transport. I had to go quite a distance to reach my home in North Calcutta. I started walking. When I came to Dalhousie Square, I heard the welcome sound of a rickshaw-bell. I stopped for the rickshaw but when it came near, I saw that there was a passenger in it. I resumed walking. But the rickshaw-puller caught up with me and stopped, barring my way. Perforce I had to stop. Looking up I espied a huge and most frightening specimen of humanity sitting in the rickshaw. He asked me in Hindi, "Where are you going?" When I named my destination, he told me to get in the rickshaw. Seeing me hesitate, he said forcefully, "Get in, I say."

If I were destined to be murdered by a goonda, so be it. Resignedly, I climbed up beside him. He began to give directions to the rickshaw-puller. We went through many side streets. I did not have the faintest clue as to where we were going. At last he stopped the rickshaw near the Telephone House beyond Harrison Road. "From here your house is not far," he said, "Go with God." I thanked him. In a few minutes I reached home.

I had forgotten to mention an additional fact. As a reward for guarding the Radio Station, apart from the monetary consideration, the authorities had given an ornament to each of us. It was a silver bracelet bearing the name of the wearer and All India

Radio as his permanent address, for a means of identification in case of death. While I was sitting in the rickshaw I was worried all along, to my lasting shame, that it was the lure of the silver which had prompted my benefactor to give me the lift.

*

In the year 1941 Rabindranath Tagore breathed his last. The poet fell ill in Shantiniketan in the month of July. His kidneys were affected. In the last week of July, he came to his ancestral home in Jorasanko in Calcutta for proper treatment. In spite of the difference of opinion among the doctors, he was operated on. But his condition began to deteriorate. On August 6, All India Radio began to broadcast the poet's health bulletin every hour. On August 7, I was sent to the house in Jorasanko to report the poet's condition to the Radio Office by telephone every quarter of an hour. A doctor of that area was kind enough to let me use his phone and from 8 a.m. onwards I was able to send in my report every fifteen minutes and based on that my friend Birendra Krishna Bhadra made his Radio broadcast to the listeners. At thirteen minutes past noon Rabindranath left his body. In the afternoon an unprecedented crowd of several lakhs of men and women accompanied their beloved poet to the cremation ground of Nimtola on the bank of the Ganges to bid him their final farewell. All India Radio relayed the event. Kazi Nazrul Islam composed his famous poem *Rabihara* sitting at the Radio Office and recited it on the Radio during the evening programme.

But soon after this event, something terrible happened to my dear friend, the poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam. He lost his sanity as well as his power of speech. I went to see him. He recognised me and wrote my name on a piece of paper when I asked him to write it, but went on staring vacantly before him. With a heavy heart I came away.

After a few days, news reached me that Nazrul could not be found. We searched everywhere, then informed the police. Late in the evening we learnt that Nazrul had been traced. A young man found him in the midst of the heavy traffic of military vehicles on the Barrackpore Trunk Road. Recognising the poet, the young man pulled him to the safety of the sidewalk and questioned him, "Kazi Saheb, where are you going?" Somehow Nazrul managed to utter the word, "Pondicherry." The young man contacted the local police who, in their turn informed us.

*

1942 was an eventful year. While the World War was taking a more and more serious turn, the Congress leadership was demanding complete independence for India. At this critical juncture, on March 23, the British Government sent Sir Stafford Cripps with some proposals of granting Dominion status to India. The Congress leaders were not ready to accept Cripps' proposals.

After coming to Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo had not made any comments on the political situation of the country. But now his seer-vision saw that Cripps' proposals

would be beneficial to the country's future. So he tried his best to influence the Congress leaders into accepting Cripps' proposals. Nirodbaran has given a detailed account of this in his book *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*:

Sri Aurobindo found in the proposal a fine opportunity for the solution of India's intricate problems and her ultimate liberation. We may note that the proposals envisaged a single, free, undivided India setting up a united front against the enemy. He promptly sent a message to Sir Stafford Cripps welcoming the Proposals and recommended their acceptance to the Indian leaders. The message was as follows: "I have heard your broadcast. As one who has been a nationalist leader and worker for India's Independence, though now my activity is no longer in the political but in the spiritual field, I wish to express my appreciation of all you have done to bring about this offer. I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself, and organise in all liberty of choice, her freedom and unity and take an effective place among the world's free nations. I hope that it will be accepted, and right use made of it, putting aside all discords and divisions. I hope too that friendly relations between Britain and India replacing the past struggles, will be a step towards a greater world union in which, as a free nation, her spiritual force will contribute to build for mankind a better and happier life. In this light, I offer public adhesion, in case it can be of any help to your work."

Sir Stafford Cripps replied, "I am most touched and gratified by your kind message allowing me to inform India that you, who occupy a unique position in the imagination of Indian youth, were convinced that the declaration of His Majesty's Government substantially confers that freedom for which Indian Nationalism has so long struggled."

Sri Aurobindo also sent messages through Mr. Shiva Rao to Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru that Cripps' offer should be accepted unconditionally. Lastly, he sent his envoy to Delhi to appeal to the Congress leaders for its acceptance, for sanity and wisdom to prevail. At this crucial moment Sri Aurobindo could not remain a passive witness to the folly that was about to be committed. His seer-vision saw that the proposal had come on a wave of divine inspiration. The scene is still fresh in our memory. It was the evening hour. Sri Aurobindo was sitting on the edge of his bed just before his daily walking exercise. All of us were present; Duraiswamy, the distinguished Madras lawyer and disciple, was selected as the envoy, perhaps because he was a friend of Rajagopalachari, one of the prominent Congress leaders. He was to start for Delhi that very night. He came for Sri Aurobindo's blessings, lay prostrate before him, got up and stood looking at the Master with folded hands and then departed....

We may remind ourselves of Talthymbius's mission to Troy in Sri

Aurobindo's epic poem *Ilion*.... Similarly, Duraiswamy went with India's soul in his "frail" hands and brought it back, downhearted, rewarded with ungracious remarks for the gratuitous advice. Sri Aurobindo even sent a telegram to Rajagopalachari and Dr. Munje urging them to accept the Proposals.... Cripps flew back a disappointed man but with the consolation and gratified recognition that at least one great man had welcomed the idea. When the rejection was announced, Sri Aurobindo said in a quiet tone, "I knew it would fail." We at once pounced on it and asked him, "Why did you then send Duraiswamy at all?" "For a bit of *niskama karma*," was his calm reply, without any bitterness or resentment.

In his magazine *Harijan*, Gandhi-ji wrote his famous article *Quit India*. On August 8, 1942 the Congress Working Committee passed its resolution to launch the "Quit India" movement against the British. The British Government decided to take a very firm stand and demonstrated it by arresting and imprisoning all the Indian leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Abul Kalam Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Acharya Kripalani, Govindballabh Pant, Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, Asaf Ali, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramiya, Mahadev Desai and others. Immediately a nationwide agitation broke out. Congress volunteers in thousands got themselves arrested. But many others had recourse to violent means.

Next year I went to Ranchi with my family. I had written to Dilip Kumar in Pondicherry about my plans. In Ranchi two strangers introduced themselves to me saying that they were known to Dilip Kumar Roy and that Dilip Kumar had written to them to look after me during my stay in Ranchi. One of them, Mathuranath Bandopadhyay, was a regular visitor to Pondicherry. In the course of our conversation, when I happened to mention our Sri Aurobindo Study Circle and Meditation Centre in Calcutta, where Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri gave his discourses on *The Life Divine*, Mathura-babu said, "We too have a Sri Aurobindo Study Circle here. A sanyasi reads and explains *The Life Divine* to us."

"Sanyasi? To which Ashram does he belong? What is his name?"

"I know nothing about his Ashram. But he is known as Swami Nirvanananda."

"I should like to see him," I said. "Can you arrange a meeting?"

"Why don't you come to our Study Circle tomorrow? Nirvanananda-ji will be there."

Next day he took me to their Study Circle. The sanyasi came. He was middle-aged and in an ochre robe. He had long hair and his beard flowed half way down his chest. Mathura-babu introduced me as a friend of Dilip Kumar Roy of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Swami-ji asked me a few questions about Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram. After I had answered them, he brought out a bound notebook containing a typewritten summary of *The Life Divine*.

We were only about seven or eight people present there. All of us had our copy of *The Life Divine* which we opened at the indicated page. The sanyasi began his discourse. He had a beautiful voice and his explanation was most revealing. I listened to him, spellbound. Later I learnt that he was a disciple of Swami Nigamananda.

Later still, he gave up his ochre robe and the sanyasin-name of Nirvanananda. He assumed a new name “Srimad Anirvan” and wore a long white robe. He was the first to translate *The Life Divine* into Bengali with Sri Aurobindo’s full approval.

(To be concluded)

NOLINIKANTO SARKAR

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

THE STILL POINT OF THE TURNING WORLD

I knew Thee not in the market place of life
 Where traders brought their wares and bought and sold;
 And the stalls were with eye-catching glitter rife
 And the price paid was in uncurrent gold.

I knew Thee not when I was absorbed and lost
 In all the intricate designs of my mind;
 Or in the gulfs of emotions, tempest-tossed,
 Or in the play of ego, arrogance-blind.

But when darkness dimming my eyes began to descend
 And my lungs choked on the fog that rose from the fen
 And the world’s give and take all came to an end
 And attachments’ ties were torn, I knew Thee then,

As in infinite cosmic dance in Space I whirled,
 O Splendour, the Still Point of my turning world.

ANIRUDDHA SIRCAR

A CLEAR RAY AND A LAMP—AN EXCHANGE OF LIGHT

(Continued from the issue of March 2005)

INVARIABLY, there would be a touch of humour tucked away somewhere. For instance, his letter of 10.10.86:

Your long letter was very welcome—and would have been still more enjoyable if your typewriter-ribbon had not been even fainter than the one with which my present letter is being done.

You are grateful for the trouble I took to send you long extracts from my forthcoming book. I am equally grateful for the detailed chronology you have sent from Morton Smith's book. On your mentioning the book a bell rang in my mind and I remembered reading a couple of reviews sent me by a friend—rather critical reviews pointing out some confusions he has made. One confusion relevant to my research is the common belief at present that the Parinirvana took place in 483 B.C. according to the Buddhist tradition of Ceylon. The Ceylonese tradition, for whatever it may be worth, is that the Parinirvana occurred in 543 B.C. Geiger's reduction by 60 years is not warranted. H. C. Raychaudhuri (*An Advanced History of India*, edited by R. C. Majumdar. H. C. Raychaudhuri and K. Datta, London, 1953, p. 58) comments: "Geiger's date... is not explicitly recognised by tradition." S. Paranavitana (*A New History of the Indian People* edited by R. C. Majumdar and A. S. Altekar, Lahore, 1946, Vol. VI, p. 262) rejects the theory that there was a Ceylon era reckoned from this date. S. N. Pradhan, who was willing to grant such an era, was yet obliged to add: "It has not been settled whether the era had any connection with the date of the death of the Buddha" (*Chronology of Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1927, p. 248). Now, 218 years which are said to elapse between Buddha's death and Asoka's accession would bring us from 543 to 325 B.C., an impossible date for Asoka's accession by any chronology: this is one year after Alexander's invasion of India. I may add that even 218 years is not unchallengeable. E. J. Thomas (*B.C. Law Volume*, II, Poona, 1946, pp.18-22) has observed that the Sarvastivadin Buddhists, as distinguished from the Theravadin, take Asoka to have flourished one century after Buddha's demise and that such a tradition may be traced in the Ceylonese Chronicles themselves. But 100 years renders matters still worse. Geiger too (*Mahāvamsā*, Colombo, 1950, Introduction, p. lxi) admits that 218 years are not widely accepted, for Takakusu informs us that in the Chinese *Tripitaka* there are four dates for Asoka: 116, 118, 130 and 218 years after the Parinirvana—and "the last date is found apparently only in the Chinese *Sudarsana Vibhasa Vinaya*, which is a translation of Buddhaghosa's *Samanta-pasadika*". Thus

Chinese as well as Indian evidence no less than a school of Ceylonese Buddhism situates Buddha's death between 130 and 100 years before Asoka. About all Ceylonese chronological estimates a big reservation has to be made in a certain respect. Max Müller (*A History of Sanskrit Literature*, Edition 1917, p. 137) states: "The Ceylonese possess a trustworthy and intelligible chronology beginning with the year 161 B.C. Before that time, their chronology is traditional and full of absurdities. Sylvain Lévi, as quoted by Vincent Smith (*The Indian Antiquary*, 1902, p. 199), remarks: "There is not, I believe, any reason to doubt the substantial accuracy of the Celonyese dates...from...the time of Dutthagamani, about 161 B.C., although the dates prior to his reign are not to be trusted." Hence, not only the alleged interval between Buddha's death and Asoka's accession but also the very date—whether 543 or 483—proposed for the former event is validly open to doubt.

The startling fact is that the present notion of Buddha having died in either the sixth or the fifth century B.C. is completely arbitrary. Müller (*op. cit.*, p. 136) long ago pointed out that while the Buddhists of Ceylon opt for 543 because of a supposed prophecy of Buddha the Northern Buddhists base their chronology on a reported prophecy of Buddha that "a thousand years after his death his doctrines would reach the northern countries". Müller writes: "Buddhism was definitely introduced into China in the year 61 A.D.: hence the Chinese fix the date of Buddha's death about one thousand years anterior to the Christian era." Buddha's own homeland has a yet another story to tell. Hiuen-Tsang who was in India during 630-643 A.D. collected all traditions current in his time for the epoch of the Parinirvana. D. C. Sircar (*The Age of Imperial Unity*, edited by R. C. Majumdar and A. D. Pusalker, Bombay, 1954, p. 114, fn. 1) cites four different traditions reported by Hiuen-Tsang: (1) about the end of the 3rd century B.C., (2) about the middle of the 6th century B.C., (3) about the middle of the 7th century B.C. and (4) about the middle of the 9th century B.C. The earlier Chinese traveller Fa-hien gives a date which is understood by H. A. Giles as between 770 and 719 B.C., whereas James Legge understands it as the 11th century B.C. By the Puranic chronology Asoka's accession would be in 1489 B.C. So Buddha would go a few centuries before it. The Tibetan chronology beats even this date hollow. Weber's *History of Sanskrit Literature* (p. 287) records: "Among the Northern Buddhists fourteen different accounts are found, ranging from 2422 B.C. to 546 B.C." I could cite several other accounts, Japanese among them. Most testimonies relate in some way the date to Asoka. This brings me to your reference, in the context of Morton Smith, to "the Greece of Asoka's Edict near Kandahar". If that Edict involves "Greece", naturally my identification of Sandrocottus with Chandragupta I of the Imperial Guptas must go by the board. But does he involve "Greece"? Tomorrow I'll post you my detailed study of the bilingual Kandahar inscription. It is a crucial

study at some length in two parts. I would value your opinion.

The next letter dated 28.10.86 is an excellent example of Amal's typical epistolary style: begin with a delightful *bon mot*, go on to speak of his present preoccupation; touch upon problems *M.I.* is facing and end with some news about his health, always laughing it away:

Your mention of my "extract" made me think of malt extract or liver extract and reminded me of the discussion between two Tamil would-be philosophers:

"How can you say there is God? Where is he?"

"God is everywhere."

"Then why don't I see him?"

"You foolish man, how can you see God? God is an essence."

"What essence? Chicken essence?"

The discussion could not proceed further after this crucial question. But I am led to inquire of you whether you mean by my "extract" my mind-nourishing essay in two parts: "The Greco-Aramaic Inscription of Kandahar: Some Second Thoughts on Its Interpretation." I shall be glad to know your impression. This area of chronological revision is of central importance.

Thanks for the address of the Interdisciplinary Society. I am preparing a copy for it under the title:

IS VELIKOVSKY'S REVISED CHRONOLOGY TENABLE?

A SCRUTINY OF THREE FUNDAMENTAL THEMES:

THE EXODUS, HATSHEPSUT, TUTHMOSIS III¹

The Press-tussle is still on. I must have written to you that the burden of the November *Mother India* has been shouldered by the All India Press. Most probably the December issue will also be taken up at the same place. After fruitless negotiations under the auspices of the Labour Commissioner the case will have to go to the Court. Let's hope this will happen soon and the Judge delivers a fair verdict. Nowadays the dice are generally loaded in favour of labour.

Good news is that both my nephews—one a specialist in cardio-thoracic surgery and the other an expert advocate (ex-right-hand man of the late Rajni Patel)—have undertaken to get my 20 unpublished books out at the rate of at least one a year and perhaps two.² This means I have to be alive for ten or more years provided I don't write any more books. A strong point in favour of my longevity is that my legs are too weak to kick any bucket.

1. *Is Velikovsky's Revised Chronology Tenable? A Scrutiny of Four Fundamental Themes*. Published in 2002 by The Integral Life Foundation, East Lyme, U.S.A.

2. The project did not quite take off.

I had responded at length to Amal's examination of the Kandahar inscription and it was so heart-warming to receive his hearty appreciation of 28.11.86, for it is difficult to envisage someone of his immense scholarship being encouraged by the reactions of an amateur. In the same letter one notices his pressing eagerness to see his adventures in literary criticism published. Once again I failed to convince anyone in Calcutta to bring out Amal's unconventional writings:

Your appreciation of my "Kandahar" has bucked me up no end. The most difficult terrain is the next lap of the destructive-*cum*-constructive adventure. This lap as well as many other incursions into a new chronological territory is a natural part of my forthcoming book, but I shall send you the sequel I had planned for the new *Haryana Journal of Indology* which does not seem to have got off the ground at all. Your idea that my paper would be snapped up by any academic periodical on history is over-optimistic. Long ago I sent a paper on the Harappa Culture to the *IHQ* or some other periodical. It was accepted at first but later rejected—most probably because it ran contrary to the current view. I am not sure that even the Haryana people were happy to include my heresy. Having invited me to write they could not easily refuse.

I have finished typing out my scrutiny of Velikovsky for publication. It has been expanded a little and prepared without reference to my *Beginning of History for Israel*. Its 101 typed sheets (double spaced) can make a booklet on its own. The Society for Interdisciplinary Studies is at heart pro-Velikovsky. It has published criticism of him but nobody has taken him on in respect of four basic themes at once and attacked what have been taken to be his strongest points. There may even be some publishers who are interested in the controversy.

The Press problem is still not resolved. The Press has lifted its lock-out and invited the workers to return, but that Janata politician cannot afford to lose face and has threatened the strikers with dire consequences if they patch up with the Press. The majority of them seem to be willing to return. I have suggested an approach to Chandrasekhar who may be able to pull up this ambitious Johnny-come-lately. Somehow the October *Mother India* which was ready save for the printing when the unpleasant affair started will be seen through shortly. But the Press is hardly in a position to assure a timely publication of the December issue. I may again have to go through Jayantilal to the All India Press and incur extra expense. Through him or independently I'll try to wake up All India Books to your needs.

Is Gupta³ willing to publish one of my twenty unpublished books? How would "Classical" and "Romantic": *An Approach through Sri Aurobindo* suit

3. Dasgupta & Co., century-old booksellers of Calcutta who published my *Themes & Structures in the Mahabharata: the Adi Parva*.

him? There is also *The Inspiration of Paradise Lost* which I recently serialised in *Mother India*. Ravindra Khanna thinks it my best piece of critical writing. My *Blake's Tyger: A Christological Interpretation* is also a candidate. Finally, what about "*A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal*": *An Interpretation from India*. I have listed only some of the directly literary works.

The next letter I have preserved is dated 15.6.87. I was helping him with attempts by a publisher to extort royalty from him although the copyright had lapsed. Here is the letter which is a veritable *pot-pourri* of queries:

Thanks for looking up the Copyright Act. Provided Pargiter died before 1937 Motilal Banarsidass are bullying me falsely. But Pargiter's death-year is difficult to get at. He was not so important as to get into the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Perhaps the *Dictionary of National Biography* could give us the information. Have you access to it?

As for Velikovsky, I have found that *Ages in Chaos*, whose four opening revolutions in chronology I am disproving, was first published by Sidgwick & Jackson in England and by Doubleday in the USA. The copy I have is a paperback ABACUS (London) who have reprinted the book four times from 1973 to 1978. Do you think they will be interested to bring out my *Is Velikovsky's Chronology Tenable?* as an original paperback?

In the preview notice of the July *Heritage* your surprising discoveries about Asoka are advertised. If they go against the declarations of the Edicts, so do the deliverances of the *Dīpavamśa* and *Mahāvamśa*. These Ceylonese Chronicles know nothing of the Kalinga war and according to them all the Dharma missions were the work of the Buddhist Council and not Asoka. Further, these missions were all sent to adjacent countries and none to Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Cyrene and Epirus (or Corinth) as our historians make out on the basis of Yavana raja Amtiyoka and the four other rajas neighbouring him.

Two days back I ran into a copy Sankalia had sent me of a letter of his to you in which he mentions a book on the Dwaraka findings, with an introduction by him. There he brings in the *Mahabharata* and Krishna. Do you have any notes on how the archaeological discoveries at Dwaraka bear on Krishna? Can they on their own connect him with the submerged town? Please let me have whatever jottings you have made from the book. They will be of value to the second edition of my *Problem of Aryan Origins*. If Krishna can be fixed down to the submerged Dwaraka of c. 1400 B.C., the Rigveda must go beyond the Harappa Culture.

The next communication is full of the Indus Valley civilisation and is dated 17.07.87.

Thank you for your letter and the xerox enclosure. Lal's introduction lays bare a wide range of treatment and I would be interested to have some of the papers to which he alludes. I know what Knorozov, Parpola and S. R. Roy have to say on the decipherment of the Indus script. But J. V. Kinnier Wilson from the U.K. is utterly unknown to me. His paper will be very welcome. Welcome too will be Richard H. Meadow's on the camel skeleton found "way back at Mohenjo-daro". As far as I know only the scapula of a camel was found. Its relevance to my current controversy with Parpola is in the fact that, although the camel was known to the Harappans, it was never depicted on their seals. The cat too was known but makes no appearance on the seals. The case is of course different from that of the horse whose presence is not to be found in any excavated relics—except at a very late stage at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa. But the sign of the cat is most accidental and from both the camel scapula and this sign one may suppose that the non-depiction of the horse does not crucially rule out its presence. The ample evidence of *Equus caballus* Lynn at Surkotada, thought a little late yet still clearly Harappan, should give us pause, especially as we don't know of any seal-depiction of this animal at Surkotada. You will find my discussion of the whole complex problem in the August *Mother India* where I comment on Parpola's reply to me in a recent issue of *Frontline*.

Along with a copy of Meadow's paper I should like to have those of E.C.L. During Caspars on a Sumerian colony on some of the Indus sites and of K.A.R. Kennedy and of M. Rafique Mughal whose information has been very difficult to get at.

As for K. M. Srivastava, I am very much in doubt whether he is really against the invasion-theory. Lal mentions him in his Introduction in the context of himself and G. F. Dales, neither of whom is against it in spite of their contention that the Aryans had nothing to do with the end of the Harappa Culture. Srivastava's quotation from Possehl (p. 441, cols 1-2) seems to show that his real thesis is that the Aryans of the Rigveda came too late on the Indian scene to have anything to do with the end of the Harappan cities. Indra may stand exonerated but the invasion by his followers did take place: only, it was around 1200 B.C., which is too late to get linked with the Harappa Culture. Possehl says that "it is widely agreed that the Vedic literature from which the hypothesis is drawn was compiled sometime between 1200 and 800 B.C." This is quite in contrast to Wheeler's estimate. When Wheeler found that D. P. Agrawal's radio-carbon dating put the end of the Indus Valley civilisation at about 1750 B.C. he commented that nobody knows when exactly the Aryans came to India and they may well have come around 1750 B.C. instead of c. 1500 B.C. as generally estimated. By the way, you may note that Srivastava's paper is entitled "The Myth of Aryan Invasion of Harappan Towns". His subject proper is not meant to exclude the Invasion-hypothesis in general. The same position, I believe, is

Renfrew's and Allchin's. So far as I and other Aurobindonian history-students are concerned, we have here just the difference between Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

If you haven't yet mailed to me S. B. Rao's *Mohenjo-daro and the Lanka of Ravana*, please don't do it. I remember to have looked at the book years back and was not at all satisfied.

You are right to think that the link-up between the discoveries at Beit Dwaraka and the Dwaraka of Krishna is not clear. However, some kind of general presumption can be created that there is a connection. What is of moment to me is that if such a presumption may be entertained the date of Krishna and the Bharata War cannot be pushed beyond c. 1450 B.C. which is the limit I arrived at by other means. The new matter on Rao's excavation will form Supplement II to the 2nd edition of *The Problem of Aryan Origins*.

To return to Lal's Introduction: If there is any paper on the discoveries at Mehargarh in Baluchistan I shall profit by it. Perhaps Jarrige, to whose excavations Lal refers, has himself contributed something? Then there is Dales's discussion of the stone objects which are generally taken to be *yonis* and *lingas*. Long ago Sankalia laid to rest the sexual identification. Perhaps Dales alludes to Sankalia's work. This makes me ask why there is nothing by our old Hasmukh in the volume? I would have been glad to see a treatment of the theme which once greatly absorbed Sankalia—how horse-drawn spoked-wheeled chariots of the alleged Aryans could come to India through the mountain passes of the north-west. There is a well known book which shows that only certain terrains could be associated with such chariots—and these mountain passes would not qualify.

Any news of Pargiter's demise? And could you track down Doubleday's address?

I am grateful that you take so much interest in my work. The monumental book is still not over. The Index-making is terrible. In my next letter I'll tell you about my new correspondence with John Greppin, Professor of Linguistics at Cleveland State University.

(To be continued)

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

SRI AUROBINDO AND MAN'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

(Continued from the issue of March 2005)

WE have seen how nation-building has proceeded in the past. If the unity of the race is to be achieved in a like fashion, it will follow the same course; that is, it will start from a loose mass and a more or less amorphous jumble of forces, and thereafter pass through a stringent process of organisation and consolidation. These chapters were written in 1916 when the First World War had entered a most critical phase, and humanity was being swayed by violent and brutal passion. There was no sign, as yet, of a "total change of the basis of our life or the establishment of a complete or a real unity". Even an external unity was not possible, far less a psychological oneness. All that had come was a vague feeling that there might be some sense in what the faddist and the pacifist preach about the iniquities of war. But that our fierce mass-egoism must be scrapped and a new basis found for our group life had not yet appeared in the mind as something desirable. On the contrary, the war was turning men's minds towards collectivism, it was bringing man much nearer to the possibility of a State Socialism. There had been, says Sri Aurobindo, "no such favourable preconditions for a strong movement of international unification",—at least no visible signs thereof. Such being the case the thinkers of the world were not likely to obtain a hearing if they proposed to "replan the whole status of international life...". The general mass of people, governed by its interests and passions, is not likely to listen to any talk of high principles. The political mind is chary about launching out into the uncertain and the unknown. Even after a worldwide convulsion it would be satisfied with a programme of mending and tinkering and adjustments. Still since men's minds have been severely shaken, since there is a widespread belief that the old order is no longer tolerable, and that world-peace should never depend on the pride and passion of national egoism, it was expected that "some serious attempt towards the beginning of a new order should be the result of the moral collapse of the old". In a new footnote Sri Aurobindo has added, "the growing insecurity, confusion and disorder have made the creation of some international system more and more imperative if modern civilisation is not to collapse in bloodshed and chaos. The result of this necessity has been first the creation of the League of Nations and afterwards the U.N.O.: neither has proved very satisfactory from the political point of view, but henceforward the existence of some such arranged centre of order has become very evidently indispensable."

Some kind of international control, is, no doubt, being attempted. In 1916, Sri Aurobindo said that it would be vain to hope that the control will be effective and prevent farther conflict. It did not, we know, prevent the second, and a bigger, catastrophe. Now, today, the U.N.O. seems to be trying its best to avert a third big

conflagration. Thirty years ago, Sri Aurobindo warned the world that mere adjustments and tinkering was not enough. "The awakening must go much deeper, lay hold upon much purer roots of action before the psychology of nations will be transmuted into that something 'wondrous, rich and strange' which will eliminate war and international collisions from our distressed and stumbling human life." As long as national egoism remains, as long as nations are fully armed, an excuse for a scrap will never be lacking. The first Great War came because all the leading nations—all but the U.S.A.—deliberately brought it on. Sarajevo and Belgium were only excuses. We like to put the Second War down to the inordinate ambition of Germany; but is that the whole truth? In fact, if there had been no Germany, still the conflagration would have been brought on by somebody else. Sri Aurobindo's words are definite, "...new causes of strife must necessarily develop when the spirit of national egoism and cupidity seeks for satisfaction; and so long as it lives, satisfaction it must seek and repletion can never permanently satisfy it." Limitation of armaments for preventing strife would be futile. How is there going to be an effective means of control? Any arrangement made will break down as soon as war actually starts.

Can a stringent International Law do any good? Within the nation Law prevents strife because the state can put it down by force. It has got sufficiently potent instruments ready to hand for the purpose. In matters international such a method is not going to be effective for a long long time. Sri Aurobindo says, "Perhaps in the end." The authority of Law in a nation state depends on the implied sanction of the majority of the people behind it and also on the power to enforce it. In international affairs, there can be no true sword of justice nor can there be the implied sanction of the majority behind it. In practice, the authority will constantly break down. There can be no reliable standing army or a police force because it would fall apart at every critical moment. The allegiance of the soldiers will belong to their own country and not to the nebulous authority of an International body. It is obvious that no loose formation without a strong central control can be effective and enduring. The International body, therefore, must go through the same process of stringent and rigid organisation that the Nation-unit has passed through. But what force or method out of so many will bring about even an external unification of mankind can only be a subject of speculation, and no more. In the present conditions an association of free nationalities is impossible to bring about. The mentality of man is such, today, that a harmonising of the international ideal with the national is not practicable. Still, if we accept a free association of free nations as an ideal, we have made a start and can move slowly towards a reasonable solution. We have seen that in building up a nation man has had to face not only the clash of individual egoism and the national egoism, but also the constant clash of minor group interests; so also here we have before us not only the egoism of nations but also the interests of various races, various religions, various cultures and various in-between leagues and confederations, not to speak of that monster: imperialistic tendencies. This huge mass of obstacles cannot be written

off by a stroke of the pen. A future religion of humanity will probably produce its line of martyrs, whose blood-flow will carry forward the ideal of humanity a long way. But generally speaking the ideal has to be pushed along gently and imperceptibly—sometimes by agreement with adverse powers, sometimes by bribing or cajoling them. This is the only possible method till man develops into a high intellectual or moral or spiritual being. Sri Aurobindo put it practically, “The unrealised international idea will have for some time at least to work by this secondary method and through such accommodations with the realised forces of nationalism and imperialism.”

It may be asked whether through the efforts of the world's thinkers, the idea of a just internationalism will not, when things are ready, be willingly accepted by the existing states. Sri Aurobindo gives a clear reply, “...States and Governments yield usually to a moral pressure only so far as it does not compel them to sacrifice their vital interests.” France helped Garibaldi's Italy to be free; France sent men and money to the American colonists when they fought for freedom; England and France rendered valuable aid to Greece in the nineteenth century when she fought for independence. Did England and France help these subject nations to be free on high principle, out of any altruistic motives? The evidence of history is to the contrary. Napoleon III helped Italy principally to spite Austria, but he also received Savoy as remuneration. Bourbon France helped Washington not because it sympathised with his political aspiration but because it wanted to deal a blow to Georgian England. England and France helped Greece against Turkey to spite the latter when it suited their books to do so; yet only four decades later these same powers helped Turkey against Czarist Russia. There was nothing to choose between Turkey and Russia as far as the cause of freedom was concerned. As a rule, there are no high principles involved in these things, though on particular occasions certain states may act on a noble impulse. So, as Sri Aurobindo remarks, “national liberty as an absolute ideal has no longer the old general acceptance.... Nations struggling for liberty have to depend on their own strength...” There is a strong possibility that the world may get rearranged in a system of large imperial combines, with small nations having a subordinate autonomy instead of complete independence. Some such thing would have come about if the Axis Powers had won the last War, says Sri Aurobindo in a short footnote. Perhaps the danger has not yet been warded off. At least the nations that have their lots thrown in with a totalitarian power cannot but find their position much like that of the petty barons in the Middle Ages, a position rather of vassals than of equals. Even their opposites that side with great Democracies may, by force of circumstance, not be able to achieve the ideal independence, though theirs cannot ever be the sort of slavery to which the satellites of totalitarianisms will be reduced. As things stand, the huge states are bound to count most in the international scale. With man as he is, any international council that may be established is bound to be controlled by a few central Powers; or there may be groups calling themselves democratic, socialistic, communistic, or

groups which are struggling against one another in the name of continental blocs. Out of this unsatisfactory state of affairs some accommodation may emerge. But nothing great or lasting can be born, as long as nations are ego-ridden and narrow-minded. Some spiritual leaven must enter into their composition before they realise the great Truth underlying man's life. A military conquest of the world by any one nation is an impossibility, but a development like the British Commonwealth of Nations, under certain conditions, "might conceivably become the arbiter of the nations and the effective centre of an international government"—it could become under new circumstances a realisable possibility of the future. Another possibility is indicated thus—"the task might be undertaken not by a single empire, but by two or three great imperial Powers sufficiently near in interest and united in idea to sink possible differences and jealousies and strong enough to dominate or crush all resistance and enforce some sort of effective international law and government." About the future, Sri Aurobindo says, in a new footnote, that the future may "belong to a struggle between Communism and a surviving capitalistic industrialism in the New World or even between Communism and a more moderate system of social democracy in the two continents of the Old World."

We have, so far, arrived at this that the solution of the problem before us is not likely, till a later period of evolution, to take "the form of a federation of free and equal nations or adopt as its motive a perfect harmony between the contending principles of nationalism and internationalism." It has been seen already that the process of unification begins with a loose formation which is, bit by bit, organised rigidly and stringently in the next stage. Looking at what has happened before, we can safely predict that here, in the international unification too, the second stage is likely to affect adversely the liberty of the individual. If the unification proceeded according to the Germanic idea of world-domination by a race or an empire especially favoured of the Lord—and from this hallucination of being the selected instrument of the Divine, God's scourge, many have suffered, from Attila of old down to "God's own people" of today—then the suppression of the principle of liberty would be inevitable. Even if this domination was not of a single all-powerful nation but of a closely organised European combine, the result would be the same for all other races,—tutelage of the coloured peoples for an indefinite period. But a large majority of these are no longer prepared to submit to the process of Europeanisation and, incidentally, of exploitation. Sri Aurobindo in a new footnote says, "Asia is now for the most part free or in the process of liberation, the idea of a dominant West or a dominant Europe has no longer any force and has indeed receded out of men's minds and practically out of existence." By their very nature, the regimes of rigid organisation would be debarred from employing any true corrective, for they would have to proceed largely by the compulsion of reluctant material. The repression and diminution of all forms of liberty would undoubtedly be necessary. All elements of natural freedom will be destroyed, first by violence, and then by legal suppression. If, however, the

unification of the race is brought about by a combination of free nations, if these units are psychological realities, the danger to freedom will be greatly minimised.

The principle of liberty naturally retards the growth of uniformity. Liberty can be reconciled with an old order but it offers steady resistance to a new order, and as the friction increases the self-assertion of liberty tends to grow more violent. This is what has happened in the past and we see no signs of a more reasonable attitude in the near future. Man is rational enough, but usually he employs his reason to justify his egoism, not to promote harmony. His mind is ruled largely by his vital passions. The principle of authority and the principle of liberty will in all probability go on struggling as before. But if within the nation individual liberty still remains unimpaired, the tendency will be to keep up the spirit in the larger unit. Unfortunately, however, individual liberty is being eliminated fast in the modern mechanical state-organisation. Unless some new spiritual and intellectual movement appears to check this tendency, individual freedom will no longer remain a basis of group life. All this we have to decide from an abstract point of view, says Sri Aurobindo, because the present does not provide us with a clear light. We can only speculate. Let us take the two extreme possibilities. The nation is a well-established group-unit; the other units are, more or less, subordinate to it. Even the imperial is a development of the national and exists largely as an instrument for the satisfaction of the various hungers of a people. Still the nation is not a permanent group-unit. It may vanish altogether. Meanwhile we have to go ahead with our outward unification, such as seems to be favoured by the political method. Then we have to see what place the nation-units are going to occupy in the larger existence. We have also to consider if uniformity is good for the race, necessary for its unity. The idea of the citizen of the world had already appeared before the First War, though for the time being violent national passions have driven it to the background. On the other hand, the nation-idea may persist in full vigour within the larger group. It may also be that it will persist, but with a diminished vitality, as an administrative convenience—but preserving “just sufficient mechanical distinctness to form a starting-point for that subsequent dissolution of human unity,” which will come about under certain conditions.

Uniformity is an attractive ideal to a certain type of mind. It is not a thing impossible to achieve, though not practicable in the near future. There has undoubtedly been a powerful drive towards uniformity in many human activities which, by persistence, will naturally lead towards uniformity of culture. But there is certainly difference of language in the world which is likely to react against unification. It is, however, conceivable that uniformity of culture and close association will nullify this adverse force and slowly lead to the creation or adoption of a common language. But it is also possible that the uniformity attained will leave ample room for free variations—variations that will be vital enough to start “the dissolution of uniformity into a new cycle of various progress”. Likewise the organisation of the international groups may be of various kinds. The idea of the highly efficient mechanical State

may permeate the larger unit. Or, after a period of violent struggle between the ideals of extreme centralisation and that of individual freedom, philosophic anarchism may intervene. It is impossible to do anything here beyond throwing out “certain ideas which may guide us”.

(*To be continued*)

C. C. DUTT

(This instalment appeared in *Mother India* in November, 1951)

THY PRESENCE ON EARTH

Envisioning the cosmic whirligig,
Of the dancing Novae and Supernovae.
The glamorous constellations, twinkling
Among the trillions of galaxies
And the star-studded Universe,
I looked around in vain
For Thy immense visage,
Romantic, sweet and mystic,
Laden with celestial affection.

Desperately fatigued,
My pallid eyelids
Closed like dew-drops
Falling on a Tulip:
In that momentary poise of trance,
My body reclining on an ingle-nook,
Thou didst appear before my dazed self
As a blue boy, playing on the magic flute,
Adorning Thy exquisite, lotus-like face.

SURESH DEY

MOMENTS, ETERNAL

(Continued from the issue of March 2005)

EVERYONE formed this friendship with the Mother. And as a sign of that friendship She gave many of us a ring. Gauri, Chitra, Millie-di, Vasudha, Minou, Tehmi-ben, Tapati and so many others received a ring from the Mother. Many received other souvenirs from Her. We could not imagine that even without asking we would receive so much. And it was the Mother Herself who prepared this deep friendship with Her. She would offer us the flower *Friendship with the Divine* almost everyday. This flower can be of two colours, one red and the other a deep yellow. The significance of the golden yellow flower is *Supramental Friendship with the Divine*. The Mother has revealed the significance of many flowers. Whenever She had this golden yellow flower She would give it to each one of us. Ah! You cannot imagine how the heart would overflow with joy. That one could so effortlessly become friends with the divine Mother Herself was beyond our dreams. Such an impossible dream has come true in our life.

In my childhood when I heard the stories of Prahlad's or Dhruva's friendship with God, a thousand questions would come crowding into my mind: Why can't we see God? Why can't we speak to Him as a friend? Why wouldn't He come to us if we called Him like Dhruva or Prahlad?

The grown-ups would say:

"That's not possible. In this *Kaliyuga* God does not show Himself in this way."

But our supreme good fortune is that the Divine Herself has come down onto this earth. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have Themselves become our friends.

Sri Aurobindo's wit and humour are so much in evidence in His *Evening Talks*. His conduct with His servitors and His children was that of a friend. And again this supreme gift that the attendants received from Him was possible only in this age. What satisfaction we derive just by reading these *Talks*! Similarly, the Mother's *Entretiens* or conversations give us the same sense of wonder.

In the *Evening Talks* Sri Aurobindo discussed different subjects with His attendants. For instance serious subjects such as politics, the independence of India, the Second World War, Hitler's and Stalin's personalities. But there were also other lighter but interesting conversations streaked with humour, laughter and fun. In His words you find not only the flow of seriousness and profound experience and erudition but also a cascade of glowing pearls of joy and laughter. I cannot help giving you two instances of this.

In Nirod-da's *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* I read about a most hilarious incident. One day Sri Aurobindo said a little mysteriously to His attendants:

"The subject is whether the measure of help is much or little."

When they did not seem to understand this puzzling question He decided to explain it to them.

During the Boer War, two Boer soldiers were fleeing on horseback. One of them who was short and stout fell off his horse. He vainly made a few attempts to get up. Meanwhile the enemy was fast approaching so he quickly prayed:

“O God! Please help me to get back onto my horse.”

And uttering this he jumped up. However as luck would have it, he leapt so vigorously that he fell over the horse to the other side! In the meantime the enemy approached and captured him. At that moment he complained regretfully:

“God did help but a little too much!”

Everyone burst out laughing. It is difficult to imagine Sri Aurobindo recounting such a story with so much humour.

Now let me tell you about another such incident. This is about Sri Aurobindo Himself. You too will not be able to resist laughing.

We all know that in 1938 on the night of 23rd November at about 2 o'clock Sri Aurobindo slipped and fell and as a result of the impact broke His right femur. He was bedridden for three months. So naturally he could not wash His hair or even comb it. Lying in bed for three months in that condition, His long hair became all matted.

When after three months He could sit up again His matted hair could finally be unloosened. Shiva's attendants began unknotting Shiva's matted locks. Champaklalji and Nirod-da began courageously to attempt this arduous task. These two heroes then (who themselves did not boast of a great amount of hair on their heads) got down to business.

After about an hour of struggling, at last they managed to unknot Sri Aurobindo's locks. Sri Aurobindo sat through this ordeal bearing it without once opening His mouth. Then He said softly in His quiet voice:

“You've left a few hairs on my head, I hope!”

No one could hold his laughter.

I can picture this clearly. Sri Aurobindo sitting quietly like a good boy while Nirod-da and Champaklalji valiantly struggled to unknot His hair. What can be more amusing than this? These two incidents reveal how close and friendly Sri Aurobindo was with them.

*

Our Father

11th July, 1994 marks the centenary of our father, Narendranath Das Gupta. It is for this occasion that I have got down to writing these reminiscences. How many memories come to my mind!

Father was a distinguished worker of the revolutionary movement of that time even though his name never appeared in public. Sri Aurobindo was his guru on the

path of sadhana. Bagha Jatin (Jatindranath Mukherjee) was his guide and mentor in the field of action. Studies, revolutionary work and sadhana all went hand in hand.

On Bagha Jatin's instructions a group of young students robbed a considerable amount of money from a vehicle. The Police launched a search to catch them. All that money was kept with father. As soon as the Police started on his trail he ran and got into his college hostel. Bagha Jatin had strictly instructed everybody that no one was to go back straight to his house after returning from the mission. Father stayed for some time in a fellow-student's room and then returned to his own room. He stashed all the money under his bed and went about as if nothing had happened.

However the Police were not ready to give up. They encircled the hostel. The hostel Superintendent then was an Irish gentleman. The Police went to him to ask for permission to search the hostel. The Superintendent was furious.

"These boys are like my sons. These are my boys."

After a lot of arguing when the Police expressed their desire to search the room father had first entered, the Superintendent acceded at once to their request. The reason was that father did not stay in that room. The Irish gentleman knew well of father's involvement with the revolutionaries. And moreover, he was very fond of him. In any case, the Police searched the room and found nothing. Good God! Had the Police discovered all the money under his bed...! This is why it is said, "Whom Krishna protects who can touch?"

In the evening the hostel Superintendent called for father and said:

"Come Naren, let us go out for a while."

He took him in his car to the Ganga. While they were walking along its bank, he remarked:

"I'm Irish and so I can fully understand the hatred and anger you feel towards the English. But what can you, a handful of young people with a few pistols, hope to achieve against the might of this huge British Empire? You'd better become a deputy magistrate instead. The Governor of Bengal would be only too happy to accept you if I put in a word."

But father was upset. He continued his studies along with the revolutionary work. He was awarded the Gold Medal twice for his M.A. examination. It needs to be mentioned that when Bagha Jatin decided to leave for Balasore with his group of young boys for some revolutionary work, father's name was on that list. I am told that at the last moment Bagha Jatin told Meghnad Saha and father:

"I also need brilliant students. You will wake this country with the light of knowledge."

And in this way on two occasions Sri Aurobindo saved father from the jaws of death.

After completing his university studies, father was offered the post of magistrate but he refused to take up any work allotted by the foreign rulers. He was also offered the post of professor at the Rangoon University. That too he rejected although the

salary for that job was for those times a very handsome 1700 rupees per month.

Finally, father and a few of Sri Aurobindo's disciples came together and decided to set up the independent Arya Publishing House. *The Life Divine* was first published by this publishing house. Father was asked to write a review of *The Life Divine*. The review was sent to Sri Aurobindo for His opinion. Sri Aurobindo asked:

"Who has written this review?"

On hearing father's name, Naren, Sri Aurobindo could not quite place him. Then suddenly He remembered him and enthusiastically exclaimed with joy:

"Oh! Naren! He is as firm as a rock."

Let me tell you about another incident in this context. I had at that time settled here for good. I bought two copies of Sri Aurobindo's *Collected Poems* and took them to Purani-ji. Very hesitatingly, I told him:

"If I could get Sri Aurobindo's signature on these I would be so very grateful."

Purani-ji replied:

"Why, certainly Sri Aurobindo will sign them. Why are you so doubtful?"

He took the two books the following day to Sri Aurobindo. In the evening when I went to get the books, Purani-ji, laughing as he handed me the books, said:

"See, open and see!"

On seeing my name written in Sri Aurobindo's hand I was overjoyed. Sri Aurobindo had asked Purani-ji:

"Who is she? Whose daughter is she?"

"Naren's daughter," Purani-ji replied.

Sri Aurobindo remained silent for a while then happily exclaimed:

"Oh! Naren's daughter, that old Naren!"

Purani-ji patted me on my back gleefully.

Purani-ji and father were very close friends. Needless to say I was delighted that Purani-ji had introduced me to Sri Aurobindo as 'Naren's daughter'.

Father and his other associates started a *ghee*-business (*ghee* being clarified butter). Both the activities went on together. The profits from the *ghee*-business were used partially for the basic maintenance of the partners and the rest was sent to Sri Aurobindo. The men were truly consecrated workers. They never worried about themselves. One day on opening a canister of *ghee* they found a snake-skin inside. At once Sri Aurobindo was informed. He sent them a telegram with the direction: *Stop it. I will have nothing to do with it anymore.* And so the *ghee*-business was discontinued from that very day.

In 1925 father came to Pondicherry for the first time. All his relatives and family members had one fear in their minds: He was not going to return. He would join the Ashram.

Sri Aurobindo asked father to return after a few days' stay. He asked Sri Aurobindo:

"On my return what should I do to earn my living?"

Sri Aurobindo did not say anything for some time then He answered:

“Why not take some job in a *mufossil* college?”

Just before leaving, father asked Sri Aurobindo:

“Can I offer my pranam to the Mother?”

Sri Aurobindo looked at father, a little perplexed for a while, then exclaimed:

“Oh! You mean Mirra? Wait, I’ll go inside and inform Her.”

After some time the Mother came out of Her room. She was wearing a very ordinary sari. Father bowed down to the Mother and with Her blessing he returned to his family. For many years after that father could not visit the Ashram. One day, on his return, while reading the newspaper his eyes fell on an advertisement. A professor was needed in a college at Feni to teach philosophy. Immediately father sent in an application to Feni College for the post. Feni College was delighted to have someone as qualified as father and immediately appointed him to the post.

A new life started for father. He maintained his family on an ordinary salary of 150 rupees a month. His guru, Sri Aurobindo, had never given much importance to money. To Him, ideals in life were the most important. Of His own accord He had given up the opportunity of joining the ICS. Embracing that same ideal wholeheartedly he took up the life of a college professor in a *mufossil* college. However, during the Second World War, when the Japanese bombed Chittagong, this college closed down and father was forced to move to Calcutta. Many opportunities of important jobs came his way. But he was a dedicated devotee and disciple of Sri Aurobindo and following His advice he had stayed on in a *mufossil* college.

Why not take some job in a mufossil college? These words of Sri Aurobindo kept father in Feni College and nothing could move him from there. From this ordinary salary father used to send an offering to Sri Aurobindo every month and send some money to his two younger brothers to help them finish their studies. Whatever money remained was used for his wife and children’s upkeep.

Our mother (Bibhavati) could stoically bear all worldly difficulties. No pain or sorrow ever touched her. Her father (Hemkumar Niyogi) was a District Judge then. Even though mother grew up in a well-to-do milieu, she, like my father, had turned towards the vision of Sri Aurobindo. She would, in fact, always encourage father to pursue this ideal.

During the revolutionary days father always carried a pistol. Whenever he would go out for some work he would leave his pistol with mother confident that it would be safe. Mother would tuck the pistol under her blouse and calmly go on with her household activities. At night father used to teach her how to shoot.

Our grandfather (Rasikchandra Das Gupta) was a very pious man. He never obstructed father in anything he did. Knowing that father was a wayfarer on Sri Aurobindo’s path of sadhana he never asked him any questions about this. However, grandmother could never accept father’s giving up of good jobs and she would blame Sri Aurobindo for it. Her dream was to see her son posted in an eminent job.

Grandmother could then run the house with so much more respect and dignity. Which mother would not wish this for her son?

Father was a straightforward sincere man and often at college he would get into debates and arguments with the teachers, especially the junior teachers. Father could not tolerate any criticism of Sri Aurobindo and he would counter it very strongly. Once, a Muslim S.D.O. in Feni made some derogatory remarks about Sri Aurobindo. Father stood up thumping the table vigorously and opposed him with great verve. Father was quite aware what taking on an S.D.O. in this way meant but he just could not budge an inch from his ideal or conviction.

Once, a senior professor wrote to Sri Aurobindo telling Him about father's conduct in this regard. Sri Aurobindo wrote back: *Whatever he is doing and whatever he is saying, it is all right. I am always behind him.*

The Second World War was assuming fearful proportions as time went by. We could not even dream of supporting the Allies. Sri Aurobindo, who had started the revolution against the British and in His life and action always striven for the liberation of India, announced that the Allies needed to be helped in every possible way. Everyone was dumbstruck. The political leaders did not concur with Him at all. During the college recess we could hear from our classroom the tremendous debate going on in the teachers' room. Father was on one side and the junior professors on the other and they were hotly debating. The latter would not agree with Sri Aurobindo's announcement. Hitler was their hero. The world had not yet seen the real nature of the Axis Powers. Every day father would try valiantly to make these junior professors understand and see Sri Aurobindo's political vision and wisdom. In the meantime the Japanese began bombing Chittagong and Cox Bazaar. At once Feni turned into a deserted town. Our life took a different turn. One by one all the families left Feni.

Every professor or decent gentleman, while leaving Feni, requested father to send at least the children and their mother to some safe place. After hearing this request from so many people, father became a little worried. He wrote to Sri Aurobindo to get His opinion. Sri Aurobindo answered: *Stay there with the family. Don't run away.*

Nolini-da also wrote something: *Fear will follow you wherever you go.*

Father was reassured. He had an iron nerve, infinite courage and extreme resoluteness. Every evening our parents used to meditate with the children. It was marvellous to focus on Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's ideal in that uninhabited, tranquil atmosphere. At that time in the town of Feni, only our family had stayed back. What an astonishing act of courage that was on father's part, really! Mother would calmly go on with her household activities, untouched by the slightest worry. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were around us, that was our certitude.

In a few days the soldiers occupied the school and college and every room in the hostel was taken. Our house was very close to the college. We were the only ones living there and there were no neighbours around. At evenfall a strange feeling would

overtake us. The whole day was spent in silence and with great caution.

Father believed in safe bind safe find. And so with great effort he dug a large trench next to the courtyard, large enough to fit us all in. As soon as father would blow the conch everyone was supposed to rush into the trench from wherever we were. We kept rehearsing this for several days. I can still picture father standing erect and blowing that big conch. The sound of that conch would infuse courage into us. However, in the end, the Japanese did not bomb Feni, and we firmly believed that it was the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's unlimited Grace that had protected Feni.

For many years father could not go to Pondicherry. With a heart longing for Sri Aurobindo, every night father loudly called out to Him. Hearing him give that longing call I used to feel that father was undergoing a lot of pain. But for whom? My heart would be overwhelmed. One day I asked mother:

“Ma, why is father so sad? Who does he call with so much longing?”

“Your father is calling out his Guru, Sri Aurobindo. Don't worry for him.”

As a result, naturally my curiosity to know Sri Aurobindo slowly increased as I grew up. When father used to go away for work I would slip into his 'puja-room' and keep looking with deep love and devotion at Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's pictures. It was the photo of the Mother wearing a gown that father had on his table. Two pieces of cloth used to cover the photos always. At that time all the followers of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother used to do everything in secret and nobody was allowed to enter father's 'puja-room'.

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

...be on your guard and do not try to understand and judge the Divine Mother by your little earthly mind that loves to subject even the things that are beyond it to its own norms and standards, its narrow reasonings and erring impressions, its bottomless aggressive ignorance and its petty self-confident knowledge. The human mind shut in the prison of its half-lit obscurity cannot follow the many-sided freedom of the steps of the Divine Shakti.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Mother, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 38)

THIS THING IMMUTABLE

What is this thing immutable that cannot perish?
Of which we're told no fire can it burn?
No villainy tarnish,
Nor any falsehood from its Truth return?
What quiet delight it is ever to dwell on such,
Until one day inside is felt a sudden rift.
In that same moment all is clearly seen:
There is only one thing to cherish
And nothing other matters very much.
Then all the inner worlds begin to shift
Propelling me to seek the source of so much quiet delight
And lo! A stream! This stream flows with a light.
Upon it floats the image of eternal fire.
It is for this the soul is yearning with inexhaustible desire.
Always have I been searching for this stream
So clear and luminous
Reflecting life's most perfect dream.
Ah! Along the banks I see the weeds
That mark the stations of my numerous misdeeds.
But all untouched and undefiled
Between them flows the river crystalline,
The inviolable truth of my soul line.
And many intimations of it now begin to sprout,
Flowers that shine among the grass and weeds
Where the clear light waters have flowed out
To nourish the soul seeds
Containing momentous acts of aspiration
Till in one blinding second of illumination
The seals of being fly apart
And You reveal to me our secret Heart.

MAGGI

CANONICAL REFERENCES TO ART IN SOUTH ASIA

THOUGH, in the earliest theoretical texts on South Asian art, the term *citra* is used indistinguishably to mean sculpture and painting, in certain texts of the medieval period, *citra* comes to mean sculpture in the round and a distinction is made between *citra* (sculpture), *ardhacitra* (relief) and *citrabhāṣā* (painting). Perhaps the most important of these texts is the late 16th c. *Śilparatna* attributed to Srikumara of Kerala. The earliest known text dealing with *citra* in general is the *Vishnudharmottaram*, generally dated as contemporaneous with the flowering of classical South Asian art (4th-6th c.).

Very little of ancient South Asian stone sculpture is cut completely in the round. Among the earliest examples of South Asian sculpture in the historic period are the massive *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs* from Mauryan times (3rd c. B.C.), chiselled out of sandstone and given the high surface polish characteristic of this period. These figures stand out frontally from the stone base out of which they are carved, giving an impression of sculpture in the round, but being in fact, “flat-backed” steles. Among the rare examples of true sculpture in the round are the animals, such as lions or bulls standing on Ashokan pillar capitals, also from this period. The gates (*torāṇas*) of the Great Stupa at Sanchi (50 B.C.) carry what appear to be free-standing sculptures connecting architectural elements, but these in fact, are slabs of stone rendered on both sides with addorsed fronts, giving the impression of two reliefs brought together. Later (post-4th c.) sculpture of India, occurring in temple settings, also features individual steles, placed in niches or enshrined in a sanctum. A rare example of a popular image sculpted in the round from the early temple period is that of the theriomorphic representation of *Varāha*, the boar incarnation of Vishnu. Free-standing and often colossal in scale, *Varāha* was evidently meant to be viewed from all sides during circumambulation. After the 6th c., Nandi, the bull-mount of Shiva, situated on an axis with the sanctum to enable a direct view of the shrine-image, is invariably carved in the round. But these are the exception rather than the rule, and we may safely assume that the predominant tradition in South Asian sculpture was one of relief.

The reason for establishing a distinction between *citra*, *ardhacitra* and *citrabhāṣā*, then, should be seen less as a clear separation of distinct modes of expression such as sculpture, relief and painting in the western sense, and rather as a gradation in solid representation, painting being thought of as a constricted mode of sculpture, with relief occupying an intermediate zone. Several early texts describe painting as a form of illusionary relief, though actually flat. This includes 5th c. literary texts, such as *Shakuntala*, where the eyes are said to stumble over the elevations and depressions of the picture surface, the reference being to the representations of landscape backgrounds and/or the voluptuous female form. However, this illusion of depth is not to be confused with naturalistic illusionism in the western sense, where

the image is objectified through the systematic use of single-point perspective and chiaroscuro based on an external light source. In the South Asian case, the viewer is denied the experience of a privileged spatial inclusion in the three-dimensional reality of the image, an ontology of universal emergence, subsistence and disappearance from/into a spaceless, timeless transcendental reality being reinforced through the emphatic flatness of the background against which the play of relative depth occurs.

The history of relief sculpture (*ardhacitra*) in South Asia shows an interesting movement, specially when related to painting. Though sculpture in Mauryan times (3rd c. B.C.) expresses the strongest feeling for plastic volume and, specially in the massive *yakṣa* or *yakṣiṇī* steles comes close to sculpture in the round, the appearance of relief proper (*ardhacitra*) can be said to begin only from the 2nd c. B.C. with the establishment of an architectural context for images. Ananda Coomaraswamy brings to our notice the fact that the early reliefs on the vedika walls of stupas, as for example at Bharhut (2nd c. B.C.) approximate rather to painting (*citrabhāṣā*) than to solid sculpture (*citra*), being closely compressed between the two planes of the wrought surface. On the *torāṇas* at Sanchi (1st c. B.C.), there is a more heightened relief and a consequent movement in the direction of full sculpture from painting. This tendency continues through the Kushana and later Andhra periods, reaching its fullest expression of realistic emergent figural mass against the flat stone backdrop in the Gupta period and its aftermath (late 4th-6th c.). Subsequently, though the quality of the volume represented becomes more fluid and in some respects facile, relief continues to express a fullness of figural depth, the flat expanse of stone wall gradually replaced for its backdrop effect by the massive soaring temple structure, as in the medieval temples (10th-12th c.) of Khajuraho, Orissa or the Hoysala kingdom.

In comparison with the shallow beginnings of relief sculpture, South Asian painting, in its earliest phases (*viz.* Ajanta, caves 9 and 10, 2nd c. B.C.) is already marked by an emphatic modelling, demonstrating its closeness to sculpture in the round. A similar impression of volume appears in relief much later, though in medieval times (11th-15th c.), a reversal of effect occurs in these two modes of expression. Now, temple sculpture persists initially in its maintenance of high relief, whereas painting, as in Gujarat and Rajasthan, survives sculpture, but becomes flattened. Coomaraswamy relates this “flattening” to psychological changes at the social level, relating to a shift of focus from a heroic will to a more reflective or contemplative intellect. In an article on *Ābhāsa* (Coomaraswamy: 1934), though he equates this at first with a slackening of concentration (*śīthila samādhi*), on further exploration, he advises a refusal of comparative judgement, treating the stylistic symptoms of an age phenomenologically, in terms of the development of its own aesthetic.

Media used for sculpture included stucco (*lepya*), terracotta (*mṛṇmaya*), wood (*vrkṣa*), stone (*pāṣāṇa*) and metal (*dhātu*). Of these the most significant surviving monumental sculpture, occurring invariably in religious contexts, is that made in

stone. By the late 4th c. (Gupta period), a standardised aesthetic begins to become codified and sculpture follows an elaborate set of technical and aesthetic guidelines. Figure sculpture predominates from this period and prescriptive proportions and poetic metaphors, rather than the use of live models, are used for translation into stone. Some of these visual metaphors are as follows: the facial outline should be like a hen's egg (*kukkuṭaṇḍavat*), the brows should resemble the arc of a bow (*cāpākāram*), a variety of analogues could contextually shape the eyes, such as a bow (*cāpākāram*), a lotus leaf or bud (*padmapatra*), the petal of the blue lotus (*nilotpala*), the eyes of a deer (*mṛgākṛti*), the belly of a fish (*matsyodaram*). The neck should be shaped after the conch-shell (*kambuḡrīva*), the chin should resemble a mango seed (*āmra-vījam*), the nose should look like a parrot's beak (*śukanāsa*), the pendant of the arm like an elephant's trunk (*gajatuṇḍākṛti*), the forearm should look like a young plantain tree (*bāla kadālī kāṇḍam*), the male waist shaped after a lion's waist (*siṃhakatī*), the woman's waist after the middle of an hourglass-shaped drum (*ḍamaru-madhyam*), the kneecap like the contour of a crab (*karkaṭākṛti*), the calf of the foot after a fish (*matsyākṛti*).

The *Vishnudharmottaram* also classifies a set of arrested stances in a rotational scheme of views for figures, ranging from a full frontal view (*ṛjvāgata*), through a three-quarter view (*anṛju*), a quarter view (*sācīkṛta*), a profile (*bhittika*) and several fractional views, till it reaches a complete back view (*samanata*). Foreshortening (*kṣayavṛddhi*), related to the above stances is elaborated, as is a classification for feet stances. For each figural type, proportional measures are supplied, as are postures and gestures related to the subject of depiction.

In place of the frontality of Mauryan images, a variety of pleasing figural flexions (*bhaṅgas*) were prescribed. These included the *samabhaṅga*, or equipoise, with the plumb line passing through the middle of the body; the *abhaṅga* or gentle flexion, with a single break or bend in the plumb line, the popular *tribhaṅga*, or triple flexion, which gave a sense of relaxed and rhythmic ease to the figure, and the extreme pliancy of *atibhaṅga*, with its maximum deviation from the plumb line. Similarly, sitting postures were also codified. For deep meditation, the *vajraparyāṅka* sitting posture was prescribed, for a more relaxed contemplation, the *ardha-paryāṅkāsa* was preferred, while further relaxation while seated was depicted using the *mahā-rājālīlāsana*. An attitude of comfort was designated by the *sukhāsana*. A vocabulary of hieratic hand gestures, shared equally by art and dance, was also codified. Popular gestures included the *abhaya mudrā*, made usually with the open right hand raised, palm outwards and signifying the gift of fearlessness; the *varada mudrā*, made with an open right hand turned downwards, palm outwards, offering boons; the *dhyāna mudrā*, signifying meditation, and a number of more specialised gestures corresponding to iconographical context. The power of gestures (*mudrā*) were extolled as devices evoking special states of aesthetic emotion. According to aesthetic texts, where the hand goes, the eye follows, where the eye goes, the mind follows, where

the mind goes, the emotional mood follows, where the mood goes, there arises aesthetic flavour (*rasa*).

The theory of *rasa* or aesthetic mood, comes to be fused with the religious consciousness in these sculptural prescriptions. Thus, a classification of the range of emotional states (*bhāvas*) which the sculptor needs to effectively portray, is central to this systematisation. These also make their first appearance in the *Vishnu-dharmottaram* and can be enumerated as the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*), the comic (*hāsyā*), the pathetic (*karuṇā*), the heroic (*vīra*), the intense (*raudra*), the terrible (*bhayānaka*), the grotesque or odious (*vībhatsa*), the wonderful or mysterious (*adbhuta*) and the tranquil (*śānta*).

In the depiction of deities, youth is glorified. Gods are ideally shown to be eternally sixteen years of age (*sadā ṣoḍaśa vārṣikim*) and are generally without beard (*hīna śmaśru*). A god or goddess may be occasionally shown as a child but never as old or infirm (*kvacittu bāla sadṛśam, sadaiva tarunam vapuḥ, mūrtinām kalpayechilpi, na vṛddha sadṛśam kvacit*). Emaciated or obese images were avoided, since, apart from aesthetic reasons, there were prevailing beliefs that worship of emaciated images would bring famine (*kṛśā durbhikṣadā*) and disease would strike on invocation of gross or obese images (*sthūla rogapradāsadā*). Body, life and mind controlled by spiritual power is the ideal portrayed in images of deities and heroes. Even in the midst of violent action or in erotic scenes, celestials and heroes are shown with an air of detached serenity and self-contained delight. Such an ideal is based on the practice of *yoga*, leading to a dynamic spiritual union. The features most expressive of this inward power and poise are the eyes, which undergo a development from wide open in the period preceding the 4th c. to a half-closed state subsequently, signifying deep meditative concentration. Women, particularly goddesses, *yakṣīs* and heroines (*nāyikās*) are shown as voluptuous, with large hips and breasts, signifying creative fecundity, though here, too, tranquility predominates and the full maturity of young motherhood is preferred. Corresponding to the postural prescriptions, an elaborate iconography was prescribed for the depiction of supernatural beings. Particularly in Hindu sculpture, this included multiple hands, heads and eyes to express superhuman omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience.

In the depiction of commoners or lesser celestials, a variety of activities with their characteristic postures are expressed. Among the activities most often shown are attendance upon kings and deities, and performance of dance and music. The adversarial powers (*asuras, rākṣasas*) are shown as powerful and grotesque, though in cases, human likeness is bestowed on them.

“*Citrabhāṣā*” literally means the “appearance” or “semblance” of *citra*, and thus prioritises sculpture as a form of visual expression, whose semblance is caught in two-dimensions through painting. However, the importance of painting in ancient South Asia is attested to by the fact that the *Kāmasūtra* lists painting as the 4th of its 64 courtly arts and by the references in literary and theoretical texts to the presence

of *citraśālās* or art galleries for the pleasure of royalty or urban citizens.

Most texts speak of three surfaces on which painting may be done. These are *bhitti* or wall-surfaces for murals, *paṭṭa* or wooden board and *paṭa* or cloth. Of these, though a tradition in cloth painting (*paṭa-citra*) is alive to this day (e.g. Orissa), only a few surviving murals (e.g. Ajanta) can be dated to an antiquity contemporary with textual sources such as the *Vishnudharmottaram*.

Several theoretical texts provide glimpses of the techniques in use for painting. Of these, the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra*, a text from the first half of the 11th c., carries one of the most elaborate and comprehensive accounts of the techniques of painting, codified as the eight limbs (*aṣṭa-aṅgāni*) of painting. These are as follows:

(1) *Vartikā* or the preparation of the “crayon” with which initial outlining of the figures to be painted will be done.

(2) *Bhūmibandhanam* or preparation of the ground, enumerated as mentioned before, into the three surfaces—wall-surface, wooden board and cloth. In the case of murals, where texts imply a use of both tempera and *fresco-secco* (lime medium) techniques, this preparation is usually a mud plaster, sometimes followed by a lime plaster, both reinforced with vegetable fibres.

(3) *Lepyakarma* or priming, where the prepared ground is smoothed and made ready for holding paint.

(4) *Rekhākarma* or the process of making the first line sketch. In discussing this step, most texts emphasise the need for the artist to first visualise the image in detail and with clarity. This act, equated with yogic concentration, is often made the expressive basis for the quality of pictorial realisation, a deficient image being attributed to a “slack meditation” (*śīthila samādhi*). The first outline is drawn with the *vartikā* or “crayon”; then a second outline is painted using a medium-sized brush carrying a pigment derived from ochre.

(5) *Karsakarma* (also known as *varṇakarma*) or the preparation of colours. There is some variation in texts (sometimes in the same text) on the primary colours to be used. For example, the *Vishnudharmottaram* mentions white, yellow, red, black and blue and elsewhere, white, red, yellow, black and green. The *Citralakṣaṇa* section of the *Śilparatna* mentions white, yellow, red, black and blue. Since, as the *Vishnudharmottaram* acknowledges, blue and yellow may be mixed to make green, most scholars take the five primary colours to include blue and not green. The *Vishnudharmottaram* mentions the minerals used for paints as: gold, silver, copper, mica, lapis lazuli, tin, yellow orpiment, lime, red lac, cinnabar and indigo. The metal colours are said to be laid on as foil or liquefied. The 12th c. *Manasollasa* is more explicit about the relationship of colour to source. Thus white is derived from conch shell, crimson from cinnabar, red from lac juice, blood red from ochre, yellow from orpiment and black from lampblack.

(6) *Vartanā* or modelling. This is among the most important aspects of *citrabhāṣā*, since it provides the illusion of three-dimensionality that makes the painting a “semblance of sculpture”. The effect of depth is obtained through three devices: *patra* or cross-hatching, *binduka* or stippling and *hairika*, which C. Sivaramamurti takes for a corruption of *raikhika* and which stands for either fine lines or modulated outline. Mention is made of the use of brighter shades to depict higher grounds and darker shades for lower. Indian painting does not use single point perspective or light and shade to create a consistent naturalistic illusion.

(7) *Lekhakarma* or brushwork. The brush is known as *lekhanī* and is differentiated into five types according to thickness. The finest brushes are made from bark fibres and the rest from hair taken from a bull’s ear or a mule’s mane. Bamboo sticks, attached to the hair with lac resin, are used for handles. In tempera painting, the colour is bound using animal media derived from buffalo hide or elephant hide. In case of *fresco-secco*, lime is used as the binding medium. In the *Vishnudharmottaram*, the brushed line is also strongly related to inner concentration. The ideal line is characterised as tranquil (*susnigdha*), distinct (*vispaṣṭa*) and, uncrooked (*ajihma*).

(8) *Dvicakarma* (*dvi ca karma*) or retouching. This is the final stage of painting, when highlights are added, particularly for surfaces, ornamentation, expression of depth or final outlining.

Painting shares with sculpture elaborate classifications for types of figures, relating to physiognomy and social differentiation. For each figural type, proportional measures are supplied, as are postures and gestures related to the subject of depiction. A vocabulary of metaphors related to body parts is also developed. All these classifications and visual similitudes are prescriptive in nature and meant both to standardise figurative expression in a collective context of practice and to guide visualisation and execution in a culture which, avoiding life models, turns the artistic gaze within. It is for this reason that these measures are termed *pramāṇāni*, evidentiary standards or guidelines.

DEBASHISH BANERJI

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MEDITATION

Silence deep within.
Sound bubbles bouncing back and forth.
Light circling the inner eye.

Watching the rhythmic ripples
Of one's own being
And listening to the voice of light
That gives it vision.

In quest of the deepest truth of consciousness
Within...without.
Steps toward peace and awakening.

Reposing in the sky of worldly murmur,
Carrying the weight of the noise,
But in deep sleep within.

GOPIKA KARTHIKEYAN

VICTOR JAUHAR (CHOTÉ)

1948 – 2004

VICTOR JAUHAR, youngest of Surendranath Jauhar's children, died of a brain haemorrhage on 9 September 2004, without giving the doctor any chance to save him. He suddenly collapsed in the evening and by the time they took a C.T. scan and drove him to Chennai in a special ambulance fitted with life-support systems, it was too late. He died ten minutes before the ambulance reached its destination. One would wonder why this quick end at such a young age—55 is young by Ashram standards. But, since a year, now that I look at it retrospectively, he did give a few clear signals. After Sunil-da's passing away in 1998, he was feeling a void which none could fill. Not many know that Victor was his faithful sound technician for more than 25 years and that he did most of the recordings of the divine music that flowed from the master musician's organ. He joined Sunil-da around 1969 when he left his studies for good. Over the years, he perfected the art of recording and mixing the music, providing invaluable technical assistance to Sunil-da's creativity. He also had the good fortune to accompany Sunil-da to the Mother when she listened to his music or when she played to him the opening notes of the New Year music which he always composed by the end of the year.

Let me now go back a little in time. Victor Jauhar was born on 13 December 1948 and was brought to the Ashram by his parents in 1950 when he was only two years old. In the early fifties, while the Mother spoke to the children in the Ashram Playground on the great work of the future, Victor quietly slept on his sister's lap. Around 1958, he joined the first experimental free progress system started by Tanmaya, Jayantibhai and Krishnakumari. All that he remembered about it was Prashant playing *tabla* on Dhiru's *tak* (shaven head) during class hours. Victor himself was hardly a *sadhu-bachcha* (a serious and obedient student) and was notorious for playing tricks on students and teachers. The story goes that he, along with another boy, would go swimming in the sea, and, from there, call loudly Kishor Gandhi's name while the latter walked on the beach. When the learned scholar turned towards the sea, they would disappear under the waves. This happened several times until Kishor Gandhi wrote to the Mother about hearing "voices from the sea". In school, he felt he had "genuine reasons" for coming late to class and could not understand why his teachers exploded for what he considered "pardonable offences", such as playing with a ball in class, or throwing paper aeroplanes at them when they were writing on the blackboard, or sticking things to the teacher's chair so that they stuck to his clothes when he sat down after a cheerful, "Bonjour, mes enfants." There was once a showdown when he could not do his homework in time. Victor reported to the Mother that he really could not get time to do homework because he had "so many things to do". The Mother wrote a strong letter to the teachers instructing them henceforth not to

give any homework to the students and that all classwork should be done during school hours. This sent shivers through the teaching community and Victor was flushed with victory. The matter did not end there. One day, when he had enough of this “nonsense” (meaning school), he went to the Mother and told her frankly that he did not feel like studying any more. Mother was extremely happy at this spontaneous confession. Fresh arrangements were made exclusively for him. He joined the Ashram Band and the Drawing Office and the school timetable had to be considerably redrawn to fit his new schedule. A little later, knowing that he was interested in music, Mother told him to work with Sunil-da. Thus began his long career as a sound technician. His devotion to Sunil-da was unmatched. One day, in the early seventies, he went to the Ashram Notice Board and read a hard-hitting message of the Mother to the sadhaks of the Ashram. The gist of it was that if one was not inclined to do serious sadhana, one should not stay in the Ashram. Victor immediately took up his pen (which he otherwise rarely touched) and wrote to the Mother that he was hardly fit for sadhana and therefore shouldn’t stay in the Ashram. The Mother replied, “But, my child, it was not meant for you.”¹ Though Victor later got married and was not officially a Prosperity² member of the Ashram, it hardly made any difference to him or others, because he went about his work as usual. His heart belonged to the Ashram and its wider environment and he never thought of settling down outside Pondicherry.

After leaving school, Victor went on to be a dramatist and played many leading roles in the presentation of Sri Aurobindo’s plays in the first December programmes. Endowed with a handsome face and a good voice, he was at one time a favourite for the hero’s role. The theatre, no doubt, became a field for the literary education he had neglected earlier. Around the same time, he undertook construction work which filled the gaps in his technical education. He built a number of houses: first, the common house of the Jauhars, followed by his sister’s house near the Lake estate, then the Delhi House and, finally, his own house which he had just finished renovating before he left us. Somewhere down the line, he became a perfectionist and drove his contractors crazy with his demands for excellence. He had an incredible energy to insist, haggle and even terrorise the poor man who had to execute his ideas. Likewise, when he published his father’s biography, he made the editor go through the roof. He would frankly admit his inability to judge literary matters, but would nevertheless doubt and question, verify and cross-verify those very points until the editor was rattled. There was a time when he ran the streets of Pondicherry like a mad man during the days of the marathon fever in the Ashram. Getting up daily at four o’clock in the morning, he would adhere to a strict running schedule, averaging about a 100

1. The author takes the responsibility for reproducing as accurately as possible what Victor Jauhar narrated to him personally, especially what the Mother told him.

2. The Ashram provides all basic needs including food, clothing, accommodation and medical facilities for those who receive ‘Prosperity’, the name given by the Mother to the department which looks after the physical needs of the sadhaks.

km a week. He consulted the best running magazines from abroad, got the best running shoes and the best watches to time himself and trained himself like an Olympic champion. Unfortunately, by then, he was over age for competitive running; otherwise, he would have surely broken a few Ashram records. It was during this period that his interest in Sports Medicine grew to almost an academic level. In the beginning, he was the driving force behind the physical fitness testing procedures which have been now introduced in the Physical Education Department. Sports Medicine was comparatively a new subject in India and not many doctors knew much about it. But he persuaded Dr. Satyavrata Sen to take interest in it and they worked out together one of the first cardiovascular fitness testing procedures in the form of a cycling test with a standard load at a given speed for a given time. As a result there is now a separate section with more precise machines along with a well-organised system of data collection to keep track of the fitness of Ashram athletes.

Of late, Victor had arrived at the crossroads of his life. He did not have much work to do at Sunil-da's place except recording his music for others. Though he was still completing the renovation of his own house, he had had enough of construction work. He decided to go on a long and lazy holiday to his sister's place in Germany. When he came back, he spent more time with his family and there was a marked concern and affection for his son. He told me one day while walking on the beach, "You people have plenty of things to do. But what do I do? I will have to now think of something." I replied, "Why not music? Why do you think Mother told you to help Sunil-da?" He pursed his lips as if it was a good suggestion but bad advice from the practical point of view. It was rather late in life to get into serious music though he was the best trumpet player in the Ashram Band. That must have been a year ago or less, before his sudden demise. I have been recently reading about birth and death in *The Life Divine* in which Sri Aurobindo says that the two are a process for the progress of the soul. Death is necessary to disintegrate the present formation of the personality so that one can start afresh in one's next life. Now that Victor has called it a day, it all seems to make sense.

RAMAN REDDY

Birth is the first spiritual mystery of the physical universe, death is the second which gives its double point of perplexity to the mystery of birth; for life, which would otherwise be a self-evident fact of existence, becomes itself a mystery by virtue of these two which seem to be its beginning and its end and yet in a thousand ways betray themselves as neither of these things, but rather intermediate stages in an occult process of life.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, p. 742)

SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME THROUGH MY FATHER

FROM the debris of memories, I gather words.....

And the voice of my father said to me, "If the Kingdom of God comes once, it can come again." He drew my attention to a calendar that had been released soon after Sri Aurobindo left his mortal coil in 1950. I was just a child. He pointed to the picture of Sri Aurobindo and told me in the most simple words that Sri Aurobindo was a great Yogi. This calendar was so placed in the room that it was the first thing I would see each day on waking up, and an inner dialogue between us began spontaneously. This contact I lost over the years until in February 1973 when my husband called from Madras (Chennai) and asked me to join him as he was going to Pondicherry in connection with some business exploration. I was to borrow my father's car for this journey. My father readily agreed over the phone to this request and called me back within seconds saying that he would join me on this journey to Madras and then to Pondicherry.

At Pondicherry we stayed at a Hotel (it is now a tourist information bureau) overlooking the sea and he took me and my husband to the Ashram. We were accompanied by Mr. Kishorilal. He particularly drew my attention to the Mother's room and the balcony from where she gave darshan. He knelt at the Samadhi and looked deeply into my eyes. I caught the message which was to kneel next to him. But I replied that I was not yet ready. This exchange in silence without spoken words spoke volumes!

The same year in November he called me on the phone one morning at 8 a.m. and gave me the news carried in *The Hindu* that the Mother had left her body and he said that we were lucky to have been to Pondicherry when she was "still in her body". I cannot forget his emphasis on "body", but I was in such a lethargic slumber that I thought he was bothering me early in the morning with news that was not very pleasant and I even went to the extent of asking him what was the significance of the news to me.

The significance dawned on me only after my father left his body on 24th August 1974. He had once commented on the death of someone who had died in a very pathetic and miserable way. He had said, "What a way to die!" I wondered then whether death was in our hands. He himself had lived and left his body very gently, smoothly, without an inkling of suffering and he simply seemed to have left his old robe, like the butterfly which leaves its cocoon. But the loss of his physical nearness gave me a big jolt.

And I began to search for him within and without. He had sent me through my daughter his book *The Ten Principles of the Upanishads*. He had inscribed on 22nd July, 1974, To "Shakku from Anna" (for that was how I fondly called him) and autographed it. He had instructed my daughter to tell me that I must specially read

chapter III in the book. This was the chapter dealing with the dialogue between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi. I began to read his other books one by one. One day I saw on his table a copy of the book, *The Adventure of Consciousness* by Satprem. At first I dodged reading this book, judging the quality of the book from the quality of the paper used to print it (it was handmade paper!). But I could not resist the pull. And one day I picked up the book and it really gripped me in a most living consciousness. In the last chapter, “The end that never begins”, he had underlined with a red pencil the word “fall” at the end. My consciousness that had dipped into an abyss began to rise gradually. Sri Aurobindo thus came to me through my father. Thus the veil of ignorance was lifted from me.

His and Sri Aurobindo’s books began to come my way most mysteriously. At my place of work in college—I was never at home in those surroundings—and to avoid the nagging by the authorities, I would escape into the library. On one such day, I picked up a volume on Indian Culture by Sri Aurobindo, which was strangely tucked away in the fiction section. After browsing through it I wanted to replace it in the same place, but I heard the librarian’s voice asking me to put it back in the last cupboard where all of Sri Aurobindo’s works were kept. There I found the Centenary volumes. One by one I would check them out and read them. The librarian noted my interest and though these were reference books she lent them to me to take home freely, with no time bar for their return, as no one would ask for them! Finally, I bought a full set of books.

Living with my father was like being in a spiritual atmosphere. Along with the calendar of Sri Aurobindo that I came into contact with as a child, another event had a strong influence on me. The famous singer-mystic, Dilip Kumar Roy once came to our house at the invitation of my father. When he sang, his melody and devotional mood filled the house, and when I reminisce, it still vibrates within me. That the Kingdom of God is within us and that we can create it anytime we want, such was the assurance of my father. He showed us how to live and also die in fullness, liberating the immortality within the body. The body’s consciousness is a gathered, processed force which one has to respectfully bring together. He demonstrated it. It is now that I understand why he drew my attention to the fact that we had visited Pondy when the Mother was “still in her body”. That while being “still in her body” the work the Mother did, this I understood later by reading. But my father had shown me the path. Memories of my father have become a sacred heritage site in my mental landscape. I picked up two autographed volumes of *The Life Divine*. There were notes handwritten in the margin and passages underlined by him. These struck me at once and revealed a living dimension of Truth. Life acquired a stable depth and gave me the sense to see beyond and behind life. A line from *Savitri* touched me most intimately:

The riddle grew plain and lost its catch obscure.

(Book 1, canto 5, p. 76)

A fortnight before he left his body, my father was bequeathing his worldly possessions to his three children. I had expressed my desire that since he had given me everything I need already he need not give me any more. But he firmly replied that it was up to him to give and how much to give. He had given all of his “dear self” in the third chapter, the dialogue of Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi in his book, *The Ten Principles of the Upanishads*, which carried this immense message, and was his parting gift of unconditional love.

N. SHAKUNTALA MANAY

(The author's father, Narayanrao Apparao Nikam was born on 3rd May 1903. He taught philosophy at several institutions and also served as Vice-Chancellor of Mysore University, as well as Secretary of the Indian Philosophical Congress. Readers may read an article by Prof. N. A. Nikam in the April 2003 issue of Mother India.)

...Philosophy, sometimes spiritual or at least intuitive, sometimes abstract and intellectual, sometimes intellectualising spiritual experience or supporting with a logical apparatus the discoveries of the spirit, has claimed always to take the fixation of ultimate Truth as its province. But even when it did not separate itself on rarefied metaphysical heights from the knowledge that belongs to the practical world and the pursuit of ephemeral objects, intellectual Philosophy by its habit of abstraction has seldom been a power for life. It has been sometimes powerful for high speculation, pursuing mental Truth for its own sake without any ulterior utility or object, sometimes for a subtle gymnastic of the mind in a mistily bright cloud-land of words and ideas, but it has walked or acrobatised far from the more tangible realities of existence. Ancient Philosophy in Europe was more dynamic, but only for the few; in India in its more spiritualised forms, it strongly influenced but without transforming the life of the race.... Religion did not attempt, like Philosophy, to live alone on the heights; its aim was rather to take hold of man's parts of life even more than his parts of mind and draw them Godwards; it professed to build a bridge between spiritual Truth and the vital and material human existence; it strove to subordinate and reconcile the lower to the higher, make life serviceable to God, Earth obedient to Heaven. It has to be admitted that too often this necessary effort had the opposite result of making Heaven a sanction for Earth's desires; for, continually, the religious idea has been turned into an excuse for the worship and service of the human ego.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 139-40)

THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of March 2005)

17. Dear to the Divine

THE *Bhagavata Purana* speaks highly of devotees as well as those who serve uncomplainingly the devotees of the Divine. Known as *Bhagavata-dharma*, this is said to please the Lord most. In this connection, Satrugna is held up as the perfect example of a bhagavata, as he preferred to serve Bharata who was a devotee of the Divine, Rama. Some of the Alvars have exulted in belonging to this group. One of them, Vipranarayana, called himself Tondar-adip-podi Alwar, one who was “the dust of the feet of devotees”. Kulasekhara Alwar was all joy when he imagined himself to be among the devotees of Ranganatha in Srirangam and the dust raised by their feet covered his frame. The *Bhagavata* is, of course, a legend of ideal devotees. Among them Ambarisha is a favourite with the old and the young because of the vibrant dramatic moments created by the presence of Sage Durvasa in the legend.

Ambarisha’s ancestry was noble. A great-grandson of Manu, Ambarisha was the son of Nabhaga who was the very image of dharma. He had received instructions on the knowledge of Brahman from Rudra himself. No wonder Ambarisha was also dharmic from his birth. While the *Bhagavata* has no dearth of devotees and inspiring tales that bring out their greatness, some legends remain constantly in our meditative consciousness. The legend of Ambarisha is cherished by devotees as a role model in every way. And what a dramatic tale! It underlines the experiential truth that God may forgive people who deny Him, but would never fail to punish those who sin against His devotees!

In Ambarisha we have an ideal devotee who is incarnate sattva. An emperor of all earth made up of the seven continents (*sapta dvīpavatīm mahim*), yet he lived as a waterdrop on a lotus leaf. At the very outset of this legend, we get to know that the Puranas were not meant to be idle stories. The national experience was pooled together to install in the common man knowledge of the Infinite as well as the noble ideals needed for leading a blameless earthly life. Sage Shuka describes how Ambarisha knew very well that wealth was transitory, dream-like (*svapna samstutam*). But this rejection was not an ascetic denial of life. Ambarisha continued to discharge his worldly duties as a king and householder with exemplary care. He considered his body as a gift of God and so he learnt to make proper use of every limb to serve and worship the Lord:

He trained his mind to be ever engrossed in the thought of Krishna’s feet; his words in recounting the excellences of Krishna; his hand in cleaning His places of worship; and his ears in listening to the sacred accounts dealing with Krishna’s

actions. He devoted his eyes to looking at the holy images of Mukunda; his sense of touch to contacting His great devotees; his sense of smell to imbibing the fragrance of Tulsi leaves enhanced by the contact of the Lord's lotus feet; and his sense of taste in the consumption of food left after offering it to Him. With his feet he ever circumambulated the holy temples of the Lord; and with his head, he constantly bowed down to Him present everywhere.

Such a consecration of one's body for the Lord's service, *kainkarya*, is to be soulful and not mechanical. With Ambarisha it was a genuine surrender. The Pauranika has chosen this image of listing out the limbs of Ambarisha to suggest his total surrender to the Supreme. This surrender is not merely a physical one but an integral offering of oneself to the Lord. Ambarisha is thus a role model for us to perform integral surrender as suggested by Sri Aurobindo in *The Mother*:

The surrender must be total and seize all the parts of the being. It is not enough that the psychic should respond and the higher mental accept or even the inner vital submit and the inner physical consciousness feel the influence. There must be in no part of the being, even the most external, anything that makes a reserve, anything that hides behind doubts, confusions and subterfuges, anything that revolts or refuses.

The discipline of the external limbs helps the discipline of the inner being, and Ambarisha had thus achieved perfect poise in terms of spirituality. Literally speaking, Ambarisha's life is an instance of how one sculpts one's self to perfection braving the most unexpected and severe obstacles placed on the aspirant's path by man, nature and God. Ambarisha appears early in the *Ramayana* when Vishwamitra tells Rama and Lakshmana about one of their ancestors, King Ambarisha. Ambarisha had once been engaged in performing a horse sacrifice. The sacrificial horse had been spirited away by Indra who wanted to defeat the purpose of the sacrifice. The Chief Priest told Ambarisha that he must get back the horse immediately or a human substitute before the commencement of the rituals so that no blame would attach to him, nor evil befall the kingdom.

Valmiki describes Ambarisha as highly intelligent (*mahābuddhi*), a tiger among men (*nara śārdūla*), one very famous (*mahā yaśaḥ*). The king takes thousands of cows with him to search for the horse or get a human substitute. Coming upon Sage Richika sitting with his family, Ambarisha the glorious (*mahātejāḥ*) addresses him who is glowing with spiritual power (*tapasā dīptam*) to give him a son in return for a lakh of cows (*gavām śatasahasram*). Richika is not prepared to sell his eldest son; his wife will not part with her youngest son. There is a son in the middle too. This youngster, Shunahshepa, after observing the manner in which his parents expressed their preference for his elder and younger brothers, said with simple dignity:

According to father the eldest son should not be sold. According to mother the youngest should not be sold either. Very well, it is obvious to me that the middle child is expendable (*vikreyam madhyamam manye*). O Prince, take me.”

It is obvious that this episode happened when Ambarisha was young as Shunahshepa addresses him as *rājaputra*. The story goes that Shunahshepa took refuge in Viswamitra who taught him propitiatory hymns to Indra and Upendra. When the boy was taken and tied to the sacrificial post he recited the hymns. Indra was delighted with the mystic incantation (*rahasyastuti toṣitaḥ*), and took the sacrificial offerings and re-warded the boy with a long life. Since the gods had taken the offerings, the sacrifice begun by Ambarisha reached a triumphant conclusion.

By the time we draw close to Ambarisha in the *Bhagavata* we see incarnate wisdom and surrender to the Divine. Obviously, in his younger days Ambarisha was fond of performing Ashwamedha sacrifices on the banks of the river Saraswati:

In the desert region facing the flow of the river Saraswati, he (Ambarisha) adored the Supreme Being with several Ashwamedha sacrifices, conducted by priests like Vasishtha, Asita, Gautama and others, and performed with an elaboration of all ancillary rites and of liberal gifts, made possible by his enormous resources. In Ambarisha's sacrifice all the sacrificial priests and members of the sacrificial assembly were dressed in splendid raiments and resembled celestials with eyes unwinking because of the wondrous display before them.

It is astonishing how the Vedic culture has been sustained down the millennia and we see it flowing from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* towards the *Bhagavata*. Huge chunks of the “Shalya Parva” are about the Saraswati valley civilisation. Rejecting the criticism that terms these legends that appear and reappear as puerile, Sri Aurobindo invited his readers to go to the stately verses of Vyasa and study them to realise that “they search deeper into the white-hot core of things and in their cyclic orbit of thought curve downward round the most hidden foundations of existence and upward over the highest, almost invisible arches of ideal possibility”.¹ In the early days of Indology, western scholars spoke of a break after the Vedas. They considered the Vedas to be pantheistic lucubrations and that the real Indian Vedanta began with the Upanishads. Sri Aurobindo found this ludicrous and sees a continuous flow of thought and images from the Vedic times to the Puranas. The story of Ambarisha is one of them.

No wonder then that a King who had revelled in undertaking extremely difficult sacrifices followed the rules of fasting and breaking the fast in a strict manner. Once, after three days of rigorous fasting in the Kartik month, Ambarisha and his wife completed all the formalities like feeding Brahmins and giving charity. They were about

1. Sri Aurobindo Circle—Thirtieth Number (1974), p. 68.

to have food when the sage Durvasa was announced. Ambarisha was delighted, welcomed the sage to have food and mark the conclusion of Ekadashi. Durvasa agreed and went away to the Kalindi river to have his bath and to offer oblations to the sun first.

There was an unconscionable delay in his return. In the palace, Ambarisha found himself caught in a dharmic dilemma. On the one hand, he would go against approved tradition if he did not break his fast before the Dwadashi (twelfth day of the fortnight) elapsed. On the other, he would incur sin if he ate before feeding his guest. What should he do then?

The positing of such *dharma sankatas* is the Puranic way of teaching right conduct to man. Life on earth is like walking on a razor's edge. We do not know when we will be hauled up to face soul-scorching problems. Meditating upon such holy accounts helps us gain discrimination and acquire spiritual poise to face the ironies of life.

Ambarisha consulted a few scholars learned in the sacred lore. Of course, there was no ready answer for the dilemma. Hence the king decided upon what he considered to be a golden *via media*. The sterling devotee meditated upon the Lord, took just a sip of water and now awaited the return of Durvasa.

Famed for his short temper, the rishi, on his return, divined what had happened. How dare a mere king insult the sage Durvasa? The rishi's mouth was no scripture when he became angry. He could not perceive the humility and genuine goodness of Ambarisha who was standing before him with folded hands. He burst forth:

Atrocious! Look at the transgression of this man, who is cruel, unbalanced by pride of wealth (*śriyonmattaḥ*), without an atom of real devotion to Vishnu (*viṣṇorabhaktaḥ*), and behaving as if he were a law unto himself. You invited me to come as your guest. But without feeding me, you have taken food. I shall show you the consequences of it immediately.

Blinded by ascetic pride and hunger, Durvasa pulled out a lock of his matted hair and transformed it into a demon that was terrible like the time of the breaking of the worlds (*kṛtyām kālānalopamam*). The demon rushed at Ambarisha brandishing a sword, and this led to the quaking of the earth. But Ambarisha continued to stand still, unafraid, in the posture of genuine humility. Indeed, there really was no need for him to act. Had he not made a total surrender to the Supreme? It was now the Supreme's duty to protect his sterling devotee. Nay. Even before Narayana needed to give an order, his discus had shot forth from His hand and knocked down the demon. The fire-belching Sudarshana chakra also consumed the demon into ashes.

The Lord often does not react when myopic people rile at Him. How patient Krishna had been when Shishupala heaped insult upon insult and derided him for daring to receive honours in the Rajasuya sacrifice! But the same Lord will not remain

quiescent even for a moment if any of his devotees is injured. Such has been the faith nurtured in the Indian mind through all our yesterdays. Having destroyed the demon that had been created with the hair of Durvasa, Sudarshana now went menacingly towards the rishi. Now began a dire running race as Durvasa speeded to various places in search of safety. But even Mount Mahameru could not give him refuge. Totally helpless, Durvasa ran to Brahma and prayed for guardianship from the pursuing flames of the Sudarshana.

Brahma made it clear that he was helpless in this matter. Narayana is Kala, Time. It is the Lord's leela that has created Brahma's Satyaloka and the same leela dissolves it when He wills. It was verily foolishness to think that Brahma could protect someone from Vishnu's wrath. Nay, even Bhrigu and Prajapatis, the Lords of devas and asuras, indeed no one can save someone abandoned by Vishnu! Pursued still by the discus, Durvasa ran to Kailasa and prayed to Rudra for succour. The answer was the same. Not only Rudra, but none of the other rishis including Narada could be of help as all were subject to Vishnu's Maya and so how could they come out of the Maya and protect someone who has committed a sin against the Lord's devotee? Rudra gave a piece of wholesome advice: "His (Vishnu's) weapon Sudarshana is beyond my power to control. So, go for shelter to Sri Hari who alone can help you in your present predicament."

By the time Durvasa reached the abode of Vishnu, he had been badly scorched by the pursuing flames of Sudarshana's fire. In his last extremity, he fell down at the feet of the Lord and prayed for help. After all, even sinners who are being tortured in hell get saved by uttering the Lord's name. Durvasa too ought to be saved by the Lord's pity. Vishnu, however, said that even He was not free! The *Bhagavata* is a legend of great devotees and here we have one of those passages that raises the yoga of devotion to its highest pinnacle:

O sage! It is as if I am not free, subject as I am to My devotees. Being fond of My devotees, My heart is under their sway. I do not value Myself or even Śrī, who is ever associated with Me, as I do these holy men who have accepted Me as their supreme goal. How can I abandon these men who have sought refuge in Me, abandoning their wives, children, relatives, house, wealth, this world and the next? ... Holy men are verily My heart, and I verily am the heart of holy men. They do not know anything but Me and I, of anything but them.

This image of the Lord as a prisoner of our love is a favourite among the hymnologists. The Telugu poet, Tyagaraja, sings of Rama as *bhakta yenu panjarapu ciluka*, the parrot in the cage called devotion! The Lord assured Durvasa that He was quite helpless in the matter but there was a way out for him. He asked the rishi to go to Ambarisha himself and seek his pardon. Again, the words uttered by the Lord remain a perfectly valid lesson for our age:

Go for help to Ambarisha himself, against whom you used black magic. The black magic done against a saintly person would cause the ruin of the person who resorts to such practices. Austerity and learning are beneficial to spiritual aspirants. But in the hands of a haughty and perverse person, they can prove to be the contrary.

A sterling lesson indeed when science and technology—the new tapasya and knowledge—often get out of hand in haughty and perverse minds as the ones that gave the green signal for the dropping of the atom bombs on the Japanese cities. The Puranas never get dated since, in essence, they are very much about the various shadows hidden in the human psyche.

To his utter shock Ambarisha suddenly found his feet caught firmly by the sage Durvasa seeking protection. Not knowing what to do in this situation which was also one of dharma sankata for him, Ambarisha did the only thing possible. He addressed the fire-belching Sudarshana. The nine verses addressed to the Lord's discus are a brilliant flash and remove fear from our heart if we recite it. This prayer is one of the earliest on the Sudarshana. Later on, praying to the Discus of the Lord became an unerring help to ward off fear, physical and mental. There are great prayers to Sudarshana like Vedanta Desika's *Sudarshana Ashtaka* and Koora Narayana Jeeyar's *Sudarshana Sataka*. For them all, Ambarisha's prayer, couched in simple and powerful diction beginning "*tvam agnir bhagavān sūryastvam somo jyotiṣām patih*" seems to have been the prime inspiration. For the power of Sudarshana not only removes fear of physical calamity (as we see it in action often in the *Mahabharata*) but also destroys ignorance, mental confusion, and evil tendencies in man:

Thou art the power manifesting in the fire, the worshipful sun and the moon who is the lord of all the stars.... By Thy spiritual radiance the darkness of ignorance is dispelled and the minds of great men are illumined. O lord of speech! None can excel Thee in greatness! For, the whole universe in its subtle and gross conditions is Thy manifestation.

Sage Shuka says that when addressed thus gently by Ambarisha, the Sudarshana calmed down and withdrew his fire. Durvasa felt relieved and now spoke to Ambarisha in all humility. He had now learnt of the greatness of the Lord's servitors (*ananta-dāsānām*). This was clear, he said, for Ambarisha had helped him though the sage had sought to destroy the king. Durvasa had recognised the existence of two sterling qualities from the episode: the greatness of bhagavatas and the readiness to renounce exhibited by the really good man. Receiving the sage's praise bashfully, Ambarisha invited him to have his food and the sage also did justice to the feast. After gaining the permission of Durvasa, Ambarisha also had his meal and all was well. Before Durvasa left he blessed Ambarisha:

I feel pleased, I feel blessed by what I have received from a great devotee like you (*prītosmi anugrahītosmi tava bhagavatasya vai*)—from your sight, speech, touch and hospitality in the spirit of divine service. The celestial damsels shall constantly extol this action of yours in songs. And on earth too your holy fame shall be glorified by all.

So it has come to be, for *Ambarisha charitra* is a favourite with traditional katha-narrators. The katha-narration or katha kalakshepa has been a time-tested instrument to teach the common man the need to acquire holiness and self-discipline, the importance of eschewing anger and pettiness and the never-failing help that comes from devotion to Hari through lectures on Indian myths and legends.

The story of Ambarisha has been retold beautifully in all the regional language variations of the *Bhagavata*, often rising to sublime heights in the hands of some poets like Pothana in Telugu. The Tamil version of Sevvaichooduvar deals with Ambarisha briefly though none of the important details are missed. In this version Vishnu is described as being angered by Durvasa's act and is seen commanding his Discus: "Go and save my devotee Ambarisha." The poet adds that the Discus first killed the demon and then pursued Durvasa for one whole year and Ambarisha did not eat anything during all these days. As in the original *Bhagavata* Ambarisha ruled over his land for a long time, though in his heart he was a renunciate. The very personification of devotion to Hari, Ambarisha handed over the kingdom to his sons at an appropriate time and retired to the forest and reached the heavenly abode in due course.

In Malayalam, a Kathakali drama, *Ambarisha Charitham* was written by Aswathy Tirunal (1756-1788). The author has used all his ingenuity to weave contemporary events into the tale and thus we have allusions to the invasion of Kerala by the army of Tipu Sultan referred to as Yavanas. Ambarisha's observance of the Ekadashi vrata is linked to the invasion, for Ambarisha is said to take a vow to observe the vrata to propitiate Lord Vishnu and thereby get help to defeat the invading Yavanas. One can imagine the happy reaction of the contemporary audience of the 18th century when the character as Sudarshana made powerful gestures to the background of the Kathakali drums while pursuing Durvasa!

Ambarisha's story has also been used by Theosophists in the early decades of the last century. Theosophists sought to find allegories in Eastern legends to underline their theory of the Mahatmas. Madame H. P. Blavatsky has transformed the Ambarisha-Shunahshepa theme to create her legend of the Blue Lotus. Ambarisha of Ayodhya is childless. After vowing that he would give his first born to Varuna should he be blessed with more than one son, he has Rohita also known as Devarata. When Ambarisha is about to sacrifice Devarata to Varuna to fulfil his promise, the boy runs away. Much later, Devarata manages to get Shunahshepa as a substitute for himself. There are other twists and turns till in the blaze of the sacrifice it is found that Devarata

is sacrificed and not Shunahshepa. The Pushkar lake which had been full of white lotuses now was covered by blue lotuses and a heavenly voice rang out:

A prince who does not know how to die for his subjects is not worthy to reign over the children of the Sun. He will be reborn in a race of red-haired peoples, a barbarous and selfish race, and the nations which descend from him will have a heritage ever on the decline. It is the younger son of a mendicant ascetic who will become the king and reign in his stead.

According to this transmogrified tale,² Shunahshepa was born in the Solar dynasty and ruled for 84,000 years while Devarata was born in the family of a caste-less foreigner (*mlechcha-yavana*) and became “the ancestor of the barbarous and red-haired races which dwell in the West”.

All of which goes to prove that the story of Ambarisha is a rich mine for the devotee, the philosopher, the sociologist, the poet and the dramatist and remains relevant still.

(*To be continued*)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

2. *Theosophy* (June, 1928), Volume 16, No. 8.

We shall succeed in this difficult change [intuitivisation of mind] in proportion as we purify the interfering intelligence,—if we can reduce in it the element of material thought enslaved to the external appearances of things, the element of vital thought enslaved to the wishes, desires, impulses of the lower nature, the element of intellectual thought enslaved to our preferred, already settled or congenial ideas, conceptions, opinions, fixed operations of intelligence, if, having reduced to a minimum those elements, we can replace them by an intuitive vision and sense of things, an intuitive insight into appearances, an intuitive will, an intuitive ideation. This is hard enough for our consciousness naturally bound by the triple tie of mentality, vitality, corporeality to its own imperfection and ignorance, the upper, middle and lower cord in the Vedic parable of the soul's bondage, cords of the mixed truth and falsehood of appearances by which Shunahshepa was bound to the post of sacrifice.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 480-81)

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of March 2005)

WE are struck by the profuse wealth of poetic images in *Savitri*. Our eyes do not just pass over the lines—we respond to their rich imagery. The first Canto of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* is perhaps the most well-known portion of the epic, and many readers have been touched by its splendid imagery, the subtle rhythms and the majestic movement as the dawn slowly displays its divine splendour and “buries its seed of grandeur in the hours”. *Savitri* is, after all, mantric poetry and carries the force of divine consciousness within it.

The images in *Savitri* are the creations of the poet in whose vision even the most prosaic, the most wordy things are transformed into exquisite or magnificent vehicles of profoundly mystic ideas. The Night described in the beginning of the first Canto is also symbolic. The poet has written in a letter:

The attempt at mystic spiritual poetry of the kind I am at demands above all a spiritual objectivity, an intense psycho-physical concreteness.... That darkness itself is described as a quietude, which gives it a subjective spiritual character and brings out the thing symbolised, but the double epithet “inert black” gives it the needed concreteness so that the quietude ceases to be something abstract and becomes something concrete, objective, but still spiritually subjective.¹

Material phenomena have an inner reality but they are most real because they are informed and animated by deeper levels of significance which is concretely present in the following lines:

One lucent corner windowing hidden things
Forced the world's blind immensity to sight.²

We shall here pass in review some of the extremely bright ones:

A throe that came and left a quivering trace,
Gave room for an old tired want unfilled,
At peace in its subconscious moonless cave
To raise its head and look for absent light,...³

We find another beautiful image in the following lines:

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.⁴

The dawn that rises in the world of Inconscience is represented in another image:

A wandering hand of pale enchanted light
That glowed along a fading moment's brink,
Fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge
A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge.⁵

which is followed by:

Interpreting a recondite beauty and bliss
In colour's hieroglyphs of mystic sense,
It wrote the lines of a significant myth
Telling of a greatness of spiritual dawns,
A brilliant code penned with the sky for page.⁶

And the same Dawn becomes an

Ambassadress twixt eternity and change.⁷

Priests and religious ceremonies and other churchly things are favourite images deftly chosen and marvellously and sometimes quite unexpectedly introduced. We shall note some of them now:

The wide-winged hymn of a great priestly wind
Arose and failed upon the altar hills;
The high boughs prayed in a revealing sky.⁸

In this image it is the happier side of religion that finds expression; in the following one the other and sorrier spectacle of credal religion is taken as an image:

A servile blinkered silence hushed the mind...
While mitred, holding the good shepherd's staff,
Falsehood enthroned on awed and prostrate hearts
The cults and creeds that organise living death
And slay the soul on the altar of a lie.⁹

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

(Based on notes from several sources)

References

1. *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29, pp. 750-52.
2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 28, p. 3.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 215-16.

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 Aswapati 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

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Poetry and Art, CWSA, Vol. 27, pp. 279-80)

NAVANIT STORIES

THE MAGIC WAND

AFTER decades of sadhana a yogi penetrated the layers of Maya that envelope earthly existence and attained the divine vision from which nothing can be hidden.

A young disciple who was dazzled by this power, decided to acquire it at all cost. He followed every instruction and wish of his guru and served him in every way possible. After twelve years the sage called him.

“My child, you have served me with great dedication for all these years; I am pleased with you. Is there something you wish me to do for you?”

“Yes, Gurudev. I wish to have the power you have of seeing through the physical and subtle personalities into the innermost being.”

“Child, what have you asked for? That capacity comes after long and intense sadhana. If it were got without that preparation, without having established the right state of consciousness it would be useless, even dangerous. Ask for something else.”

“Gurudev, that is what I want. If you are really pleased with me, if you really wish to give me anything, give me that power.”

The sage kept quiet for a long time. Then he picked up a small stick that was lying nearby and gave it to the disciple. “If that is what you must have, I give it to you. Take this stick, if you point it towards someone you will see everything in his inner being.”

The young man was overjoyed. He waited until the guru sat in meditation and was deep in samadhi. Then he pointed the stick towards the guru. In a corner of the guru’s inner being he saw a stain of greed, in another corner a small shadow thrown by the self, in yet another, a spot of desire. “What?” he silently exclaimed. “Even he has these blemishes?” Filled with anger and contempt he rushed out of the room.

A whole month went by and he did not come to the guru. The guru understood. He went to the disciple’s house.

“My child, what is the matter? I haven’t seen you for a whole month. What happened? Have you been ill? Or has some other problem kept you from coming to me?”

“Charlatan! I know you now. Go away, I will never come to you again.”

“But tell me what is the matter; what has happened?”

“When I pointed this magic wand towards you, I saw that you too are subject to greed, pride, desire, etc. Why then should I even come near you?”

The guru smiled. “My child, it is true; I too am not immune from the attacks of these forces. But did you point it at yourself also? It does not matter if you never come to me again, but do try this, at least once.”

The disciple pointed the wand at his own heart: a damp darkness as in a cave, piles of black desire, heaps of multi-hued envy, jealousy and lust, smelly stacks of pride

and selfishness, stifling clouds of delusions and infatuations everywhere.

Stunned and ashamed, the poor boy rushed to the guru's house. Falling at his feet, tears streaming down his face, in a choked voice he blurted: "Forgive me, Gurudev! Forgive, forgive, forgive. How blind was I and yet you showered your grace and granted my desire. Even after I insulted you, you did not withdraw your love and you came to save me. Forgive my stupidity, Gurudev."

The guru bent down and helped him up. "It is all right, my child. Now that you know better, take up your sadhana earnestly and sincerely and you will see, in the end you will certainly attain your soul's aspiration. My blessings are always with you."

PUJALAL

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

As the supreme Shastra of the integral Yoga is the eternal Veda secret in the heart of every man, so its supreme Guide and Teacher is the inner Guide, the World-Teacher, jagad-guru, secret within us. It is he who destroys our darkness by the resplendent light of his knowledge; that light becomes within us the increasing glory of his own self-revelation. He discloses progressively in us his own nature of freedom, bliss, love, power, immortal being. He sets above us his divine example as our ideal and transforms the lower existence into a reflection of that which it contemplates. By the inpouring of his own influence and presence into us he enables the individual being to attain to identity with the universal and transcendent.

What is his method and his system? He has no method and every method. His system is a natural organisation of the highest processes and movements of which the nature is capable. Applying themselves even to the pettiest details and to the actions the most insignificant in their appearance with as much care and thoroughness as to the greatest, they in the end lift all into the Light and transform all. For in his Yoga there is nothing too small to be used and nothing too great to be attempted. As the servant and disciple of the Master has no business with pride or egoism because all is done for him from above, so also he has no right to despond because of his personal deficiencies or the stumblings of his nature. For the Force that works in him is impersonal—or superpersonal—and infinite.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 61-62)