

# MOTHER INDIA

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## THE STONE GODDESS

In a town of gods, housed in a little shrine,  
From sculptured limbs the Godhead looked at me,—  
A living Presence deathless and divine,  
A Form that harboured all infinity.

The great World-Mother and her mighty will  
Inhabited the earth's abysmal sleep,  
Voiceless, omnipotent, inscrutable,  
Mute in the desert and the sky and deep.

Now veiled with mind she dwells and speaks no word,  
Voiceless, inscrutable, omniscient,  
Hiding until our soul has seen, has heard  
The secret of her strange embodiment,

One in the worshipper and the immobile shape,  
A beauty and mystery flesh or stone can drape.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 139)*

[See p. 407: Some Notes on “The Stone Goddess”]

## **‘THOU ART OURSELVES IN OUR REALITY’**

**August 15, 1913**

IN this even-fall, Thy Peace deepens and grows more sweet and Thy Voice more clear and distinct in the silence that fills my being.

O Divine Master, Thine is all our life, our thought, our love, all our being. Take unto Thyself once more what is Thine; for Thou art ourselves in our Reality.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 28)*

## **‘I AM THYSELF EVEN AS THOU ART I..’**

**August 16, 1913**

O LOVE, Divine Love, Thou fillest my whole being and overflowest on every side. I am Thyself even as Thou art I, and I see Thee in each being, each thing, from the soft breath of the passing breeze to the glorious sun which gives us light and is a symbol of Thee.

O Thou whom I cannot understand, in the silence of the purest devotion I adore Thee.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, Vol. 1, p. 29)*

## REASON, SCIENCE AND YOGA

EUROPEAN metaphysical thought—even in those thinkers who try to prove or explain the existence and nature of God or of the Absolute—does not in its method and result go beyond the intellect. But the intellect is incapable of knowing the supreme Truth; it can only range about seeking for Truth, and catching fragmentary representations of it, not the thing itself, and trying to piece them together. Mind cannot arrive at Truth; it can only make some constructed figure that tries to represent it or a combination of figures. At the end of European thought, therefore, there must always be Agnosticism, declared or implicit. Intellect, if it goes sincerely to its own end, has to return and give this report: “I cannot know; there is, or at least it seems to me that there may be or even must be Something beyond, some ultimate Reality, but about its truth I can only speculate; it is either unknowable or cannot be known by me.” Or, if it has received some light on the way from what is beyond it, it can say too: “There is perhaps a consciousness beyond Mind, for I seem to catch glimpses of it and even to get intimations from it. If that is in touch with the Beyond or if it is itself the consciousness of the Beyond and you can find some way to reach it, then this Something can be known but not otherwise.”

Any seeking of the supreme Truth through intellect alone must end either in Agnosticism of this kind or else in some intellectual system or mind-constructed formula. There have been hundreds of these systems and formulas and there can be hundreds more, but none can be definitive. Each may have its value for the mind, and different systems with their contrary conclusions can have an equal appeal to intelligences of equal power and competence. All this labour of speculation has its utility in training the human mind and helping to keep before it the idea of Something beyond and Ultimate towards which it must turn. But the intellectual Reason can only point vaguely or feel gropingly towards it or try to indicate partial and even conflicting aspects of its manifestation here; it cannot enter into and know it. As long as we remain in the domain of the intellect only, an impartial pondering over all that has been thought and sought after, a constant throwing up of ideas, of all the possible ideas, and the formation of this or that philosophical belief, opinion or conclusion is all that can be done. This kind of disinterested search after Truth would be the only possible attitude for any wide and plastic intelligence. But any conclusion so arrived at would be only speculative; it could have no spiritual value; it would not give the decisive experience or the spiritual certitude for which the soul is seeking. If the intellect is our highest possible instrument and there is no other means of arriving at supraphysical Truth, then a wise and large Agnosticism must be our ultimate attitude. Things in the manifestation may be known to some degree, but the Supreme and all that is beyond the Mind must remain forever unknowable.

It is only if there is a greater consciousness beyond Mind and that consciousness is accessible to us that we can know and enter into the ultimate Reality. Intellectual

speculation, logical reasoning as to whether there is or is not such a greater consciousness cannot carry us very far. What we need is a way to get the experience of it, to reach it, enter into it, live in it. If we can get that, intellectual speculation and reasoning must fall necessarily into a very secondary place and even lose their reason for existence. Philosophy, intellectual expression of the Truth may remain, but mainly as a means of expressing this greater discovery and as much of its contents as can at all be expressed in mental terms to those who still live in the mental intelligence.

This, you will see, answers your point about the Western thinkers, Bradley and others, who have arrived through intellectual thinking at the idea of an “Other beyond Thought” or have even, like Bradley, tried to express their conclusions about it in terms that recall some of the expressions in the *Arya*. The idea in itself is not new; it is as old as the Vedas. It was repeated in other forms in Buddhism, Christian Gnosticism, Sufism. Originally, it was not discovered by intellectual speculation, but by the mystics following an inner spiritual discipline. When, somewhere between the seventh and fifth centuries B.C., men began both in the East and West to intellectualise knowledge, this Truth survived in the East; in the West where the intellect began to be accepted as the sole or highest instrument for the discovery of Truth, it began to fade. But still it has there too tried constantly to return; the Neo-Platonists brought it back, and now, it appears, the Neo-Hegelians and others (e.g., the Russian Ouspensky and one or two German thinkers, I believe) seem to be reaching after it. But still there is a difference.

In the East, especially in India, the metaphysical thinkers have tried, as in the West, to determine the nature of the highest Truth by the intellect. But, in the first place, they have not given mental thinking the supreme rank as an instrument in the discovery of Truth, but only a secondary status. The first rank has always been given to spiritual intuition and illumination and spiritual experience; an intellectual conclusion that contradicts this supreme authority is held invalid. Secondly, each philosophy has armed itself with a practical way of reaching to the supreme state of consciousness, so that even when one begins with Thought, the aim is to arrive at a consciousness beyond mental thinking. Each philosophical founder (as also those who continued his work or school) has been a metaphysical thinker doubled with a yogi. Those who were only philosophic intellectuals were respected for their learning but never took rank as truth-discoverers. And the philosophies that lacked a sufficiently powerful means of spiritual experience died out and became things of the past because they were not dynamic for spiritual discovery and realisation.

In the West it was just the opposite that came to pass. Thought, intellect, the logical reason came to be regarded more and more as the highest means and even the highest end; in philosophy, Thought is the be-all and the end-all. It is by intellectual thinking and speculation that the truth is to be discovered; even spiritual experience has been summoned to pass the tests of the intellect, if it is to be held valid—just the reverse of the Indian position. Even those who see that the mental Thought must be

overpassed and admit a supramental “Other”, do not seem to escape from the feeling that it must be through mental Thought, sublimating and transmuting itself, that this other Truth must be reached and made to take the place of the mental limitation and ignorance. And again Western thought has ceased to be dynamic; it has sought after a theory of things, not after realisation. It was still dynamic amongst the ancient Greeks, but for moral and aesthetic rather than spiritual ends. Later on, it became yet more purely intellectual and academic; it became intellectual speculation only without any practical ways and means for the attainment of the Truth by spiritual experiment, spiritual discovery, a spiritual transformation. If there were not this difference, there would be no reason for seekers like yourself to turn to the East for guidance; for in the purely intellectual field, the Western thinkers are as competent as any Eastern sage. It is the spiritual way, the road that leads beyond the intellectual levels, the passage from the outer being to the inmost Self, which has been lost by the over-intellectuality of the mind of Europe.

In the extracts you have sent me from Bradley and Joachim, it is still the intellect thinking about what is beyond itself and coming to an intellectual, a reasoned speculative conclusion about it. It is not dynamic for the change which it attempts to describe. If these writers were expressing in mental terms some realisation, even mental, some intuitive experience of this “Other than Thought”, then one ready for it might feel it through the veil of the language they use and himself draw near to the same experience. Or if, having reached the intellectual conclusion, they had passed on to the spiritual realisation, finding the way or following one already found, then in pursuing their thought, one might be preparing oneself for the same transition. But there is nothing of the kind in all this strenuous thinking. It remains in the domain of the intellect and in that domain it is no doubt admirable; but it does not become dynamic for spiritual experience.

It is not by “thinking out” the entire reality, but by a change of consciousness that one can pass from the ignorance to the Knowledge—the Knowledge by which we become what we know. To pass from the external to a direct and intimate inner consciousness; to widen consciousness out of the limits of the ego and the body; to heighten it by an inner will and aspiration and opening to the Light till it passes in its ascent beyond Mind; to bring down a descent of the supramental Divine through self-giving and surrender with a consequent transformation of mind, life and body—this is the *integral* way to the Truth.<sup>1</sup> It is this that we call the Truth here and aim at in our yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 157-61)

1. I have said that the idea of the supermind was already in existence from ancient times. There was in India and elsewhere the attempt to reach it by rising to it; but what was missed was the way to make it integral for the life and to bring it down for transformation of the whole nature, even of the physical nature.



## SOME NOTES ON “THE STONE GODDESS”

*(Sri Aurobindo’s poem appears on p. 401)*

THIS poem is about an early experience of Sri Aurobindo’s. He refers to the experience in a letter: “...the living presence of Kali in a shrine on the banks of the Narmada...”

*(SABCL, Vol. 6, p. 50)*

The “town of gods” in the poem is Karanali, near Chandod in Gujarat. Sri Aurobindo visited this place towards the end of his stay in Baroda, 1904-06.

*(From Sonnets, p. 96, 1980 edition)*

\*

Randhir Upadhyaya wrote from Ahmedabad on 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1974:

Regarding the details of the exact location of the Kali Mandir and its historical background, the following are my findings:

The temple is generally called “Mahakali Mandir of Karanali”. It is situated on the northern bank of the river Narmada, just near the famous Kubereshwar Temple. One has to climb about 100 steep steps to reach the Kali Temple after about a mile’s boating in Narmada from Chandod. The Shrine is approximately 300 years old. Sri Somvargiriji Maharaj, a Mahant of Niranjani Akhada took to the Sri Chakra Upasana—worship of the Divine Shakti—three centuries ago. He got the three Sri Chakras drawn on three triangular pieces of metal and did Tantra Sadhana for some years. Ultimately he got “siddhi” and acquired occult powers, with great spiritual consciousness. It is said that he had realised Mahakali through the Siddha Chakras and She used to manifest before him often. He was a great yogi and Tantrik. A few days before his death he installed the three Siddha Chakras and Kali idol in front of his *yajña-kunḍ* [sacrificial pit] by the side of a wall and erected a small temple. Since then it is looked after and worshipped by Niranjani Sadhus. The beautiful idol of Mahakali in the temple is about three feet high and a folding wooden tiger is fixed near her feet in such a way that it appears as if the Goddess is mounted on the tiger with Her face in the west direction. An iron *triśūl* [trident] is placed by the side of the idol. The three yantras are not visible. The entire atmosphere of the place is surcharged with powerful spiritual vibrations. The temple is not at all famous and is in a dilapidated condition.

*(From Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research, Vol. 2, No. 2, December, 1978)*

## ALL OR NOTHING

THE Integral Yoga is a matter of all or nothing. Not that the Guru rejects partial offerings: whatever movement is towards the Divine is welcome and can be made the starting-point for a larger gesture. The Grace answers to even the smallest sincere gift. But its call is towards more and more, a new starting-point each moment. And if to this insatiable call a deaf ear is turned, then in terms of the Integral Yoga it is as if nothing was done.

The call is insatiable not only because the Grace wants the whole human to be surrendered to the Divine but also because it wants the whole Divine to be lavished on the human. Surely, since the very nature of Grace is to exceed mere tally and equation, its self-lavishing is always greater than the aspirant's self-surrender. Yet the aspirant cannot receive and retain it unless he holds up to it a being that increasingly widens and deepens and grows a less and less partial offering.

In the integral offering that has to be made in the Integral Yoga, one understands fairly well the need of entire detachment from the non-divine and of absolute love for the Supreme and of perfect service to the Master. What is not often understood is the way of action in the midst of the world where the Supreme's manifestation has to take place, the way of dealing with the humans amongst whom the Divine has put us. There are two extremes into which we are likely to fall. One is the position that the mere practice of goodness is spiritual. No doubt, every movement that loosens one's self-centredness is a help to spirituality. But it is not till the ego which is one's common centre is replaced by the true soul and the universal Self that spirituality is established. Otherwise all that happens is a subtilisation of the ego, a diffusion of it in place of a concentration—a state in which it is at times more difficult to detect and therefore more difficult to outgrow, more liable to induce a self-haloing complacency and prevent the release into true Light. A constant remembrance of the Divine, a direct life-offering to the Supreme, a conscious motive and *élan* beyond mere goodness, an unremitting cry to the Master Light to manifest its own will in all human relations: this is spirituality in action.

The other extreme cares little for how we act among men. We feel that all our capacity of sweetness is to be exercised only with the Guru and that it does not matter how we behave with others. We tell ourselves: "The incarnate Divine is our concern: nobody else is of any importance and what helps us in Yoga is simply the way we love and serve the Master. It is of no moment whether we are just and generous and calm and helpful to others." Here a great truth is shaded off into a great falsehood. Even apart from the fact that the Divine who is incarnate is also hidden in all beings and requires from the secret station there a fineness and largeness of attitude and action, we have here an oblivion of two ingredients of the Integral Yoga.

First, this is a Yoga of manifestation no less than realisation. Not only is the Supreme to be centrally reached: the Supreme is also to be radiated to the farthest

peripheries of the world. The innermost soul has to look forth and touch the outermost: all crudity of attitude, all meanness of action in our dealings with earth's creatures would cut across the ultimate aim of this Yoga.

Secondly, it is a delusion that one can divide oneself into parts and be always fine and wide with the Guru without practising fineness and wideness twenty-four hours of the day. Of course, the Divine is our concern, but can we ever hope to love and serve the Divine wholly if in some part of our being, in some field of our activity we tolerate the crude and the mean? As long as the soul remains somehow in force during the hours in the sanctuary we may be able to exclude the unregenerate movements from our relations with the Master. But it is not only the soul that has to be offered: the soul must lead the rest of the being to the sanctuary. And when the rest is touched by the Divine and called upon to co-operate, then if it has not trained itself to be fine and large outside the sanctuary it will tend to be resentful, angry, jealous, self-seeking with the Divine as it has been with the human. The soul's sweetness and light may fail to curb and convert it if that sweetness and that light have not been accustomed to do so everywhere and at all times. Resentment, anger, jealousy, self-seeking on any occasion can be a secret seed of the same ego-expression against the Supreme. In the Integral Yoga, with its stroke on each part for response to the Supreme, the total self-offering is not possible unless one takes to heart Sri Aurobindo's command: "Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you; because she is, indeed, always present."<sup>1</sup>

K. D. SETHNA  
(AMAL KIRAN)

*(The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo, 1992 ed., pp. 153-54)*

1. *The Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 105.

Nil actum reputa si quid superest agendum.

*Don't consider that anything has been done if anything is left to be done.*

*Lucan*

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

(Continued from the issue of April 2005)

I used to act as the Devil's Advocate for Amal, bringing to his notice any news or studies that challenged the position he was taking in his yet-to-be-published works on ancient history. His letter of 12.8.87 provides insight into the type of material I used to send him and his detailed responses which were as much to clear his head as to test on me whether his marshalling of arguments was adequate to demolish the academic-turned-Union Minister Debi Prasad Chattopadhyaya:

Thanks for your concern about the second edition of my *The Problem of Aryan Origins* and for sending all the material that might prove useful and for insisting on me to read carefully the most recent pronouncement on the Aryan invasion question, the 1987 lecture by Debi Prasad Chattopadhyaya. Yesterday I gave it a second reading. I find it self-contradictory and wrongly interpretative of the *Rigveda* and fundamentally proceeding on the assumption that there was an Aryan invasion of India in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C.

The rest of the letter has been reproduced in Supplement III of *The Problem*.

After this I had been sent off to represent India at a conference on Family Welfare in Seoul. On my return I found Amal's letter of 15.9.87 and two articles of his. My bringing Chattopadhyaya to his notice had led to a new demolition exercise by him. I had also sent him the only letter by Mrinalini Devi that Sri Aurobindo had preserved which formed part of the Alipore Bomb Case records and had been traced out by my parents. The year of death of Pargiter continues to plague Amal because of the copy-right issue involved:

You must have been back for long after restricting the output of children in South Korea. Two of my brain-children must have welcomed you on your return: an offprint containing my first letter contra Parpola and my typed letter contra Chattopadhyaya. I have now enlarged the second in a significant way in order to cover the whole of the lecturer or rather to uncover the hole that he is. The enlarged version will appear in the December *Mother India* on the heels of a reproduction, in the November issue, of my old *Heritage* piece, *Was there an Aryan Invasion of India*. Its sequel will be entitled "*The Aryan Question*" Again.

I don't know whether by now you have unearthed the death-date of F. E. Pargiter. Motilal Banarsidass have kept quiet after my informing them of my inability to send a copy each of my forthcoming book to two historians who are dead.

Your father has published the letter of Mrinalini. I had a typed copy of it but, search as I may, I can't trace it. Will you be able to send me a copy of the printed material?<sup>1</sup> I shall be thankful also to have your notes on the date of the *Mahabharata* if you have been able to put them in shape.

Minna remembers with pleasure both you and your wife, especially the latter whom she considers wonderful.

I sent S. B. Roy, who had been writing on the Indus Civilisation, Amal's work and passed on his criticisms once again as a Devil's Advocate. This is Amal's fighting response dated 8.10.87:

I have read S. B. Roy's "critical appreciation" of my work, but I am not sure whether he correctly knows my views nor am I persuaded that his views are sound in all respects.

Before I come to these points let me ask how he can assert two Aryan invasions so confidently when evidence for even one is absolutely lacking from the standpoint of scientific history. If either archaeological or documentary testimony is all to seek for the supposed invasion around 1500 B.C., how are we to posit not only an invasion by Sanskrit-speaking Rigvedics, but also an earlier one by Prakrit-speaking non-Rigvedics? Besides, what grounds do we have to date the former invasion to c. 2000-1900 B.C. and the latter to c. 3100 B.C.? Grierson and Hoernle speak of two waves of invasion, but they were writing when the invasion-theory was never challenged and also when the details of Harappan chronology were unavailable. The old idea was that the Aryans arrived in c. 2000 B.C. But at that date the Harappa Culture was in full swing and there is no possibility of damage by any invasion. Roy seems to go back to the old chronology about the Aryans. I may add that the two waves were called inner and outer. The inner is supposed to have gone into the Middle Country, while the outer remained in the Punjab-Afghanistan area. Naturally the inner wave which went deeper into India was earlier, leaving the Punjab-Afghanistan area clear for the later wave to occupy. Roy inverts the chronology. The "Asura" Aryans who came earlier according to him are set in the north-west, whereas the "Daeva" Aryans who came later are put on the eastern side of the Parushni. Lastly, the Rigvedics are silent not only about the matter of coming to India from abroad: they refer in the very first hymn—that of Rishi Madhuchchanda—in terms of themselves being modern (*nūtanaiḥ*) and their ancestors in wisdom being ancient (*pūurvebhiḥ*). A long continuity in the same country appears to be implied. We get no sense of a different brand of Aryan in the time remoter than that of the Rigvedics. The whole business of "Asura" Aryans and "Daeva" Aryans has not the slightest basis in the *Rigveda*. What may be inferred is that certain

1. Amal had misunderstood. My parents had unearthed the letter and copied it out. It has not been published yet.

Aryan groups are taken to have turned hostile to some other groups. But to identify the Harappans as the “Asura” Aryans is, as far as evidence goes, a flight of fancy just as the alleged fight between the Rigvedics and the Harappans on the banks of the river Ravi is. Roy falls into the trap of equating the Rigvedic Hariyupiya with Harappa, one point among several I have discussed in one of the Appendices of my *The Problem of Aryan Origins*. Roy banks on his tracing the dates of the various Rishis and of the kings contemporary with them. As far as I remember, his basis is astronomy, the reading of certain stellar facts in a number of Rigvedic or other allusions. First of all, is such a reading dependable or even permissible? Secondly, does it agree with ascertained historical chronology? Roy, from what he says in his review, does not appear to care at all for this chronology. How am I to take his position seriously? It does not strike me as internally consistent or as concordant with known history. When we put aside arbitrary affirmations, we face two things. There is no scientific reason to assume an Aryan invasion. And if so the *Rigveda* cannot be a scripture of the period where the Harappa Culture ends and as it cannot be located in the Indus Valley from c. 2500-1500 B.C.—the time bracket for the Harappa culture—its creating in the same area must be earlier.

In support of this thesis comes my argument from *karpāsa*, cotton. Roy calls it an *argumentum e silentio* and regards it as ineffective. He does not realise that there are silences which are thunderous. The silence down from the *Rigveda* to the Puranas about any Aryan invasion is deafening, running as it does over nearly 2000 years. A silence slightly less insistent on being heard is the absence of reference to cotton not only in the *Rigveda* but also in all the other Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. Not before we reach the Sutras do we have *karpāsa*, which means a silence for at least 1000 years according to every possible computation. Is such a silence to be brushed aside as inconclusive? Roy has failed to assess the strength of my argument.

He has also failed to appreciate the fine points of my chronology of the Sutras. We have reason to believe that there were Sutras prior to the ones we have in our hands. The way cotton is mentioned in these latter shows that it was a familiar object already. The lost Sutras are bound to have referred to it. The earliest Sutra we possess goes back by a definite astronomical observation to c. 1400 B.C. The documents preceding it must be dated to the final period of the Harappa Culture: say, 2000-1500 B.C. Alamgirpur which is close to the part of India which lay outside the Harappan territory attests cotton at c. 2000 B.C. So the possible cotton-mentioning Sutras may be put back at least up to this period. Beyond it there would be Sutras but without reference to cotton. I do not say anywhere that Sutras of 2500 B.C. speak of *karpāsa*.

Roy makes me declare that the Aryans came to India very early. I actually say that we have no sight of any coming to India by the Aryans. Even if they

came from more northern latitudes we cannot say that the time of their coming was anymore near the Rigvedic period. This period, according to me, starts from c. 3500 B.C. So the Aryans must be taken to have been in India much before this.

Roy says he agrees with me “that the early India included Afghanistan, South Russia, Eastern Persia (Iran) in its ambit, and that the early hymns of the *Rigveda* were composed there”. My view is that some parts of Afghanistan were in Rigvedic India, but I say nothing either of Eastern Iran or of South Russia. I merely draw a map of the belt of early Aryanism which extends from Rigvedic India to South Russia (the Ukraine)—and I certainly do not hold that any hymns were composed in Eastern Persia or in South Russia. Even to think of Afghanistan in connection with their composition is conjecture.

I do not note in Roy’s review any consideration of the Harappan religion *vis-à-vis* the Rigvedic. Those whom he calls “Asura” Aryans and “Daeva” Aryans seem to have the same religion. But how can this be if the former constituted the Harappa Culture? There is a marked difference between the Rigvedic and the Harappan religion. That is why Marshall and company dubbed the latter non-Aryan. It can be deemed Aryan only if we distance it from the Rigvedic and take it as at once a derivative, a development and a deviation. The same relationship we find between the Rigvedic religion and the religion we can gather from the Sutras. I have taken great pains to demonstrate the close affinity which the Sutras’ religion has with the Harappan. This is one more point to equate the times of the Harappa Culture and of the Sutras. The preparation of the affinity we can trace in the late Brahmanas.

My general picture is many-sided and each side is shown to support the others so that a consistent over-all thesis emerges. I doubt whether Roy has grasped this many-sidedness. But I am thankful that he has found some parts very useful and has shown enthusiasm about them.

At some time I shall deal with the problem of the Battle of the Ten Kings in the light of what Roy calls my belief in “Shri Aurobindo’s theory of the Rig Veda”, a belief which makes my approach “basically mystical”.

Two months later, Amal wrote on 7.12.87 that he was done with this issue and was moving on to Velikovsky and literary matters. Valuable information regarding “Siddhi Day” occurs in the letter. Amal sent me with his letter Shraddhavan’s generous praise of my study of Wordsworth as a *kavi* that had been carried in *Mother India*:

I believe I have now covered all the ground of the theory which posits an Aryan invasion with or without its hand in the destruction of the Harappa Culture. A side-issue of great importance is the interpretation of the *Rigveda*. Sri Aurobindo’s symbolic-spiritual reading of that scripture seems to arise with



some force from a negative view of the “Question”.

My new series of letters to Kathleen Raine has now swelled enormously and is fit to make a second book of correspondence. One of my answers to her ran into 40 double-spaced typed pages, another to about 20 and the latest to over 10. She is reluctant to pursue the discussion further and we shall soon cry a halt and revert to other topics—Yeats, Tagore, etc.—which were side-tracked because of the direct tackling of the subject of Sri Aurobindo as a Poet. The mental block in her which refuses to accept his poetry as genuine stuff seems too deeply set. I told her that *Savitri* is too much of “the Future Poetry” and she should turn to *Ilion*. This she did but couldn’t bring herself to grant that here was splendid poetry, though she conceded that Sri Aurobindo had wonderful energy and mastery of the English language as well as of the Greek hexameter as a technical tool.

My book on Velikovsky is still lying with me—so too are *The Beginning of History for Israel* and “*Raised from the Dead*” (an examination of the evidence for Jesus’ Resurrection).<sup>2</sup> They are all in their final forms. Some others out of my still 20 unpublished books have to be set in order before I pop off. I must attend to them so that my two nephews who will be in a position to publish them<sup>3</sup> may have nothing more to do than dole out the shekels. My latest and hopefully the last historical adventure—*Ancient India in a New Light* (nearly 700 pages)—is ready but is held up because I haven’t yet finished making its Index, a most bothersome job.<sup>4</sup>

Shraddhavan has given me a note for you, her appreciation of your Wordsworth paper. It is enclosed herewith.

Nirodbaran’s “talk” on Mrinalini is making its *début* in the December *M.I.* and will run into two further instalments, the last of which will appear in the February issue appended with a Note by me on “Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Siddhi’” (*A Note on Sri Aurobindo’s “Siddhi”*). The question of his “Siddhi” has arisen because in three letters—two to Mrinalini and one to Motilal Roy—he has spoken of his having attained “Siddhi” and being ready for world-work, much before November 24, 1926 which we generally regard as the Siddhi Day.

The next letter of 17.1.88 is extremely important because it contains a detailed comment on the only letter from Mrinalini Devi that Sri Aurobindo had preserved, which remains unpublished as yet. I had sent Amal copies of all the letters my parents had painstakingly copied from the Alipore Bomb Case court archives. I had pointed out that though these contain a letter from Sri Aurobindo replying to Mrinalini, we

2. Published as Part Two of *Problems of Early Christianity* in 1998 (The Integral Life Foundation, USA: Waterford).

3. The project never took off.

4. Published by Aditya Prakashan, New Delhi; 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1989, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1997. *Problems of Ancient India* followed in 2000, brought out by the same publisher.



do not realise this fact because somehow he had dated his answer wrongly. Amal confirmed my finding twice over. In the letter we also perceive Amal's eagerness to elicit a nod from the modern Renaissance authority, Sukanta Chaudhuri regarding his tracking down of Shakespeare's Dark Lady and Mr. W.H. This was never forthcoming save for a guarded letter of appreciation. And, finally, the Pargiter ghost is laid to rest as I succeeded in getting the date of his death.

Thanks a lot for sending me all those letters. More thanks are due to your mother for taking so much trouble. The unpublished letter from Mrinalini, full of abuse from the loving heart, is worth bringing out because we have Sri Aurobindo's response to it in the letter which is wrongly dated 17.2.1907 when the correct year should be 1908, as you suggest. This response of Sri Aurobindo's makes all the complaints of Mrinalini pointless since Sri Aurobindo is no longer himself but only a tool in the hands of the Divine and so he cannot be judged any longer from the human standpoint which takes into consideration the duties of a husband or even of a man in general. Mrinalini's of 20.12.1907 has not been published because of the fear that it might lead to a misunderstanding of Sri Aurobindo by its "disrespectful" attitude, though a keener perception should assure us of the devotion behind it which makes the abuse itself humanly sweet. The letter whose true date you have properly intuited reveals the exact situation and brings a light in which Sri Aurobindo stands justified no less than Mrinalini or rather he is taken out of the realm in which she can be justified and he require any justification. As there is in her series of invectives no reference to any awareness that he is now in God's hands—as the reference is merely to some great work he is doing, evidently in the Nationalist cause—we can be sure that what is usually dated to early 1907 must be later than that series. No doubt, in his letter Sri Aurobindo wants her not to divulge to anybody the secret of his no longer being his own master, but this should not prevent her from showing in a private letter her own knowledge of the great change: she could have said that all this talk of being God's instrument altogether can cut no ice with her who was his rightful wife and needed to be attended to. As we find not the slightest inkling of such an attitude we cannot put her letter later than Sri Aurobindo's about the stupendous psychological revolution that has taken place in his life.

After writing the above, I consulted Purani's *Life of Sri Aurobindo* (Fourth edition, fully revised, 1978) and sought out the letter from Scott's Lane about this revolution. A very good translation of it appears on pp. 105-06, and there is a footnote which sets right the date:

"The manuscript of this letter bears the date 17 February 1907. This is evidently a slip. In February 1907 Sri Aurobindo was staying in Deoghar. The house in Scott's Lane does not seem to have been taken till after Sri Aurobindo's return from Surat in February 1908. In 1909 the judge in the Alipore bomb-

case, evaluating the letter as evidence, said of it, ‘dated 17<sup>th</sup> February 1907— obviously a mistake for 1908.’ (Bijoy Krishna Bose, Ed., *The Alipore Bomb Trial*, Calcutta: Butterworth & Co., 1922, p. 157)”

Nirod was against giving any publicity to Mrinalini’s letter. I don’t think he realised that Sri Aurobindo’s letter about being a puppet in God’s hands followed it. I’ll try to open his mind to the fact and see what he has to say.

Sukanta Chaudhuri wrote to me before he went to the Shakespeare Conference in Germany. After that I haven’t heard from him. In the letter he referred to my analysis of the time-span of the sonnets, as far as I remember. No other topic was touched upon. I should like a detailed assessment of my work by him. I remember replying to him and thanking him for the compliment he had paid my book on the whole.

I have sent copies of my two articles on the Aryan invasion to both Allchin and Renfrew by airmail bookpost. I have also written letters to them and requested an assessment. I have not got in touch with either D. P. Chattopadhyaya or S. B. Roy. As to Sri Aurobindo’s reading of the real meaning of the *Rigveda* I have already devoted a chapter to it in *The Problem of Aryan Origins* (the second edition of it, fairly expanded in the sense of added to at the end), I hope to bring out this year from Pondi if Tarapada Majumdar, its publisher, lets me know how much he is prepared to spend.

To follow a study on Mallarmé you don’t need to know him beforehand. You’ll come to know him through my book and he is certainly worth knowing. Kathleen Raine thinks highly of my book, though she falls foul of some translations in it. My correspondence with her has swollen to huge proportions and is not quite finished yet. I would like to send you the matter that has already come to pass. It should make a fascinating book.

In desperation I may give up the Herculean task of the Index to *Ancient India*. The book is sufficiently divided into not only chapters but also sections with titles to serve as a guide to all important matters.

Thanks for Pargiter’s dates. Motilal Banarsidass has no right to bully me. Pargiter’s death in 1927 leaves a gap of over 60 years between it and my book. I’ll cock a snook at them if they write to me in the future.

As the Mrinalini letter did not get published, there was some hurt caused to my parents. Amal’s letter of 10.7.88 is inimitable in the sweetness of its apology— although in age he was far older than them! Amal had written an article in *M.I.* on the *Gita* to which my father had provided a trenchant answer. This is referred to—and typically Amal won’t say die. We find that the ogre of the Index for *Ancient India* has finally been tackled and Amal’s long-time desire to get his work on Blake published is about to be fulfilled.<sup>5</sup>

I am so terribly sorry getting you entangled in a situation that has caused so much annoyance on your parents' part. If I had known to what lengths of rummaging they would have to go I would have curbed my curiosity to get hold of that letter. Please forgive me and please ask your parents not to judge too harshly this fully repentant sinner. Thanks for passing on my comment on your father's treatment of my problem. I hope my criticism won't seem like adding insult to injury. I shall soon send you by registered post the document on the *Gita*. I have typed out for myself a few passages towards the end of it, in which the final redaction of the *Gita* has been accurately dated. According to your father the redaction was done in the heyday of Vaishnavism and that may have brought in some interpolations which led to my problems.

I can understand your perplexity over "chantiers", but "antres" should have been familiar to you from Othello's account of his military career which took him to a host of strange places, including "antres vast and deserts idle". "Antres" comes from the Latin "antrum" through the French "antre", meaning "cavern", "den", "lair". "Chantier" means literally "timber-yard", "stone-yard", "dock-yard" but by extension can connote, according to me, an enclosed place where things are piled up for future construction.

I am glad you have a number of books getting ready. I should like very much to get from you the notes you have taken on the date of the Bharata War from archaeological evidence—or was it the date of the poem *Mahabharata*?<sup>6</sup>

My *Ancient India* has now acquired an *Index* and will soon be printed. *Blake's Tyger* is waiting for its *Index* to be finalised. The second enlarged edition of *The Problem of Aryan Origins* will most probably be out with Sita Ram Goel as the publisher instead of Tarapada Majumdar.

The next communication I have is dated 17.3.89 in which Amal wrote:

It's good to hear from you. I was wondering why total silence had enveloped you. I haven't seen the February *Heritage*. I'll try to get a copy and read "The Story of the Two Leelas".<sup>7</sup> As for correspondence on the *Gita*, there are other contributions also waiting to be put together along with my comments. I have kept your father's correspondence in mind but haven't put things in proper shape yet. Your new book has arrived and I have already dipped into it. Many interesting topics are touched. I shall certainly request Gauri Dharmapal to review it for *Mother India*.

Both *Ancient India* and *Blake's Tyger* are ready. The latter should be out in the course of this month. The former will be published only in August according to Sita Ram Goel's plan. Its publisher will be Aditya Prakashan,

6. A reference to Dr. Gauri Lad's thesis *Mahabharata and Archaeology* (Deccan College, Pune).

7. A retelling from the *Yoga Vashishtha Ramayana* by my parents.

managed by his son. My *Talks on Poetry* given years ago are also going to be published now. Our Centre of Education is bringing them out, just as it did Mallarmé<sup>8</sup> in 1987.

I am sorry about your official predicament. Perhaps your passive protest will tell. Sankalia's going is indeed a loss. He was several years younger than I.

Peter Brook's gargantuan production of the *Mahabharata* had received high praise in the meantime with which I could not agree. I wrote a strong piece and sent it to Amal. He replied in a hastily handwritten postcard on 18.5.90 showing his detailed knowledge of the epic and repeating what he had told me years ago regarding Sri Aurobindo having identified the genuine passages:

Your critique of Brook's *Mahabharata* film is excellent... You have dealt well with Smith also though I am not sure whether your faulting him on 5.22 is correct. What does the critical edition of the *Mahabharata* say? Of course that edition goes by certain mental norms which may not hold always. The true edition will be the one based on Sri Aurobindo's separation of the genuine verses from the two other hands that have come in. There is a Sanskrit text in which Sri Aurobindo has done the threefold sifting. I believe it is in some Madras library.

I have kept the *Gita* debate in mind. But there have been one or two other protagonists. I have to weave all together.

(To be concluded)

PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

8. *The Obscure and the Mysterious: A Research in Mallarmé's Symbolist Poetry.*

...the indications in the Veda on which this theory of a recent Aryan invasion is built, are very scanty in quantity and uncertain in their significance. There is no actual mention of any such invasion. The distinction between Aryan and un-Aryan on which so much has been built, seems on the mass of the evidence to indicate a cultural rather than a racial difference.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Secret of the Veda*, CWSA, Vol. 15, p. 26)

## OUR BELOVED PAVITRA-DA

(A Letter)

June 17, 1969

Dear Mr. Krolic,

As father told you, I've been intending to write to you since end April. But somehow or other I just did not sit down and then suddenly the health of our beloved Pavitra-da started to go down at an alarming pace and he left us on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May last.

Pavitra-da, apart from doing many personal works of the Mother, was the General Secretary of the Ashram and the Director of the Centre of Education. He was loved by all not only because he was a great yogi and one of the older disciples but also for his loving and affectionate nature. His sincerity in whatever he said, did and believed was exemplary. And though he had mastery over so many subjects his humility was something to be seen to be believed. He would always strive to attain perfection in whatever he did and never flinched from doing any job that came his way. You should have seen him full of calm sincerity, devotion and concentration with never a hint of the physical pain that he must have been suffering due to his illness. Sri Aurobindo had given him the name of 'Pavitra' and all his life he radiated purity all around. Is it any wonder that we all miss him and the emptiness he leaves behind can never be filled?

To me he was not only the greatest of all men (to us Mother and Sri Aurobindo are the Divine) but more than a father, friend, mentor and these last few years I had been working with him as his secretary. It is he who taught me most of the things I know and I'm really grateful to the Mother for having given me the chance of coming in close contact with him. There is none for whom I felt so much love, respect and admiration. He was invariably very affectionate and sweet towards me and though sometimes I behaved abominably, he would still have his superb smile and treat me so lovingly as if I never did anything wrong! I feel his loss so much! Of course all is the Divine's will and I'm proud and happy knowing what he achieved during his lifetime and after. He is now in the Mother's lap, peaceful and happy and I do not grieve for him as one would the loss of anyone dear and near. But somehow there's an emptiness that seems to be permanent and something has disappeared from my heart.

I'm very grateful to you for the kind wishes you convey to me through father. When I meet him—which is not often—he gives me your news if there's a fresh letter from you.

We are all o.k. And am sure that you are doing fine.

I send you my best wishes and pray so that the Blessings of the Mother and the Lord be always with you.

SUMITRA

## BETWEEN THE ARRIVAL AND THE DEPARTURE

*(Continued from the issue of April 2005)*

On September 28, 1944, I was fifty-five years old. It was time for me to retire from my service with the All India Radio. Soon after my retirement I wrote a letter to Nolini Kanta Gupta, the secretary of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. In my letter I expressed my desire to live permanently in the Ashram with my wife and two daughters, all of whom were eager to live in the spiritual shelter of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Nolini-da replied that he had taken my letter to the Mother. At that time the Mother was in Sri Aurobindo's room. Nolini-da read out my letter to both of them. After he had finished, the Mother asked, "Who is this Nolini Sarkar?" The answer came from Sri Aurobindo, "He is my old disciple." Perhaps the Mother did not remember seeing me in 1921 when I had lived in the Ashram for some five months. She remained quiet for a while then instructed Nolini-da, "Write to him to come after four years." After reporting all this, Nolini-da had a word of consolation for me, "Don't feel bad. Things ripen in their own proper time."

But I was disappointed all the same.

Although I did not get permission to live in the Ashram permanently, when I requested the Mother to allow me to come for the November Darshan, she granted my wish. I had heard that the celebrated stage actress, Niharbala, lived in Madras. Through my connection with actors, dramatists, musicians and others in the theatre world, I knew her quite well. From a mutual friend I obtained her address and wrote to her about my impending visit to Pondicherry and informed her about the date and time of my arrival at the Madras Central Station. She sent Jashodanarayan Ghosh to meet me at the station with his car. When I reached her house, she informed me that they too had received permission to come for the Darshan and that all three of us would be travelling to Pondicherry together. After spending the day in her house, we boarded the night train to Pondicherry.

It was the eve of the Darshan. Dilip held a musical soirée in his house and asked me to accompany him on the *tabla*. That evening I met many illustrious personalities in his house, whom so far I had known only by their names.

Next day was the Darshan. Fourteen years ago, in 1930, I had last seen the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and had had the good fortune of touching their feet. This time we just filed past before them.

On this occasion I stayed for ten days in the Ashram. I met the poet and painter, Nishikanto, as well as the painter and tabla player, Anilkumar Bhattacharya, during the morning tea session in Dilip Kumar's house. Nishikanto's dream-haunted eyes were unforgettable. But what surprised me was that Nishikanto's poetic soul went hand in hand with his keen sense of humour.

Then came the evening of my departure. Niharbala was to go back with me, Jashoda-babu having left for Madras a few days earlier. A rickshaw was summoned to take us to the railway station. Suddenly Niharbala declared that she would not go back. She wanted to live in the Ashram. The more we explained to her that she had to obtain the Mother's permission to stay here, the more she cried her heart out. At long last we persuaded her to go back to Madras for the time being. But her wish was fulfilled seven years later when the Mother gave her permission to live in the Ashram. She died in the Ashram in 1955.

\*

In the year 1945 when I was leading a life of retirement, I heard from a friend that Anandamoyee Ma had established her Ashram in Ekdalia Road. That very afternoon I set out in search of the Ashram. It was not difficult to locate the place. Anandamoyee Ma was in the courtyard sitting on a dais. Beside her was my old acquaintance Gopal Thakur. He was to give a discourse on the *Gita*. The place was already crowded. I stood on one side waiting for the discourse to begin. Suddenly a gentleman came directly to me and said, "Are you Nolini-babu? Ma is calling you. Come with me." For a moment I was surprised because Anandamoyee Ma did not know me, but then I realised that Gopal Thakur must have spoken to her about me. When I made my way through the crowd and came close to her, she pointed to a place on the dais and told me to sit there. I touched her feet and sat down.

Soon the discourse began. Gopal Thakur spoke with his usual verve and clarity, charming the audience who listened in pin-drop silence. After the programme was over I bowed before Anandamoyee Ma to take her leave. But she stopped me, saying, "I hear that you sing very well. Come again tomorrow. I would like to listen to your songs."

Next day I went to the Ashram in the morning. I think it was a Sunday. Quite a crowd of devotees had already gathered there. Ma came out and asked me to sing. I sang many devotional songs—*bhajan*, *keertan*, *shyamasangeet*. After my singing was over Ma went inside. Somebody touched me on the back. I turned and saw Nazrul's mother-in-law. She requested me to speak to Anandamoyee Ma on Nazrul's behalf. I introduced her to Anandamoyee Ma's personal secretary, Gurupriya Devi, and asked for an audience with Ma. We were told to come the next afternoon.

When we were ushered into Anandamoyee Ma's room, I told her all the details of Kazi Nazrul Islam's insanity and said, "This lady is the mother-in-law of the famous poet. She has come to you for your blessings, praying that you will cure him."

Anandamoyee Ma said, "Have you given him the medicine from Patna?"

We did not know of any such medicine. Ma explained, "I have heard that a barrister of Patna, Hassan Imam, knows of some medicine for this sort of mental disorder. Many people have been cured by taking his treatment. Why don't you approach him?"

We touched her feet and turned to go. She stopped us and said, "Perhaps you



are under the impression that just because I have told you about this medicine, it will cure Nazrul. But it is not that simple. There is something called destiny which cannot be altered. If Nazrul has repaid the debt of his previous Karma, he will surely recover.”

The most important event of the year 1945, was the sudden capitulation of Japan to the Allied Forces after the United States of America dropped the infamous Atom bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on August 6 and August 9 respectively, causing unprecedented death and destruction. On August 15 (does this momentous date not ring a bell?), Japan surrendered to the United States of America, bringing the six-year-long war to an end.

At this time the Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauj) created by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was advancing relentlessly towards India through Burma. They had taken Kohima (capital of the present Nagaland) and had raised the flag of free India in Manipur. But after the surrender of Japan, the Azad Hind Fauj had no option but to retreat. Subhash Chandra Bose flew to Japan from Saigon on August 17. But on August 18 his plane caught fire and he was forced to land in an airport of Formosa. He had suffered severe burn injuries. On August 22, Radio Tokyo announced that he had died in the hospital.

\*

Next year I went to Pondicherry in April with my two daughters, Gitika and Bokul. After spending the day, as was usual, in Niharbala's house in Madras, we took the night train to Pondicherry accompanied by Niharbala and her nephew, Aniruddha. When we reached Dilip Kumar's residence (known at present as the Trésor Nursing Home), we found that Dilip's older cousin, Sachin, had also come for the Darshan, thereby adding to the gaiety which was a hallmark of Dilip's house. But at the core of this gaiety there was always a beautiful peace and calm which enveloped everybody who came there.

This was the first time that my daughters saw the Mother. In those days we could see her several times a day. We made full use of every opportunity to receive the Mother's blessings and immerse ourselves in her divine presence. In the evening Dilip sang in the big hall in his house. Only a blue light burned before the image of Krishna. Flowers diffused their perfumes. Incense smoke spiralled upwards carrying our aspirations to the Divine. And in perfect harmony with this atmosphere rose Dilip's heavenly voice singing devotional melodies. The audience went home carrying with them something ethereal which prepared them better to receive the grace of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo during the Darshan.

This year I came for the August Darshan too. But the joy and peace of the Darshan given on the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's birthday, was marred to some extent when we received the news of widespread Hindu-Muslim riots that had broken out in different parts of the country, especially in Bengal and Punjab.

Then came the much awaited August 15, 1947—the day of India's Independence,



coinciding with the birthday of Sri Aurobindo, who had uttered for the first time the fiery mantra of *Swaraj* for India. But was it a mere coincidence? History bears witness that this date had played a crucial role again and again at critical junctures affecting the fate of humanity.

After England suffered a devastating defeat in Dunkirk during the early days of World War II, Hitler had announced that he would have his dinner in Buckingham Palace on August 15. But finally the tables were turned and the course of the War changed exactly on that day when on August 15, 1940, in less than twelve hours, 144 German planes were brought down over England, the biggest number so far.

“Apropos of this battle and its date, the editor of *Mother India* wrote, ‘...[Hitler] fixed in 1940 the 15<sup>th</sup> of August as the day on which he would complete his conquest of Western Europe by broadcasting from Buckingham Palace the collapse of Britain ... and on that day the largest toll so far was taken of the Luftwaffe... We might indeed designate it as the turning-point in the Battle of Britain.’” [*Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 138]

Again on August 15, 1945 Japan surrendered to the Allied Powers, thereby bringing World War II to a close.

On page 165 of his book *Twelve Years With Sri Aurobindo*, Nirodbaran writes: “As far back as 1935, when I asked him (Sri Aurobindo) if he was working for India’s freedom, he replied, ‘That is all settled, it is a question of working out only.... It is what she will do with her independence that is not arranged for—and so it is that about which I have to bother.’” In fact, in the year 1921 Sri Aurobindo had given the same assurance to A. B. Purani that India’s independence had already become a reality in the Causal World, it would take a little time to be realised on earth.

On the occasion of India’s independence Sri Aurobindo had given a message which was broadcast by All India Radio Trichinopoly. I would like to quote a few passages here:

August 15<sup>th</sup> is the birthday of free India.... To me personally it must naturally be gratifying that this date which was notable only for me because it was my own birthday celebrated annually by those who have accepted my gospel of life, should have acquired this vast significance. As a mystic, I take this identification, not as a coincidence or fortuitous accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power which guides my steps on the work with which I began life. Indeed almost all the world movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though at that time they looked like impossible dreams, I can observe on this day either approaching fruition or initiated and on the way to their achievement....

Those aims and ideals were in their natural order these: a revolution which would achieve India’s freedom and her unity; the resurgence and liberation of Asia and her return to the great role which she had played in the progress of

human civilisation; the rise of a new, a greater, brighter and nobler life for mankind which for its entire realisation would rest outwardly on an international unification of the separate existence of the peoples... the gift by India of her spiritual knowledge and her means for the spiritualisation of life to the whole race; finally, a new step in the evolution which, by uplifting the consciousness to a higher level, would begin the solution of the many problems of existence which have perplexed and vexed humanity, since men began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society.

I was not present in Calcutta on the historic occasion of the first Independence Day. When the entire city of Calcutta was busy making preparations for the imminent celebration, when in my own house my daughters were enthusiastically practising for the programme of music and recitation organised by the Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir, I had gone to Pondicherry to celebrate Sri Aurobindo's birthday there.

On returning to Calcutta, I found that my daughters had carefully preserved the copies of the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* for my perusal. About the celebrations the issue of the paper dated August 16, 1947 reported:

After the end of two long centuries of accumulated lassitude and guilt caused by the grief-laden subservience to a foreign Power, the newly awakened people of India, bathed and purified in freedom, freely celebrated an unprecedented Independence Day on Friday last. Hindus and Muslims united together for this unforgettable historic celebration.... As soon as the clock struck the hour of midnight, each and every area of the city reverberated with the sound of conches, bells, bugles and sirens. The ululating voices of thousands of women resounded in the air. The loud booms of bursting fire crackers shook the horizon. All the locomotive engines on the outskirts of the city blew their whistles and announced to the world that India was free. In thousands of homes *Bande Mataram* was played on the gramophone to welcome free Mother India... The Indian tricolour proudly flew over every house.

As the day progressed more and more people crowded the streets. The Bus and Tram Companies were giving free rides to their passengers... The sea of humanity shook the earth and sky with their cry of *Jai Hind*. The Hindu-Muslim unity which was witnessed the previous night, continued unabated...

There were truck loads of policemen roaming the streets to maintain law and order, but the celebrations were performed so peacefully, observing all the norms of discipline and propriety, that they could relax and freely mix with the crowd.

When night came, the members of the Hindu and the Muslim communities sprinkled rose water on one another and the entire city of Calcutta was brilliantly lit up with millions of new lamps of Freedom.

Towards the end of the year Dilip Kumar came to Calcutta. As soon as we met, he proposed, "I shall be travelling for about a month and a half giving singing programmes. I must collect some money for the Ashram. Come along with me. You will accompany me on the *tabla* while you see new places."

It was an attractive proposal no doubt. But I had to decline. I said, "I am sorry to say 'no' to your kind offer. But now it is not possible for me to stay away from Calcutta for a long period."

"Why isn't it possible? You must come with me," he insisted.

Patiently I explained, "I have retired from the Radio Office. My income has consequently dwindled to a great extent. Now I am obliged to earn money by giving singing lessons and doing freelance writing. So I must be in Calcutta. If I lived in the Ashram today, I could have set out with you, free from all worries."

Dilip thought for a moment then said, "All right. I shall write to the Ashram today itself."

I was taken aback: "Good God! What will you write?"

He said, "Just this. Nolini-da and his family have wanted to live in the Ashram since long. The Mother knows that. If she now kindly permits them to join the Ashram, it will be of great help to them."

He did write that letter and when I saw him after a few days, he exclaimed, "Nolini-da, I have very good news for you. The Mother has given her permission for you and your family to live permanently in the Ashram."

Many years ago Dilip had caught my hand and pulled me away from the lure of death. Today once more he took me by the hand and led me to the doorway of a new life.

\*

It was the month of January 1948. My whole family was busy wrapping up our life in Calcutta and getting ready to go to Pondicherry. Dilip was still in Calcutta. Everyday somewhere or the other he was giving his music performance. Our days were passing very happily.

On January 30 there was a programme in the Dwarbhanga Building of the University of Calcutta. Dilip would sing and give a talk. I was present there. Soon the place became overcrowded. At 6.30 in the evening Dilip started the programme with a song. After a few more songs he was about to begin his speech, when somebody rushed in breathlessly and announced that Mahatma Gandhi had been shot in his Prayer Meeting in Delhi. We were thunderstruck. A young man fainted. Very quietly we dispersed.

\*

Our preparations for going to the Ashram and living there permanently were complete. On February 16 we boarded the Madras Mail and reached Pondicherry on

February 19, early in the morning. The Mother had arranged for our accommodation in a rented house nearby. After depositing our luggage there, we rushed to the Balcony Street behind the Ashram. Many people had already gathered under the Mother's Balcony, waiting expectantly but in an indrawn manner for the Mother to appear. As the sun rose over the sea on the eastern horizon she came and stood on the Balcony, gazing at the rising sun. Then slowly her gaze travelled over all of us and she blessed us with her eyes.

At eight o'clock in the morning, again we gathered in the Ashram Courtyard. Soon the Mother came down and sat in the Meditation Hall. Along with the other Ashramites we formed a queue to go to the Mother, touch her feet and receive her blessing. Although my daughters had seen the Mother in 1946, for my wife this would be the first time. When our turn came, we stood before the Mother and offered ourselves to her. One by one we bowed to her. She touched our head, blessed us and gave us a flower. My long-cherished aspiration was fulfilled. The Mother gave us shelter at her feet.

(Concluded)

NOLINIKANTO SARKAR\*

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

\* In 1962 the film *Dada Thakur*, based on the life story of Sarat Chandra Pandit as narrated by Nolinikanto Sarkar in his book *Shraddhaspadeshu*, received the prestigious President's Gold Medal. Just a few days before his "departure" on May 18, 1984 Nolinikanto Sarkar was awarded the Humayun Kabir Puraskar for his rich, lifelong contribution to Bengali literature.

### *Soul in the Ignorance*

*Soul in the Ignorance, wake from its stupor.  
Flake of the world-fire, spark of Divinity,  
Lift up thy mind and thy heart into glory.  
Sun in the darkness, recover thy lustre.*

*One, universal, ensphering creation,  
Wheeling no more with inconscient Nature,  
Feel thyself God-born, know thyself deathless.  
Timeless return to thy immortal existence.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 570)

## THE PEBBLE COLLECTOR

Looking ahead at the horizon  
I gaze at the distance,  
Much to do, much to walk.

Carrying the heavy life-burden,  
I feel tired—out of breath;  
Probably could rest awhile  
And then move on.

I stoop and notice a shadow  
A hump on my back—  
Growing day by day  
Only a sack full of pebbles—Life.

I sink on my knees  
Notice a few pebbles  
Beautiful shades—glazed by  
The blazing sun overhead.

Could rest a little more  
Not today—maybe tomorrow,  
Impulsively I grab a handful  
Adding gleefully to my collection.

Got to deliver, got to get up,  
Much to do, much to walk  
Much to collect, much to explore  
Before the Sun sets in.

ARNAB B. CHOWDHURY

# GLIMPSES OF BAGHA JATIN

## On the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of His Birth

ARISTOTLE thought that, to be appreciated by men, a subject should neither be too big, nor too small. In the case of Bagha Jatin, the unusually rich and complex character has been trimmed to an over-simplified stature of a martyr who had happened to kill a tiger in a wrestling bout. On reviewing, however, a thesis on Bagha Jatin, a French historian was reminded of an opera by Giuseppe Verdi. M. N. Roy believed that the battle of Balasore itself—where Jatin fought and died—had enough grandeur of an epic, with the drama woven around the man, his character, his personality. In the 70's, eager to hold up an ideal before the wayward youth, Satyajit Ray seems to have thought of a documentary on Bagha Jatin with the Films' Division.

Shrouded in legends, popular as Bagha Jatin, Jatindranath Mukherjee, in his short span of life (7.12.1879 – 10.9.1915), had attained immortality: *hatō vā prāpsyasi svargam*. His elder sister and *alter ego* Vinodebala Devi had kept notes and recorded anecdotes with a real-life picture of the *man*; in 1923, Upen Banerjee, Amarendra Chatterjee, Jadugopal Mukherjee, Satyen Majumdar and Praphulla Sarkar (founder of the *Ananda Bazar* group of papers) consulted her, before publishing his first biography *Biplaber Bali* ('An Offering to Revolution'), which was immediately proscribed. So did Lalitkumar Chatterjee (Jatin's uncle and colleague) and Hemanta Sarkar. 9 September 1923 was chosen not only to celebrate openly from Kolkata to Peshawar<sup>1</sup> Jatin's heroic battle but, also, to warn the Government that the first batch of revolutionaries, on returning from exile and prisons, presented themselves to the public as an alternative to Gandhi's policy. Amarendra published a new daily, the *Swadesh*, with a special Bagha Jatin issue; Deshabandhu Chittaranjan was planning to found a memorial in Balasore; simultaneously, inspired by some of them, Bhagat Singh (the future martyr) published articles on Bagha Jatin in Punjabi.<sup>2</sup> A score more books have come out since August 1947. But none could portray successfully the beloved leader. Whereas, turn by turn, the major avenues, streets and public parks of Kolkata were being vainly proposed to be renamed after Bagha Jatin, one of his followers, Bhupendrakumar Datta—having interviewed Jatin's contemporaries and having consulted Indian archives—passed his notes to a young scholar, guiding him to write a reliable biography. After fifty years of research<sup>3</sup>, the groundwork being

1. *Biplaber Padachinha*, by Bhupendrakumar Datta, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Orient Longman), 1973, pp. 156-57.

2. *Loc. cit.*

3. (a) *Sadhak Biplabi Jatindranath*, by Prithwindra Mukherjee, Pashchim Bāngla Pustak Parshat, Kolkata.

(b) *Bagha Jatin*, by Prithwindra Mukherjee, Dey's Publishing, Kolkata.

(c) *Undying Courage*, by Prithwindra Mukherjee, Academic Publishers, Kolkata, 1991.

(d) *Les origines intellectuelles du mouvement d'indépendance de l'Inde (1893-1918)*, thesis for State Doctorate by Prithwindra Mukherjee (supervisor, Raymond Aron, University Paris-Sorbonne IV).

ready (with additional documents from European and American archives), is it not time to evaluate who Bagha Jatin was and the significance of what he did?

\*

The greatest influence on Jatin was his mother, Sharat-Shashi Devi. Fond of essays by Bankim and Yogen Vidyabhushan, a fiery and charitable widow, she had succumbed to the contagion while nursing a cholera patient. As a college student, impatient to solve some value-centred questions, Jatin learnt from Vivekananda that India's political freedom was indispensable for the spiritual deliverance (*moksha*) of mankind. For this, he was to prepare patriots with iron muscles and nerves of steel, sublimating the libido in an utter dedication to the Motherland. In a Police Report, in contrast with the vulnerability of a few illustrious leaders that he enumerated, J. E. Armstrong upheld that Jatin "owed his pre-eminent position in revolutionary circles, not only to his quality of leadership, but in great measure to his reputation of being a *Brahmachari*, with no thought beyond the revolutionary cause."<sup>4</sup> To several of his followers, Jatin personified the essence of the *Gita*: his equanimity generated in the listeners' hearts a conviction that nothing was impossible.<sup>5</sup>

In 1899, employed by the barrister Kennedy of Muzaffarpur, young Jatin heard him campaigning for a *National* army for India. And he came to know how the British safeguarded the imperial interests in China and elsewhere by squandering Indian money. This led Jatin to work for winning over the Indian soldiers with patriotic ideology. He concentrated exclusively on a two-pronged programme:

(a) Social Service: numerous reports show him by the side of Nivedita, during the plague relief work in the late 1890's;<sup>6</sup> with a semi-military volunteer corps and qualified medical men from all social and religious groups, nursing plague and cholera stricken patients and cremating their condemned bodies, attending large fairs and pilgrimages such as the Ardhodaya Yoga, the annual celebration of Ramakrishna;<sup>7</sup> organising flood relief in Burdwan and Contai;<sup>8</sup>

(b) all-round body building, vigorous football matches, studying Bankim-chandra and Vidyabhushan, meditating on the *Gita*, listening to guest scholars, staging patriotic plays. A gifted actor, Jatin made of the urban stage and the rural operas (*yatra* and *charan*) a powerful organ of propaganda.<sup>9</sup>

The "earliest known attempts in Bengal to promote societies for political or

4. *Terrorism in Bengal*, edited by Amiya K. Samanta, Vol. II, p. 393.

5. *Biplabi Jibaner Smriti*, by Jadugopal Mukherjee, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1982, pp. 351-52.

6. *Nivedita Lokamata*, by Shankariprasad Basu, several references.

7. *Political Trouble in India*, J. C. Ker, p. 9; *Terrorism...*, several references.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Two Great Indian Revolutionaries*, U. Mukherjee, p. 163, fn. 2.



semi-political ends", by P. Mitter, Sarala Ghoshal and Okakura, "commenced in about the year 1900", and "flourished particularly at Kushtea" under Jatin.<sup>10</sup>

On meeting Sri Aurobindo and J. N. Banerji (Niralamba Swami) in 1903, Jatin with his followers joined their secret preparation for an armed insurrection. Both Banerji (in Upper India) and Jatin (in Bengal), with their personal influence, added to it the participation of army men. As "Sri Aurobindo's direct contact" Jatin organised and led secret societies in the districts, up to Darjeeling,<sup>11</sup> backed the publishers of the *Jugantar*.<sup>12</sup> According to Hemendraprasad Ghose (Sri Aurobindo's cousin and a member of the centre in Deoghar where Jatin and Barin worked with their associates and where, even the latter's mother, Swarnalata Devi, volunteered to keep a watch on the bomb factory inside her cottage, with a sword), Jatin controlled the *Jugantar* movement for over ten years.<sup>13</sup>

Jatin's revolutionary project included three phases: individual martyrdom; guerrilla; and, finally, mass movement. Disapproving Barin's centralised organisation (the pattern to be followed by the Dhaka Anushilan) and untimely terrorism in a spirit of showdown, Jatin developed a loose confederation of regional groups which would prove its merits during prosecutions like the Howrah Gang case. For instance, managing the groups in Natore, Dighapatiya and Jamalpur under Jatin's leadership, Satish Sarkar<sup>14</sup> ignored that Amaresh Kanjilal was playing exactly the same role in Mymensingh, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Cooch Behar. "Secrecy was absolute in those days—particularly with Jatin."<sup>15</sup>

\*

The abrupt events in 1908—massive detention and the Alipore case—created a demoralisation; issuing increasingly repressive measures, the Government banned all associations and meetings. Keeping a handful of select militants in Kolkata (later referred to as Sevak Samiti), Jatin immediately directed the majority towards rural centres, enlarging with them the social service programme: thanks to Justice Saradacharan Mitra, he obtained from Sir Daniel Hamilton lands in the Sunderbans for agriculture, small-scale cottage industries, *swadeshi* stores and homoeopathic dispensaries; in the remote marshy regions, he trained boys in handling firearms.<sup>16</sup>

10. Nixon's Report, *Terrorism...*, Vol. II, p. 501.

11. Home Polit-Pros A, March 1910, No. 33-40, quoted by Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, 1977, p. 376.

12. *Op. cit.*, pp. 531-34.

13. "Biplabi Bangla" in *Galpa-bharati*, Kartik 1358 (October, 1951).

14. Known by Sri Aurobindo's intimates as *kanishtha papishtha* ('the junior-most sinner') [cf. autobiographical writings by Suresh Chandra Chakravarti], this man will be commissioned by Jatin Mukherjee on 24 January 1910 to accompany Biren Datta-Gupta at the High Court to assassinate Shams-ul Alam and to inform Sri Aurobindo that the mission was successful. Soon after this intimation, Sri Aurobindo will receive the command from within to go to Chandernagore.

15. *First Spark of Revolution*, Arun Chandra Guha, Orient Longman, 1971, p. 163.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 161; *Terrorism...*, Vol. I, p. 42.



Through Charu Ghosh of his party, Jatin purchased important consignments of revolvers and ammunition from Nur Khan, a well-known smuggler in Chetla. Then, in a masterly stagecraft, he dealt four spectacular blows to the existing law and order, hoping to rouse the patriots' imagination: attempt to kill the Lt. Governor of Bengal (7.11.1908); shoot dead the police inspector who had arrested Praphulla Chaki (9.11.1908); overtly murder the public prosecutor (10.2.1909) and the Deputy Superintendent of Police (24.1.1910). On the 25 January 1910, the Viceroy Minto declared: "A spirit hitherto unknown to India has come into existence (...), a spirit of lawlessness which seeks to subvert (...) British rule..."<sup>17</sup> Overwhelmed, he left the Indian scene. Arrested on 27 January with forty-six major suspects, in the teeth of severe trials in the Howrah Case, Jatin and most of the co-accused got released (21.2.1911). The newly appointed Viceroy, Hardinge, singling out Jatin as "the real criminal", regretted the dismantling of the seditious 10<sup>th</sup> Jat Regiment and wrote: "Nothing could be worse (...) than the condition of Bengal and Eastern Bengal. There is practically no Government in either province..."<sup>18</sup>

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Since 1906, working in Asia, Europe and America, Jatin's emissaries strove to receive higher education or technical and military training, to stir international sympathy in favour of India's freedom. Exemplary among them were Taraknath Das and Guran Ditt Kumar from Bantu (both of them had known Sri Aurobindo at the National College). Their endeavour in Canada and in California crystallised a spirit of sacrifice among compatriots, the very nucleus of the future Gadar Movement. While in prison, Jatin was informed by them about an imminent war between England and Germany.

After his release, confiding Kolkata organisations to Atulkrishna Ghosh, he suspended all terrorist action, to concentrate on underground preparations in the districts. Nixon classified 1911-14 as a period of 'Temporary Cessation of Activities': "The fact that outbreak of war provided a splendid opportunity for revolt seems to have struck Jatin Mukherjee very early."<sup>19</sup> Contrary to Gandhi's Chauri-Chaura dismay in 1922, this lull proved Jatin's complete command of the violence he had introduced as an antidote.

During the visit of the German Crown Prince to Kolkata, Jatin had an interview with him and received "an assurance that arms and ammunition would be supplied to them."<sup>20</sup> Having left San Francisco in May 1913, Kumar informed Tarak about establishing a base in Manila, to "supervise the work near China."<sup>21</sup> Sent by Atul Ghosh,

17. *India under Morley and Minto*, M. N. Das, 1964, p. 122.

18. Hardinge Papers, Book 81, Vol. II, No. 231.

19. *Terrorism...*, Vol. II, pp. 544, 591.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 625.

21. J. C. Ker, p. 237.

early 1914, Bholanath Chatterjee and Noni Basu spent several months in Bangkok and Batavia preparing similar bases. The *Berliner Tageblatt* in an article on 'England's Indian Trouble' (6.3.1914) disclosed the flourishing revolutionary preparations and secret societies inside India and "In California especially there appears to be an organised enterprise for (...) providing India with arms and explosives."<sup>22</sup>

Three Gadar leaders (Jatin's emissary Satyen Sen with Pingley and Kartar Singh) reached Kolkata in November 1914. In Berlin, Viren Chatto created the 'German Friends of India Committee' with industrials and officers of the German Foreign Office and signed a Pact with the Kaiser's Government on 2.9.1914, to promote a revolution in India.<sup>23</sup> Son of Aghorenath Chattopadhyay (Principal, Nizam's College, Hyderabad), Viren had known Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary cousins (*viz* Sukumar and Kumudini Mitra) and had maintained contact with them. On 22.9.1914, N. S. Marathe and Dhiren Sarkar left for Washington to see the Ambassador Bernstorff with the Kaiser's instruction to pay them 25,000 Marks and to despatch to India, through Von Papen, shipments of arms and ammunition. In December, Jiten Lahiri and Tarak reached Berlin from San Francisco. Gadar militants in thousands were returning to India for an insurrection. Tegart noted Jatin's visit with Satyen to the Dakshineswar gunpowder magazine to interview Sikh officers of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Burmans regiment: "Especially to tamper with the troops."<sup>24</sup>

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Soon after Jatin's meeting J. N. Banerjee, the latter had left for Upper India as a wandering monk under the name of Niralamba Swami, carrying the fire-seeds of revolution received from Sri Aurobindo. His contacts especially with some receptive Indian officers in various regiments and with the Arya Samaj leaders had created a favourable field: two potential leaders—Lala Har Dayal and Rasbehari Bose—were influenced by him. In 1911, informed by Motilal Roy about Sri Aurobindo's instruction—"follow Jatin Mukherjee,"<sup>25</sup>—Rasbehari Bose had met him in Kolkata, in the company of Amarendra and kept in view Jatin's plans for insurrection with the help of the army. Again, observing the extremists' reunification under Jatin during the 1913 flood relief, Bose had left his Benares retreat and hastened to learn from Jatin his further plans for the rising. In reply to Jatin's question, "The Fort William has to be seized. Can you manage it?", spellbound, Bose is reported to have replied, "Yes, I can." And he had set to negotiate with an Indian officer of the Fort.<sup>26</sup> Claiming Jatin

22. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

23. *First Spark...*, pp. 432-33.

24. Report No. V, *Terrorism...*, Vol. III, p. 505.

25. Cf. Motilal Roy's article in the special Jatin Mukherjee supplement of the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 9 September, 1947.

26. Jadugopal Mukherjee, *Biplabi Jibaner Smriti*, 1956, p. 647 (and several other references).

to be “a real leader” whose contact “added a new impulse”, Bose had proceeded to make U.P. and Punjab join hands with Bengal.<sup>27</sup> Bringing to his notice the existence of the Mauser pistols stolen from the British gun importers, since 26.8.1914, Jatin had accepted to accompany him to Benares for this mobilisation. Jatin sent Pingley and Kartar to keep Bose abreast of the German assistance. In January 1915, considering that the Gadar volunteers could not wait for the German aid, they chose 21 February for the general rising from Bengal to Peshawar, with the participation of various regiments.

In urgent need of money for this operation, Jatin devised “a new feature in revolutionary crime”:<sup>28</sup> hold-up on automobile taxicabs. On 12.2.1915, his men intercepted a van leaving the Chartered Bank, and escaped with Rs 18,000. Heedless of Bose’s failure and determined to minimise it, he succeeded in extorting Rs 20,000 from a rice merchant on 22.2.1915. On 24.2.1915, surprised during a secret meeting, his men shot dead a spy. Again on 28.2.1915, an Inspector of Police, posted for the security of the Viceroy, noticed an absconding revolutionary and while trying to chase him, was killed. “By 1915 the situation had become one of unparalleled danger. (...) It was at last recognised that the forces of law and order (...) were inadequate.”<sup>29</sup> A heavy reward promised for Jatin’s arrest, had no effect: “(...) As he is a man of desperate character and always carries arms, it is difficult to find informers who will watch for him (so the Bengal Government report).”<sup>30</sup>

“The entire international chain was masterminded by Jatin,” claims Bhupati Majumdar.<sup>31</sup> In early March 1915, Jiten Lahiri returned from Berlin to get an emissary sent to the German Consul at Batavia for the delivery of a ship-load of arms. Selecting Naren Bhattacharya for this mission, Jatin chose Balasore to receive the arms and went there to hide away from Kolkata. According to Jatin’s plans of a pincer operation—and with the Kaiser’s credentials—the Berlin Committee would raise an army of liberation in the Middle East and march through the North-West Frontier; the Gadar men would wait in Bangkok for the Bengali delegation coming via Batavia, train another army and march through Burma, while the postponed rising would flare from Peshawar to Kolkata.

On 9 September 1915, Jatin (with four associates) fought against a detachment of military police, opening the path for the Mass Movement. Another masterly pageant and an instance of a rare selfless strategy.

Recognising “their driving power (...) immense”, Tegart would write that if the army could be raised on the Burmese frontier or the ship-loads of arms could reach

27. *Two Great...*, p. 119.

28. Rowlatt, § 69.

29. “Memorandum from 1905 to 1933” in *Terrorism...*, p. 799.

30. Letter by Henry Wheeler, on 24.5.1915: I.B. Records/1915, India Office Library, London.

31. *Op. cit.*

an Indian port, that would mean the defeat of the British during the World War.<sup>32</sup> Amalesh Tripathi acknowledged the contribution of the Extremists under Jatin Mukherjee as the crystallisation of a will to improve an over-all (especially economical) status of the people. Judging from the Howrah Case proceedings, it is clear that they added three new dimensions: (a) acquisition of arms from inside the country and abroad; (b) raising a guerrilla army in India; (c) creating simultaneously and on several points an insurrection with the indoctrination of the Indian soldiers.

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Having carefully gone through successive chapters on makers of modern India from Rammohun to Sri Aurobindo, professor Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie—father of the New Wave in History—exclaimed on reading Jatin Mukherjee’s life-sketch: “This is the first chapter where we have a great impression of modernity!” He was reminded of some kind of a Bolshevik organisation: “which is certainly, a pure *functional* coincidence.” While meeting Lenin for the first time, aware of Plekhanov’s influence on the Bolshevik view of Marxism, M. N. Roy (alias Naren Bhattacharya) insisted on the similarity between the Russian Populist-cum-Socialist Revolutionaries and the Indian Extremists led by Jatin: they all believed in terrorism and the special genius of their own race; they appealed to the younger generation to return to the village; temporarily, they denounced capitalism as a western vice, unfit for their country (whereas Lenin believed that capitalism as a social revolutionary force was inevitable).<sup>33</sup>

The finding of new material leads us to realise what Sri Aurobindo meant when he spoke of Jatin Mukherjee as “My right-hand man.”

SATYAVRATA BHARADWAJ

32. Tegart MSS, quoted by Amalesh Tripathi, *Swadhinata Samgrame Bharater Jatiya Congress*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1991, p. 78.

33. M. N. Roy, *Memoirs*, 1964, p. 381.

*Our path is not easy, it demands great courage and untiring endurance. One must work hard and make a great effort with quiet stability to obtain results which at times are scarcely perceptible outwardly.*

*The Mother*

(Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 13, p. 147)

## REMINISCING ON DR. H. MAHESHWARI

As I was gazing at the horizon, suddenly the earth seemed to breathe in the vibrant waves of the ocean and the words of Sri Aurobindo in his book *The Mother* came to me: "...your very breathing or moving come from her,"<sup>1</sup> but the voice that rang in my ears was that of Dr. H. Maheshwari in *Swadhyaya*. In the study group on *Essays on the Gita* conducted by Prof. M. V. Nadkarni in February-March 2004, I saw many holding copies of Maheshwari-ji's *The Bhagavat Gita in the Light of Sri Aurobindo*. Serendipity touched the colours of twilight and bewildered, I remembered many instances where Maheshwari-ji had played a very significant role in my life. "Step back and see,"—the Mother's words put me in reverse gear of consciousness and I began to trace my journey from the past, and recollected how he had gently and steadily brought me into the kingdom of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to which my father had introduced me.

My first contact with him was in 1981 when he delivered the memorial lecture in honour of my father, the late Professor N. A. Nikam. The subject was "The Vedanta of Tomorrow". His frequent visits to Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Bangalore and his talks and *Swadhyaya* gradually attracted me and I began to come to Pondicherry now and then. I have maintained a book with the signatures of all the speakers of the memorial lectures instituted in the name of my father, but although my contact with Maheshwari-ji became so frequent and close, his signature is missing to this day. I overlooked these sentimental formalities and to "live" what I gathered from him, left no room for extra frills. However, his autographed copy of *Bhagavat Gita* with the words "Sri Aurobindo's Prasadam" dated 21.2.1986 and his signature in many of his letters I had profusely gathered—all these I have preserved.

Maheshwari-ji's early education was in Palwal, a small town in U.P., his graduation was from Benaras Hindu University, Varanasi and he received his doctoral degree from Agra University. In the same University he taught for twenty years in the capacity of head of the Department of Philosophy.\* After this he moved to Pondicherry in 1971 and continued to teach philosophy at Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. When the Sri Aurobindo chair was created by the Vice-Chancellor of Sardar Patel University, Vallabha Vidyanagar, Gujarat, he was the first person invited in the year 1995 and he occupied this prestigious position for two years.

He has a number of other books to his credit, among them, his Ph.D. dissertation on *The Philosophy of Swami Rama Tirtha*; *Swami Vivekananda: Jeevan aur Darshan* (Hindi); *Sri Aravinda ke Alok mein Gita ka Divya Sandesh* (Hindi); and also its Gujarati translation, *Sri Aravindani Drishtiye Gitano Divya Sandesh*.

He has conducted *Swadhyaya* camps, seminars and education camps for teachers and others who were drawn to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. His simple and

\* From 1965 to 1971 he was the Principal of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, Vrindaban.

unassuming exterior hid a multi-faceted scholarly personality. His varied interests were in the fields of education, psychology, yoga, Indian culture, spirituality and the great future of India and humanity.

Several Centres of Sri Aurobindo Society in India as well as abroad invited him for talks and study camps, among them the East West Cultural Center in Los Angeles and the AuroMira Centre in London.

To approach such a person seemed daunting! My first attempt was to gather courage and hesitatingly ask him to clarify the difference between *Dharma* and Values. His answers laid my fears to rest and I could approach him more freely. He helped me to hew my way forward, life then assumed depth and I began groping for light. Being on the faculty of Home Science education in the local college, I sensed the acute need of value-based Home Science education and the need to incorporate values in this area. All the texts that the syllabus prescribed as reference books were by foreign authors, enunciating principles of various schools of philosophy, and values based on Western education. He introduced me to the concept of "*Purushartha Chatustaya*", the fourfold imperatives of human life, i.e., *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*. This system of values was taken up for research by a student of mine for her Master's degree in 1984. Her research emphasised Indian cultural values and her dissertation on "Human Values and Home Science Education", values upon which Indian homes should evolve, pointed out the need to incorporate this concept in Home Science education. She barely got a First Class. I felt that her work had not been properly assessed! This outraged me and I was convulsed with anger but Maheshwari-ji suggested that I conduct a day's seminar on values in this institution to remove the veil of ignorance which had blinded the educationists. I approached the U.G.C. for a grant and sent the proposal to conduct a seminar on this vital but sensitive subject. This was accepted and the grant was received. Maheshwari-ji gave the keynote address and there were other speakers also. This made a dent in the formulation of the 1984 National Education Policy, and it came up emphatically that all education needs to be valuebased!

My life began to refine itself with my casual reading of the works of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, when a friend suggested that I study them with a definite aim and get registered for a Ph.D. degree. This suggestion was shared with Maheshwari-ji. His enthusiasm was so great that he even helped me to work out the chapter details!

The significance of going to Sri Aurobindo's room on one's birthday and the value of the New Year's music were revealed to me by him.

My experience during my visit to Sri Aurobindo's sacred room on my birthday in 2002 was unusual. A sheet of silence descended upon me and I could not speak. When I went to see Maheshwari-ji, I saw that he was feeble. When I expressed to him my difficulty in speaking, he told me that I should go to my room and sleep!

This was my last meeting with him.

In my inner journey, Maheshwari-ji became a beacon of light. The benefits of

*Sushupti* or perfect sleep are manifold. Sri Aurobindo says, “The sleep-state ascends to a higher power of being, beyond thought into pure consciousness, beyond emotion into pure bliss, beyond will into pure mastery; it is the gate of union with the supreme state of Sachchidananda out of which all the activities of the world are born.”<sup>2</sup> Maheshwari-ji’s last words asking me to “sleep” had a profound impact and opened many doors for me and enabled me to walk on the Mother’s Sunlit Path.

Gratefully remembering him, this gaze at the horizon brought me a new birth—and these lines from *Savitri* came into my heart:

Losing the punctilio of its separate birth,  
It leaves us one with Nature and with God.<sup>3</sup>

It was thus I made my conscious entry into the kingdom of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in my wakeful state.

N. SHAKUNTALA MANAY

### References

1. *The Mother*, p. 25.
2. *SABCL*, Vol. 20, p. 504.
3. *Savitri*, p. 47.

...God has not set me here merely to think, to philosophise, to weave metaphysical systems, to play with words and syllogisms, but to act, love and know. I must act divinely so that I may become divine in being and deed; I must learn to love God not only in Himself but in all beings, appearances, objects, enjoyments, events, whether men call them good or bad, real or mythical, fortunate or calamitous; and I must know Him with the same divine impartiality and completeness in order that I may come to be like Him, perfect, pure and unlimited—that which all sons of Man must one day be. This, I cannot help thinking, is the meaning and purpose of the Lila. It is not true that because I think, I am; but rather because I think, feel and act, and even while I am doing any or all of these things, can transcend the thought, feeling and action, therefore I am. Because I manifest, I am, and because I transcend manifestation, I am. The formula is not so clear and catching as the Cartesian, but there is a fuller truth in its greater comprehensiveness.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 8-9)



## THE VISAGE OF OUR QUEEN

Waiting for feet that never come  
A face beloved once seen  
A voice from our ancestral home,  
The visage of our queen.

We call in silence and we wait  
Counting not the years  
Nor mark the sudden turns of fate  
That fuel our human tears.

The world assails us with its woes  
And nothing is what it seems,  
Still in us the Presence grows  
In Her earth's future dreams.

And we shall be with Her again,  
Our souls of this aware  
When ego in its den is slain,  
Desire turned to prayer.

That being pure we may arise  
To kneel before Her feet  
And gaze untroubled in Her eyes  
And know ourselves complete.

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)



## MOMENTS, ETERNAL

*(Continued from the issue of April 2005)*

FATHER came to Pondicherry in 1941. Tapati and I came with him. Our photos had been sent to the Mother on Nolini-da's instructions. During that time anybody wishing to come to the Ashram had to send a photo to the Mother. The Mother used to look at the picture and then give Her permission for the person to come. And so both of us were greatly worried for several days about whether we would pass this test. But then finally Nolini-da's letter arrived: the Mother had allowed us to come to the Ashram after seeing our photos. It would be difficult to translate the inexpressible joy that we experienced on receiving this news.

On the very day of our arrival we were fortunate to go and see the Mother in the evening. Nolini-da had been waiting for us at the entrance of his room. Father was a very dear friend of his. We had hardly bowed down to him that he gave us some flowers saying:

“Offer these to the Mother.”

With our father we went up to the Mother's room. Roni-kaka (Ranjit Sen), Suniti-kakima and Chhoto-mama (Himangshu Niyogi) were also with us.

As soon as we reached the top of the stairs we saw that the Mother was standing in front of the door and blessing each one with flowers. So splendid She looked! It was impossible to take my eyes off Her. Hardly did I find myself in Her presence that I felt it was Mother Durga standing in front of me. A crown adorning Her head, there were anklets on Her feet. Everything was filled and aglow with a golden light. A beautiful sari enveloped Her body. A golden Light radiated from Her eyes. Her touch brought about a huge change in me....

I did not feel the slightest urge to go back to Feni. However, it seemed that finishing college was a good idea. If for some reason I could not stay here then at least I would have something to help me stand on my own feet.

I returned to Feni. Time stood still.... All my friends were taken aback to see me so unhappy and worried.

“What's wrong with you?” they kept asking.

“I am kind of missing the Mother,” I said.

They could not believe their ears! How could I explain it to them? And in this way, the days plodded on. And then it was time for the B.A. examination. I wrote to Nolini-da to let him know: “I would like to come to the Ashram for good as soon as my examination is over. Please arrange that I get the Mother's permission.”

Nolini-da replied: “First finish your studies, then we'll see.”

We all came back with father in 1944 for the April Darshan. I noticed that Nolini-da did not mention anything about my staying here. What was I to do? One day when I went to the Mother, She greeted me very tenderly with a “Bonjour”. Hearing that tender “Bonjour” from the Mother a huge turmoil rocked my being. I felt that I could

not stay anywhere else without the Mother. And I blurted out:

“Mother! I want to stay here with You.”

At once I wondered if I had said the right thing and not made a mistake. In fact, at school or college we never used to speak in English. It was difficult to forget that the British had fettered us. And so we studied English only when it was absolutely unavoidable.

No sooner had the Mother heard my prayer that She pulled me behind Her with both Her hands. “Come in,” She said, just as my father got into the room. I was terrified. I had not taken my parents’ permission to decide about staying here. It was therefore natural for me to be scared.

The Mother told my father:

“I am keeping Priti here with me.”

Father looked at the Mother, quite stupefied.

“But, Mother, Bibhavati [Priti’s mother] will be saddened.”

The Mother took father’s hands in Hers and told him with exceeding tenderness:

“Next year you will all come here for good.”

Father’s eyes filled with tears of joy. In deep gratitude he kissed the Mother’s hands. Finally father’s deepest wish was fulfilled. The Mother had herself made the arrangements for our stay here. I often remember that day’s event...

Whenever I told my father, “Why is it that we never get any experiences? Sahana-di speaks of so many of her experiences.”

Father would reply:

“During our times we all used to have all kinds of experiences. We have all gone through all kinds of beautiful experiences. This was not because of anybody’s merit. At that time Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were working on a higher plane. It was easy to meditate. The Mother used to get even the gods down in our midst. Now the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are working with the lower nature. Now everyone has to go through the various problems of the lower nature. If one can open out to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, then They will solve our problems with the lower nature for us. This path of sadhana is most interesting, even though it is hard. The Mother has stretched out Her hand to help us.”

Father used to explain to me so many things in this way towards the end of his life. One day I asked father:

“Father, why do so many people here suffer because of depression?”

Father said:

“Beware! Depression is a terrible trap of the asuric power. From time to time it takes you away from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s protection. At first the being is overwhelmed with ordinary despair. Then slowly all kinds of bad suggestions start invading the sadhak’s mind. You have to be very careful. Let me tell you of an experience of mine. I was once meditating. I felt a little uneasy, as if from somewhere an asuric force was trying to swallow me up. I began meditating more consciously. I

noticed a black, ugly shape standing behind me. His eyes were sharply fixed on me. But I did not feel frightened and was absorbed in deep meditation. Thanks to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's infinite Grace I realised that this being was the devil of depression. You need to be most careful. Be most conscious right from the beginning. Never let depression approach you, even a little."

Father had given such a vivid description of this devil of depression that it was impossible to let myself slip into despair or gloom.

I would always feel that this asura was going to grab me. This was in 1945. Father brought mother, my brothers and sisters to the Ashram for good in April, for Darshan. The Mother Herself enrolled Arati and Manoj in the school. The Mother had already told Manoj:

"I am going to open a school. You will come and study here."

Father was given work as the head of the publishing department. Then he was given work as the head of our Ashram press. When the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre (now Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education) was established, the Mother made my father professor of philosophy. Father continued to teach even while being the manager of the Ashram press. At night he would attentively go through the final proofs. After finishing the general marching and receiving groundnuts or sweets from the Mother, he would slowly walk down the sea front to the press. And he would get deeply absorbed in all kinds of work. How much he worked all on his own! The press would be totally deserted by then.

Father had offered himself completely to the Mother's work. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo's work was part of father's sadhana.

So much so that even on the day our mother left her body father did not skip his work at the press. He took his bag and slowly, quietly went down the steps.

Our mother left her body on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1953. About one year later, on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1954 our elder brother, Saroj, passed away.

What an incredible happening! Dada (Saroj) was to go to Calcutta. He was very eager to get the Mother's blessings but unfortunately the Mother was not seeing anyone on that day. Dada was obstinate. On entering the playground upon my return from the tennis-ground, I noticed that Dada was standing against a wall, waiting for the Mother. I said:

"Dada, the Mother will not see anyone today."

Dada kept standing. The Mother then came out of Her room to go to the interview-room. The Mother went straight to Dada. I was quite scared thinking that the Mother was certainly going to scold Dada. But what happened was just the opposite. Very affectionately the Mother asked Dada:

"Are you leaving today?"

Dada was thrilled and answered enthusiastically:

"Yes, Mother I'm leaving today. I want you to bless me."

"When will you come back?" the Mother asked.

Dada said:

“I will return before the November Darshan.”

I was greatly astonished to see and hear the Mother being so loving and caring.

“You know, Mother, Priti thinks that you love only her.”

I felt deeply embarrassed. The Mother looked at us and smiled. These little fights between brother and sister are common. The Mother turned to Dada and said:

“Au revoir, mon enfant.”

Dada caught typhoid on arriving in Calcutta. Every day he sent a letter. He urged father to come to Calcutta. Slowly Dada became so weak that it became impossible to read his handwriting. Towards the end we received postcards filled with shaky lines. Many of our relatives and close friends wrote to father urging him to come to Calcutta. Dada was in a very critical condition. Every day a telegram would arrive informing us of his state. I would go and give it to Nolini-da for him to read it out to the Mother. The Mother would listen and remain silent. I just could not figure out what exactly was going on. The Mother forbade father to go to Calcutta. All the relatives and close friends were extremely upset with him. The Mother asked that Dada be brought back to Pondicherry in that very condition. Everyone was perplexed. In any case, the eldest son of our youngest aunt, Keta-da, sejo-mashima and mejo-mashima most courageously covered that long distance and brought Dada back to Pondicherry. Dada could not stay a moment without Keta-da. From their very childhood the two had developed a deep friendship. Talking of friendship Satyavrata (Dr. Sen) too comes to mind. After Keta-da went back to Calcutta it was Satyavrata who used to give Dada a sponge bath, feed him while telling him all sorts of stories and keep his mind distracted. And he went on doing this happily day after day. Dada flatly refused to go to the Mother even after much persuasion. The Mother would listen to all this and remain silent. I did not understand anything at all.

Dada would lie on his bed and listen to songs all day. He himself used to sing very well. What a marvellous voice he had! He had come back from Calcutta with a lot of records. One of these records was his favourite. I remember a couple of lines from a song:

*My worldly play now its end has reached,  
My boat I shall row out to the other shore,  
And change into new clothes discarding the old.*

I guess Dada must have obviously felt that it was now time for him to leave. He would become strangely silent while listening to this song. For father and us a great ordeal began. The Mother used to send some *juhi* flowers for Dada every evening. As soon as Manoj had handed these flowers to him, Dada would pull his emaciated weak body up and leaning against the wall sit and start weaving a garland for the Mother. And Manoj would take this garland to give to the Mother. Father would silently bear all his suffering. Sri Aurobindo's remark, “He is as firm as a rock” was

confirmed in his everyday conduct. That gentle, affectionate human being had become hard like stone. Very solemn. As if he had had a presentiment of something.

The day Dada left his body, father was taking his philosophy class at school. On getting the news from Tapati, very quietly he walked back home, as if nothing had happened. Leaning against the wall and sitting in the lotus position, Dada held his hands together in salutation. Like a great yogi. How amazing, really! This is how he breathed his last. Father came and embraced Dada close to his chest. Then a little later he very carefully stretched him out on his bed and covered his legs with a *chaddar*. He sat still on a chair for the whole day staring at Dada's face. As firm as a rock, without the hint of a tear in his eyes.

The Mother told me later:

"I forbade your father to go to Calcutta for some reason. You surely remember the day Saroj was to leave for Calcutta I saw him standing and waiting for me as I was going to the interview-room. I went straight to him. Because Saroj's soul came out to me and said: 'Mother, this is our last meeting. I shall not see you again in this mortal body.' And I blessed Saroj."

Memories of that day come back to me. The ground was empty. Pranab was busy with the children's group. The Mother kept talking with Dada. I was the only one standing a little further away.

The Mother said:

"Saroj's soul was very developed. In comparison, his body was extremely weak. He was so incredibly mature within that he considered everything in this outer world as trivial. He would make light of everything. He took this world lightly. His soul needed just a few years of experience. As soon that experience was over his soul took leave."

After listening to the Mother I finally understood why Dada did not wish to go to see the Mother despite repeated attempts at persuasion. He would just repeat: "I will not go to see the Mother with this bag of bones."

Father had understood that it was time for his life's lamp to be extinguished. He was always sort of absent-minded and sad. He would often tell us:

"When you go to the Ashram in the evening, sit there for a while. Do not forget to bow at the samadhi. Even if you cannot meditate all the time, remember the air that has touched the Mother comes and caresses our body and that air is immensely beneficial to us. This divine *prasad* is the Mother's blessing. That is why you should go and sit in the Ashram."

I was awe-struck. I had never seen things this way.

(To be continued)

PRITI DAS GUPTA

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

## **THE TSUNAMI DELUGE: SIGNIFICANT LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY (IN SRI AUROBINDO'S LIGHT)**

DAY 10 since a killer Tsunami in the Indian Ocean wrecked havoc in vast stretches of coastal areas—from Sumatra to Somalia. More than a lakh and a half dead and the count kept rising. Decomposing corpses littered the beaches and waterfronts, but hardly any of those were of dead animals!

Animals were not the only living creatures able to escape nature's fury. The primitive tribes also proved smarter than their more civilised brethren. Some of the endangered aborigines of the Andaman Islands like the Jarawas who allegedly live in a time-wrap of 70,000 years vintage, survived the deluge! The Nicobar Islands, which are very close to the epicentre of the earthquake that produced the Tsunami, predictably were among the worst affected regions. But the reclusive Shompens inhabiting a Nicobar island, who are hostile to all semblance of civilisation and civilised people, also escaped the killer waves!

How did it all happen? How could the animals and the aborigines beat the sophisticated surveillance mechanism and smart machines of the twenty-first century in the game of survival? There is an explanation.

### **ANIMAL INSTINCT**

The animals are infra-rational, but they have their instincts. They can sense the approaching danger and try to move out of harm's way. The aborigines can decipher nature's warning signs coming through changes in land surface, sea and wind or in the behaviour of ants, birds, animals and fish and take refuge in the safe havens. But civilised man depends on his surveillance and advance warning systems and scientific knowledge. He cannot detect the messages coming from instinct, separating these from his other thoughts surfacing in his mind. Nor can he bank upon instinct-based past experiences as these cannot be explained rationally or scientifically.

The manner in which animals and aborigines perceive danger is different from that of thinking men. The former wake up to nature's warning signals fast through a mindless impulse called instinct. The latter become aware of the danger ahead only when rational observation and analysis of physical phenomena makes it apparent. On that fateful Sunday morning, joggers in their fashionable tracksuits and running shoes saw nothing abnormal in the sea waves off Chennai's Marina Beach till the waves swept them away. But people remember seeing a stray cow on the beach running like mad away from the coast. And the unclad and barefooted Jarawas or Shompens in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands could see the terrible face of Neptune in the waves of the same Bay of Bengal and could run to the safety of high grounds well ahead of the moment of deluge.



## THEORY OF EVOLUTION

Is it development of mind that has brought about such a big difference between civilised man on the one hand and the animal and the so-called ‘uncivilised’ humans on the other? The riddle can be resolved in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s interpretation of the theory of evolution, which also focuses on the evolutionary possibilities for humanity in the future.

The Darwinian view that the human species, *Homo sapiens*, evolved from animals, specifically from a species of apes, is now accepted by a large cross section of thinkers, although there are varying views on the theory of evolution as propounded by Darwin. What are the evident gains and losses of this evolution? The gains are there for all to see. Man with his mental faculties—not developed in the animals—of observation (including introspection), analysis and synthesis, has far surpassed his evolutionary predecessors in dominating the inanimate world, the plant world and the animal world on this planet. On the debit side of the balance sheet, some of the irreversible changes include the disappearance of the tail and the shift from quadrupedal to bipedal mode, although man still walks on all fours as a toddler. Some evolutionists opine that man has also not been able to reach the level of physical prowess and strength which a few species of apes, like the gorilla, possess. While these are only outer changes, the inner changes arising out of evolution are of far reaching consequences—man has lost the simplicity, the spontaneity as well as the instinct of the animal.

Sri Aurobindo says that man has climbed the evolutionary ladder from the stage of the animal through the development of his mental faculties. Though he has gained a lot through this process *vis-à-vis* the animals, this evolution has also meant, in a sense, a fall from the Garden of Eden, as reason has clouded the flashes of instinct, so natural to an animal. But as he moves to the next evolutionary stage—to supermanhood—the same sureness as the animal instinct comes back as flashes of intuition, with a much greater light and power and exactitude. Sri Aurobindo focuses on this issue in his *magnum opus*, *The Life Divine*:

The reason active in our waking consciousness is only a mediator between the subconscious All that we come from in our evolution upwards and the superconscient All towards which we are impelled by that evolution. The subconscious and the superconscient are two different formulations of the same All. The master-word of the subconscious is Life, the master-word of the superconscient is Light. In the subconscious knowledge or consciousness is involved in action, for action is the essence of Life. In the superconscient action re-enters into Light and no longer contains involved knowledge but is itself contained in a supreme consciousness. Intuitional knowledge is that which is common between them and the foundation of intuitional knowledge is conscious or effective

identity between that which knows and that which is known; it is that state of common self-existence in which the knower and the known are one through knowledge. But in the subconscious the intuition manifests itself in the action, in effectivity, and the knowledge or conscious identity is either entirely or more or less concealed in the action. In the superconscious, on the contrary, Light being the law and the principle, the intuition manifests itself in its true nature as knowledge emerging out of conscious identity, and effectivity of action is rather the accompaniment or necessary consequent and no longer masks as the primary fact. Between these two states reason and mind act as intermediaries which enable the being to liberate knowledge out of its imprisonment in the act and prepare it to resume its essential primacy. When the self-awareness in the mind applied, both to continent and content, to own-self and other-self, exalts itself into the luminous self-manifest identity, the reason also converts itself into the form of the self-luminous intuitional knowledge. This is the highest possible state of our knowledge when mind fulfils itself in the supramental.<sup>1</sup>

### INSTINCT: CONSCIOUSNESS OF NATURE

The Mother, who was the collaboratrix of Sri Aurobindo in his supramental yoga, has explained the why and how of instinct in nature. During a conversation with children in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, she replied to the question, *What exactly is instinct*, in the following words:

It is the consciousness of Nature. Nature is conscious of its action, but this is not an individual consciousness. There is an instinct of the species. Some have said that there were even “spirits of the species”, conscious beings for each species. Instinct depends on the way Nature works, and Nature is a conscious force which knows what it wants, does it in its own way, knowing where it is going and its roads: it itself chooses them. For man this appears incoherent, for his own consciousness is too narrow (he can’t see the whole well enough; when one sees only the small details of things or little fragments, one can’t understand at all), but Nature has a plan, it has a conscious will, it is altogether a conscious entity—it can’t be called a being, for it is not in the same proportion. When we speak of a being with our human consciousness, we immediately imagine a human being, perhaps a little larger or much larger, but still functioning always in the same way. That is why I don’t call it a being, but it is a conscious entity, a conscious will doing things consciously, deliberately, and having formidable forces at its disposal.<sup>2</sup>

On the question of how this instinct works on an animal, the Mother explains on another occasion:



Animals have much more perfect senses than those of men. I challenge you to track a man as a dog does, for instance!

This means that in the curve or rather the spiral of evolution, animals (and more so those we call “higher” animals, because they resemble us more closely) are governed by the spirit of the species which is a highly conscious consciousness. Bees, ants, obey this spirit of the species which is of quite a special quality. And what is called “instinct” in animals is simply obedience to the spirit of the species which always knows what ought and ought not to be done. There are so many examples, you know. You put a cow in a meadow; it roams around, sniffs, and suddenly puts out its tongue and snatches a blade of grass. Then it wanders about again, sniffs and gets another tuft of grass, and so it goes on. Has anyone ever known a cow under these conditions eating poisonous grass? But shut this poor animal up in a cow-shed, gather and put some grass before it, and the poor creature which has lost its instinct because it now obeys man (excuse me), eats the poisonous grass along with the rest of it.... And these unfortunate animals, like all animals, have a kind of respect... for the superiority of man—if he puts poisonous grass before the cow and tells it to eat, it eats it! But left to itself, that is, without anything interfering between it and the spirit of the species, it would never do so.<sup>3</sup>

In the process of evolution from animal to man, this wonderful gift of intuition has been lost. But as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, man has the potential of access to intuition, and the evolutionary future of humanity is “mind fulfilling itself in the supramental”, which is the highest possible state of knowledge.

### KNOWLEDGE BY IDENTITY

Pending that evolutionary consummation, examples of recognising the flashes of intuition or obtaining knowledge through the process of “conscious or effective identity between that which knows and that which is known”, can be found in all branches of knowledge systems, both spiritual and mundane—*parāvidyā* as well as *aparāvidyā*.

Let us take the case of our traditional medicine—*Āyurveda*. There are two authentic ancient texts—*Suśruta Samhitā* and *Caraka Samhitā*. Sushruta, living in Varanasi, had listed the medicinal properties of a large variety of mineral and plant-based products—*oṣadhiguṇa*. Caraka, hailing from Taxila, had, in addition, formulated the medicines available in the body parts of hundreds of animals that move or crawl on the ground, swim in the water or float in the air. Tradition has it that the initial recognition of much of these medicines, available in the plants, minerals or in the body parts of animals, came through the yogic process of obtaining knowledge through identity.

One may recall the story of the great physician, Jeevaka Komarabhaccha, a

contemporary of Gautama Buddha. After studying for seven years, Jeevaka enquired whether his education was completed. The teacher gave him a test. "Take this spade and seek round about Takkasila\* a *yojana* on every side, and whatever plant you see which is not medicinal, bring it to me," said the Guru to Jeevaka. The worthy disciple examined all the plants in that large area and reported that he had not come across any that had no medicinal properties. "Your education is now complete. Go forth and treat the people," said the Guru. Is it possible to obtain such a comprehensive knowledge about the properties of hundreds of plants merely through studies, observations and experimentations unaided by intuitive faculties?

The Mother records an interesting case of finding health-giving properties of flowers while in deep meditation. The following experience was noted in her diary on April 7, 1917, while she was in Japan:

A deep concentration seized on me, and I perceived that I was identifying myself with a single cherry-blossom, then through it with all cherry-blossoms, and, as I descended deeper in the consciousness, following a stream of bluish force, I became suddenly the cherry-tree itself, stretching towards the sky like so many arms its innumerable branches laden with their sacrifice of flowers. Then I heard distinctly this sentence:

"Thus hast thou made thyself one with the soul of the cherry-trees and so thou canst take note that it is the Divine who makes the offering of this flower-prayer to heaven."

When I had written it, all was effaced; but now the blood of the cherry-tree flows in my veins and with it flows an incomparable peace and force. What difference is there between the human body and the body of a tree? In truth, there is none: the consciousness which animates them is identically the same.

Then the cherry-tree whispered in my ear:

"It is in the cherry-blossom that lies the remedy for the disorders of the spring."<sup>4</sup>

What a graphic portrayal of the process of knowledge by identity, its philosophy, its method and its consummation put together!

One finds reference to the same yogic process of obtaining knowledge in several other ancient texts of India.

Chants the Vedic Rishi Medhatithi Kanva:

अप्सु मे सोमो॑ अब्रवीदन्तर्विश्वानि॑ भेष॒ज।

*Apsu me somo abravīd antar viśvāni bheṣajā.*<sup>5</sup>

Soma has told me that there in water lie all the medicines.

\* Taxila

Patanjali focuses on what seems to be a yogic method to decipher the language of all living creatures, including birds, animals, ants, etc:

शब्दार्थप्रत्ययानामितरेतराध्यासात् संकरस्ततः प्रविभागसंयमात् सर्वभूतरुतज्ञानम्।

*Śabdārtha-pratyayānām-itaretarādhyāsat saṅkarastat pravibhāga-saṁyamāt-sarvabhūta-rūta jñānam.*<sup>6</sup>

Through the imposition of the idea of word and its meaning on each other, there is created a conjunction of the two. By concentration on the point of distinction between the two, one can understand what is intended to be communicated by the voice of any living creature.

The aborigines who were forewarned of the advancing Tsunami waves, might have got the danger signal watching the reaction of animals, but their instrument of acquiring such knowledge happens to be that subconscious impulse called instinct and not the yogic process, although the outcome could be as effective.

Examples of obtaining knowledge through yogic or intuitive process can also be found in the *Upavedas* dealing with various subjects and disciplines, both mundane and spiritual. Panini, perhaps the greatest grammarian in history, was said to be a poor student of grammar in the beginning. Panini took recourse to yogic practices. Tradition has it that *Māheśvara Sūtras*, a key component of the grammar, was revealed to Panini when he was in a state of *tapas*. It was these sutras which had served as the system of Panini's *Vyākaraṇa*, which stands unparalleled even today after a lapse of nearly three millennia. The story points to the same process of getting knowledge through intuition. The annals of modern science also are replete with stories of scientists making a discovery, aided by intuition.

The role of intuition or listening to the inner voice as a means of obtaining spiritual knowledge or for making progress on the path of *sādhana*—spiritual practices—has been acknowledged by all religions. While yogis and bhaktas sometimes speak of receiving *ādeśh* of the Divine through an inner voice, Christian mystics beckon the seekers of the spiritual to try to listen to the “still small voice” which mostly remains unheard in the din of the mind.

### LESSONS FROM TSUNAMI

What are, therefore, the lessons for humanity from the recent Tsunami deluge? The Governments of the affected countries are bolstering up their earthquake and cyclone/tidal wave surveillance mechanism. They would also like to make the early warning system more efficient so that there is time to evacuate people ahead of disaster. The Government of India has indicated that its Tsunami surveillance unit in the Indian Ocean will be completed by 2007. The UNESCO has also announced that it would

help set up a Tsunami surveillance system in the Indian Ocean region for the benefit of the littoral countries. But the data that the smart machines of the seismographers, the meteorologists and the oceanographers would collect and process, may not include many of the yet unexplained signs of a coming catastrophe that Mother Nature gives so generously. These signals may get reflected in the silent mind of a yogi, come as an instinctive impulse to an animal or alert an infra-rational aborigine, although for the civilised man these are of no use since our scientists do not take their cognisance.

But if our present evolutionary stage prevents us from having the instinct of the animal and the aborigine or the intuition of a spiritual person, how do we recognise these warning signs of nature and dovetail these into our disaster surveillance and warning systems? Well, one source of such knowledge could be the folklore and country ballads of almost every linguistic and cultural group. They talk about what colours in the clouds, what changes on the earth, what type of behaviour of animals, birds, ants, etc., will portend drought or flood, good or bad crops, war and pestilence, earthquake and tidal wave. It will be the job of discerning researchers to separate the wheat from the chaff and make a workable system out of it. This is exactly what some of the Chinese scientists are reportedly doing in attempting to create a viable advance earthquake warning system. They are trying to benefit from the rural elders' wisdom and studying behavioural pattern of ants, birds and other animals and physical changes on the ground, in the water as well as in the wind ahead of and during a seismic disturbance.

The recent Tsunami has also brought up significant data that have to be studied by the scientists in the interest of creating a more effective disaster warning system. *The Hindu* reported the story of a scientist, Dr. Chidambaram, who had warned about a coming cyclone/tidal wave months ahead of the tsunami deluge. Dr. Chidambaram had noticed an unusual increase in the population of a type of small fish called Red Bait on the eastern coast of India. He had noticed that the sighting of this fish called *Dibteryjonatus Lucogrommicus*, locally known as *aranaival*, was a portent of natural calamity. Dr. Chidambaram said that he had written to the appropriate Government authorities as well as to the scientific community warning them of an imminent danger.

Subsequent media reports indicate that he was not alone in noticing this phenomenon. Fishermen of Pondicherry were horror-struck two months ago to find *aranaival*, the small fish with reddish tails, in their trawler-nets. Similar catches in 1977, 1979 and 1996 were followed by major cyclones. It is a fisherman's instinct that Red Bait portends disaster and it has often come true. Reports indicate that the field staff of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) had stumbled on this fish when they were on a routine quality check. They also alerted their superiors in Kochi, but all these warning signals were apparently ignored by the authorities as these might have been considered not significant enough to be fed into the disaster surveillance systems.

There were many other warning signals of Mother Nature which the animals

took heed of and the aborigines of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands received in time and saved their lives. Here are a few examples of animal instinct ahead of the disaster noticed along the coast line of Tamil Nadu:

- Crows flew into the fish hatchery of CMFRI in Chennai and did not budge.
- A cow on the Chennai beach ran like mad away from the coast.
- At Point Calimere wildlife sanctuary, black bucks and deer fled towards higher ground.

If an intrepid researcher can talk to the aborigines of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands and find out what were the warning signals in inanimate nature and in plants and animals they saw, heard and felt well before the huge wall of water swept the ground they stood on, it will be an invaluable addition to the knowledge base of all mankind.

But will the scientists be able to construct a knowledge-system mixing scientific data with the observations of supposedly irrational people or study of signs in the inanimate or plant world or in animal behaviour, which may as well be termed as coincidence or one-offs? Let us consider again the case of building up an effective earthquake warning system. (It was a severe oceanic earthquake of Richter 9.3 intensity that produced the recent Tsunami.) Despite many decades of intensive research, the scientists are not yet able to predict earthquakes. Their smart machines have recorded a profusion of data, but are yet to find a definitive pattern or causal link which can lead to a forecast. For example, scientists noted changes in chlorine levels in the water before the 1995 Kobe earthquake and a flutter in the magnetic field before the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. But these were found to be one-offs and have not been repeated in case of other severe earthquakes. But the physical changes in land, water and air, the changes in the plants or the behavioural changes in the animals ahead of a seismic disturbance, which are the stuff of rustic wisdom or village folklore and which are reportedly being studied by the Chinese scientists, may not be one-offs since these are based on age-old experience. But it may require a paradigm shift in the mindset of scientists if they have to take into account for their scientific studies such factors, which they had so far considered as irrelevant mumbo-jumbo. The scientists will also have to respect and empathise the supposedly instinctive or intuitive persons in order to gain from their knowledge.

### **PARADIGM SHIFT**

This will, however, call for a paradigm shift in the mindset of the scientist. Rooted as he is in the creed of materialism, he may question the facts and data supposedly emanating from an extra-material realm, which he considers as unreal and illusory. But Sri Aurobindo finds such an approach irrational and illogical. The following

lines from Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* puts the issue in perspective:

It is a fact that mankind almost from the beginning of its existence or so far back as history or tradition can go, has believed in the existence of other worlds and in the possibility of communication between their powers and beings and the human race. In the last rationalistic period of human thought from which we are emerging, this belief has been swept aside as an age-long superstition; all evidence or intimations of its truth have been rejected *a priori* as fundamentally false and undeserving of inquiry because incompatible with the axiomatic truth that only Matter and the material world and its experiences are real; all other experience purporting to be real must be either a hallucination or an imposture or a subjective result of superstitious credulity and imagination or else, if a fact, then other than what it purported to be and explicable by a physical cause: no evidence could be accepted of such a fact unless it is objective and physical in its character; even if the fact be very apparently supraphysical, it cannot be accepted as such unless it is totally unexplainable by any other imaginable hypothesis or conceivable conjecture.

It should be evident that this demand for physical valid proof of a supraphysical fact is irrational and illogical; it is an irrelevant attitude of the physical mind which assumes that only the objective and physical is fundamentally real and puts aside all else as merely subjective. A supraphysical fact may impinge on the physical world and produce physical results; it may even produce an effect on our physical senses and become manifest to them, but that cannot be its invariable action and most normal character or process. Ordinarily, it must produce a direct effect or a tangible impression on our mind and our life-being, which are the parts of us that are of the same order as itself, and can only indirectly and through them, if at all, influence the physical world and physical life. If it objectivises itself, it must be to a subtler sense in us and only derivatively to the outward physical sense. This derivative objectivisation is certainly possible; if there is an association of the action of the subtle body and its sense-organisation with the action of the material body and its physical organs, then the supraphysical can become outwardly sensible to us. This is what happens, for example, with the faculty called second sight; it is the process of all those psychic phenomena which seem to be seen and heard by the outer senses and are not sensed inwardly through representative or interpretative or symbolic images which bear the stamp of an inner experience or have an evident character of formations in a subtle substance. There can, then, be various kinds of evidence of the existence of other planes of being and communication with them; objectivisation to the outer sense, subtle-sense contacts, mind contacts, life contacts, contacts through the subliminal in special states of consciousness exceeding our ordinary range. Our physical mind is not the whole of us nor, even though it dominates almost

the whole of our surface consciousness, the best or greatest part of us; reality cannot be restricted to a sole field of this narrowness or to the dimensions known within its rigid circle.

If it be said that subjective experience or subtle-sense images can easily be deceptive, since we have no recognised method or standard of verification and a too great tendency to admit the extraordinary and miraculous or supernatural at its face-value, this may be admitted: but error is not the prerogative of the inner subjective or subliminal parts of us, it is also an appanage of the physical mind and its objective methods and standards, and such liability to error cannot be a reason for shutting out a large and important domain of experience; it is a reason rather for scrutinising it and finding out in it its own true standards and its characteristic appropriate and valid means of verification. Our subjective being is the basis of our objective experience, and it is not probable that only its physical objectivisations are true and the rest unreliable. The subliminal consciousness, when rightly interrogated, is a witness to truth and its testimony is confirmed again and again even in the physical and the objective field; that testimony cannot, then, be disregarded when it calls our attention to things within us or to things that belong to planes or worlds of a supraphysical experience. At the same time belief by itself is not evidence of reality; it must base itself on something more valid before one can accept it. It is evident that the beliefs of the past are not a sufficient basis for knowledge, even though they cannot be entirely neglected: for a belief is a mental construction and may be a wrong building; it may often answer to some inner intimation and then it has a value, but, as often as not, it disfigures the intimation, usually by a translation into terms familiar to our physical and objective experience, such as that which converted the hierarchy of the planes into a physical hierarchy or geographical space-extension, turned the rarer heights of subtle substance into material heights and placed the abodes of the gods on the summits of physical mountains. All truth supraphysical or physical must be founded not on mental belief alone, but on experience,—but in each case experience must be of the kind, physical, subliminal or spiritual, which is appropriate to the order of the truths into which we are empowered to enter; their validity and significance must be scrutinised, but according to their own law and by a consciousness which can enter into them and not according to the law of another domain or by a consciousness which is capable only of truths of another order; so alone can we be sure of our steps and enlarge firmly our sphere of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

### A NEW SCIENCE

The above extract provides the basis to build the epistemology of a new science whose field of study is not confined to the world of matter and material energy but



extends to the worlds and planes that lie beyond and above the material. The means and methods of such a science cannot be restricted to what our five senses detect, what the scientific instruments record and what our rationality justifies. It must also admit for consideration whatever information and knowledge may come through instinct or intuition, be it the irrational impression of an aborigine or knowledge by identity received by a yogi. In fact, like the *Āyurvedāchāryas* of ancient India, the new scientist should preferably be an intuitive person himself who can harmonise the knowledge received from both material and extra-material planes.

But is human mind capable of such an alchemy on a sustained basis? Sri Aurobindo spoke about an evolutionary goal where intuition would be a constant cognitive process for man. “Transform reason into ordered intuition; let all thyself be light. This is thy goal”,<sup>8</sup> he said. Later, commenting on this aphorism of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother said:

Ordered intuition.... For at the beginning, when one enters into contact with the realm of intuition, it is a sort of spasmodic contact; that is, from time to time, for more or less explicable or conscious reasons, one suddenly has an intuition or is possessed by the spirit of intuition; but it is not methodical, not a phenomenon which occurs at will, organised and obeying a central will. But Sri Aurobindo says that if the entire reason is transformed—he speaks of transformation, you know—if the reason is transformed into the very essence, the substance of intuition, then the whole inner movement of the inner mind becomes a movement of intuition, organised as the reason is organised, that is, it becomes active at will, answers all needs and comes into the being in accordance with a methodical system. It is not something which appears and disappears one doesn’t know how or why; it is the result of the transformation of the reason, which is the higher part of the human mind, into a light higher than the mental light, a light of intuition. So it becomes ordered, organised, instead of being spasmodic and uncoordinated.<sup>9</sup>

Even if this “ordered intuition” manifests only among a few evolutionary fore-runners of humanity, this points to the possibility of a new science as well as other new forms of knowledge, which would help us resolve most of our present day problems. Sri Aurobindo tells us that India can play a big role in developing such new forms of knowledge-systems that would be the hallmark of the future humanity. While India had reached the heights of spiritual knowledge, it also had the insight and capacity to harmonise the material and the spiritual. India has to rediscover that knowledge and apply it to the needs of the future of humanity. Sri Aurobindo has set this agenda clearly for us:

The recovery of the old spiritual knowledge and experience in all its splendour,

depth and fullness is its first, most essential work; the flowing of this spirituality into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge is the second; an original dealing with modern problems in the light of Indian spirit and the endeavour to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society is the third and most difficult. Its success on these three lines will be the measure of its help to the future of humanity.<sup>10</sup>

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*Sri Lankan wildlife officials have said the giant waves that killed over 24,000 people along the Indian Ocean island's coast seemingly missed wild beasts, with no dead animals found. "No elephants are dead, not even a dead hare or rabbit," said H. D. Ratnayake, deputy director of Sri Lanka's Wildlife Department. "I think animals can sense disaster. They have a sixth sense. They know when things are happening." The waves washed floodwaters up to two miles inland at Yala National Park in the ravaged southeast, Sri Lanka's biggest wildlife reserve and home to hundreds of wild elephants and several leopards.*

(From the Internet)

## THE TSUNAMI SHOCK AND AFTER

*Is it Chance smites? is it Fate's irony? dead workings or blind purpose of  
brute Nature?  
Or man's own deeds that return back on his doomed head with a stark  
justice, a fixed vengeance?  
Or a dread Will from behind Life that regards pain and salutes death with  
a hard laughter?  
Is it God's might or a Force rules in this dense jungle of events, deeds and  
our thought's strivings?*

Sri Aurobindo, "The Lost Boat", *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 564

A GIANT wave of destruction has passed over South and South-East Asia swallowing many a human life. In minds that are sensitive, it has caused indignation, in hearts easily moved by appearances a great sense of tragedy and pity. In those who have survived, a sense of fear and horror will haunt them for a long time to come. Yet, if we wish to probe the deeper causes and not just the superficial material ones, we need to steady our gaze and try to look behind the appearances. Tragedy and grief, horror and fear are natural human reactions and while they have their just place in self-defence and releasing strong emotions, yet they cloud the clear vision of truth. They prevent us from looking straight into the eyes of that which appals and threatens us. And unless we do that, we will only play with appearances, manipulate the surface phenomena that are only a screen to hide yet deeper sources of human misery.

Let us simply look at the appearances, but without losing sight of anything, with a view as total as we can at our human level. The sea in its upsurge of sudden and violent fury ran over the earth swallowing nearly one fifth of a million people. And the death count has shaken our nerves and hearts. But have we ever taken count of the millions and billions of sea creatures and lives that man as a species has been plundering and destroying and displacing and swallowing for gluttony and greed. For a change, perhaps it was a truth of our own action that rebounded as it were from the ocean depths with the loud, roaring cry, that every fish has its day. The sea, guardian of its creatures in a moments' gesture rebounded and reflected the threat that man has been imposing upon the marine world for centuries. For Nature is an impartial and equal mother. Its wisdom and love pour out as much in the making of a blade of grass, a petal of a flower, a honeycomb as in the building of galaxies. Man, to Nature's view is only one among many of its children. We abrogate to ourselves a unique place of being greater among equals, and though there is a grain of truth in it, it is not a truth that man can claim by force of might. If man is simply an animal like others, he cannot claim a superior place either in Nature's eyes or God's. Then it is simply a balance of forces. And as with other species before him, man may lose out to others, become endangered by his own kind, or who knows, may even be wiped out in masses.

Nature did not weep when it wiped out the dinosaur, nor let out a sigh when man led many an animal to the verge of extinction. Nature is too vast for the animal-man. It cares little for numbers even as we care little for the flowers or the grass or the ants that we trample on or the birds, and fish and other animals that we sacrifice to the dark god of our belly. Nature destroys but does not lament. It goes ahead even simultaneously to create anew. For it sees and knows that nothing is truly destroyed. It is simply a reorganisation of the energy of life to build other forms. The balance of All-Life is always preserved to its total vision. The waste of one life-form goes into the building of another life-form. It cannot be otherwise. For if Nature were to only create and not destroy, the balance would be altered in such a way that existing life-forms would find life horribly miserable!

But then there is a subtle truth behind man's greatness that is not in his animality but in his divinity. But even here, as the divine element in man is never destroyed but the bodily form is, so too the soul of the drowned rises from the ocean depths beyond the clasp of the giant waves and the dark and sombre chill of the sea. It rises beyond the pyre and the grave to inhabit new shores and resume its journey in new lands. Here too the tragedy lies in our ignorance, our imperfection of seeing and knowing, our ego-bound limited vision that can neither see the soul nor comprehend the totality of All-Life. Is Nature then at fault or an unfair God is at play capriciously destroying at will all that we cherish and hold dear? Or is it that both Nature and God snatch away the bonds and the limits that we hug and cling to as dear to us so that teased by the blindness we seek for light and sight? Is not destruction a challenge to build anew, afresh? Yes, and there can be no doubt about it. But what do we need most to build for man? A shelter of brick and clay, to find him a morsel of food, to give him back the same animal life that he lost! No doubt, that may be the first necessity of our animal and physical parts. But would we not care to build in our mind and heart vision and strength and hope, and lend to our ignorance a vision of the whole, to our blindness the sight that sees not just the destruction of the body but the immortality of the soul triumphant over death? And who would do that? Not the vainglorious philanthropist feeding the corpse of desire so as to revive it again. Not the politicians and the 'aid' of the so-called 'developed' nations whose own deeds of destruction and plunder far outnumber the sea's and before whose death-machines even Nature's fury sometimes hangs its head in shame. Not the kind of media that thrives on morbid sensationalism or at best raises only some dust of sentimental piety whose fervour settles down as rapidly as the waves that climbed high. Man is in urgent need to outgrow himself and his limitations, self-imposed by his ego that chooses to live in ignorance or at best in a superficial knowledge studying the surface play of Nature and its fringe of outermost forces. But there is a deeper knowledge and power to which man can rise, a wider and fuller seeing to the summits of which his vision can climb. Even now, in spite of our ignorance that vision sometimes unfolds itself. There are some who dreamt of the destructive tide, some who sensed it even in their bodies

and bones. Some places and animals were strangely protected as if by the working of a mysterious all-knowing force. What the animal works out unconsciously, man must do through conscious intuition. The mysterious Power that rests on the high and solitary peaks beyond nature acting only now and then from behind as a miraculous intervention must become man's inborn nature, or shall we say Supernature, the mere animal man grow into divine being,—a new and different species sharing the Vision and Will of the All-powerful Wisdom.

Yes, rebuild we must but on a newer plane and on a qualitatively different ground, on a ground where Death cannot reach and where destruction loses its force! Otherwise, we will only play with appearances. We will only master one tidal wave to be drowned by another, conquer plague, tuberculosis and smallpox only to be threatened by heart-disease, cancer and AIDS. Or even if we were to find a secure fortress from known messengers of death, yet would death find us through new agents. For death is only the reverse side of life and therefore it too can create its own forms as life does. No outer defence can help us so long as our inner fortress of Nature remains undefended and weak.

Perhaps that is the next challenge, the challenge of the new millennium thrown at man—to create a new body plastic and supple enough to spontaneously adapt to every change; to create a new mind of light that sees with an inborn luminosity far ahead in time and hears through its subtle ears the footsteps of an unborn destiny; a new will of life that has the power to turn the tides away or ride over it as a sport and fun holding the lion's mane. A new heart, not just sharing a weak sympathy born out of a common fear and nervous pity but a heart that is as strong as it is compassionate, that can spontaneously sow the seeds of hope and courage and lean into the abyss of human nature out of a divine universal love to lend or create the light of consciousness where now there is only obscurity and blindness. In short, a new man, or better still, a new being in a new body. Perhaps this is what Nature is busy creating right now even as we wail and lament much as a heedless but loving mother would keep the child out while she prepares a nice dish for him in her private kitchen. Perhaps the shaking and quaking of the earth's and the ocean's floor is a physical symbol and expression of the shaking and quaking of our inner space; the giant wave only a massive release of a stupendous energy thrown up from the disc of a hidden sun rising out of the caves of the subconscious depths, that dark ground below our feet. All forms of life that cannot bear its heat and light hide or perish. The rest undergoes the scorching blaze of the fire of an inner forge so that a greater power can emerge out of our very cells. Perhaps the destruction we see is only the loud thunderclap of a new creation and death and tragedy and fall the mask of a new life, a bliss waiting to raise man higher than he has ever dreamt.

Time shall reveal the awakening of a now-sealed, all-seeing eye of God in man!

There are other lessons of the Tsunami as well. For one, the myth of evolution as merely a process of adaptive survival lies shattered and sunk under the ocean deeps. The Jarwa and Onge tribes, perhaps the oldest living ancestors of man, stayed safe without the advanced warning systems. So did the animals in the Sri Lankan sanctuary and other places. But the modern man relying too much on machinery failed to take heed. True, we will install better machinery but how about installing a better consciousness in man? How about evolving within us faculties and powers of foresight and foreknowledge,—these are things well-known to yogis and even now there are clairvoyants and intuitive sciences that need study and perfection. Someone did dream of the Tsunami at Auroville, some did experience forms of disturbance that were unusual for them. But they failed to note their meaning and significance.

Similarly, there have been stories of some amazing survivals. A girl staying in the sea for 48 hours and returning safe; another floating on a natural raft for a few days, feeling all the while some invisible presence around helping her. A man from Indonesia survived a week on the sea, clinging to a floating tree trunk. The limits of human physiology and psychology were, as if, stretched beyond their logical limits. Perhaps the laws of our body are really the limits of our physical mind, a recurrent habit and a perpetual conditioning of many a millennium.

So also the rare heroism and courage exhibited by some individuals. Crisis, it seems, brings out not only the worst but also the best out of some. The adage ‘fools rush in where angels fear to tread’ was as if reversed, some did rush and destiny did not prove them to be fools. Perhaps the fool of today is an angel in the making of tomorrow. Perhaps each crisis or adversity is the other face of truth labouring, however paradoxically, to bring out the imprisoned god in man. To sum it up, is there a way to develop or recover within man some latent or lost faculties so as to better understand and master Nature? That such faculties exist is testified both by the unusual cases of extraordinary things in common man as well as by the rare and uncommon yogi.

In any case, the possibility exists and though now rare, there would be surely some way of discovering and generalising it in the human race.

This does not mean that we have to only observe and learn and not to act. Of course, the need of the moment is to act but in an enlightened way, so too the need of the hour and the Time Spirit is to evolve beyond man not only in our external machinery but also and even more importantly in our inner nature, in our inner consciousness.

Action itself has two aspects. One that is outward and visible; the other that is inward and unseen. So also action with hands and word and feet and wealth is outward and necessary, even indispensable. But there are many who can do it and will do it even better than it would have been before the disaster! But the inner action, creating harmony with the sea and other elemental forces of Nature, of widening and gathering all grief into one’s heart that has grown one with all, pouring waves and streams of strength and hope and packets of energy of peace and faith is not possible for all. Some, especially those called upon for this must act here too. Great is the service



that saves and serves the body and the outer man; greater still the service that saves and serves the spirit, opening new vistas for humanity, discovering, laying the foundations of a better inner technology of man. Saving the animal-man is good, no doubt, but there is an even greater need to evolve the divine man, one who is spontaneously immune to disaster and master of his destiny, death and fate. Let those who mock at this higher and greater possibility for want of faith and courage do so. But let others engage themselves in this greater inner conquest with a redoubled zeal. For in it lies the hope of a lasting security against all ills, in this lies the certitude of a golden future. It is the emergence of the New Man and the spontaneous action of his consciousness that is the best way even for the old humanity. And this service toward man's greater potentiality will in the end prove to be the greatest possible service to the present man itself. Time presses for a change, not only without but also within. The Tsunami is only just one signal calling our attention toward this needed change in man himself.

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There is a role for the physical scientist and a role for the social scientist. There is a role for the spiritual scientist too. And each one must do his bit in his own field. Each of these approaches does not annul but beautifully complements the others. The physical scientist has to discover ways and means to act physically upon physical elements. The social worker and the philanthropist have to step in for the outer retrieval and salvage. So too the spiritual scientist must work toward discovering ways and means to control forces of outer nature through inner means. Such possibilities not only exist but have been used by certain extraordinary persons in the past. Such a power would involve two main aspects,—the power of foreknowledge and the power of fore-action. Though modern science preoccupied with the surface may find such a thing difficult to understand, there is nothing fundamentally unscientific about it. In fact, from a deeper perspective it is perfectly intelligible. When we look at the outside of things, they appear as separate objects. To our outer view, sea is sea, man is man, house is house, tree is tree, etc., etc. This is however only a partial and superficial truth of the sensory world. The deeper truth is that the sea, the man, the house, the tree are a single continuum, physical or otherwise. And if we go still deeper we would discover as the seers of the Upanishads did that each separate part is not only linked but contains in itself the whole. Thereby arises the possibility of manipulating the world by manipulating oneself. A new and more intimate relationship begins to be discovered between 'us' here and the universe 'out there'.

But how do we actually realise this possibility? The ancient system of Vedas and Tantras actually worked it out by discovering not only the hidden forces but the consciousness and beings that act from behind over Nature. It saw the force of consciousness and the being, the elemental spirit so to say, behind the mountain, the



rain, the clouds, the sea, each species of the animal world, and other such seemingly less conscious or even inanimate forms of nature. This was no mere totemism or rituals based on magic accepted by some primitive men, though the possibility is there that unripe minds of the larger sections of humanity may have understood only the ritual part and forgotten the spirit. Nevertheless, if oneness of things is a fact, there must be other ways of entering into contact with and modifying the forces of Nature. Ritualistic worship and soulful prayer may be some of the ways. The other way is a knowledge and control by identity.

These are obviously processes that the rational mind may find difficult to understand. And all that it does not understand, it tends to dump as infra-rational. But just as there is no doubt an infra-rational movement (though for that reason not necessarily less effective as noted in the animals who escaped the Tsunami), so too there is a supra-rational movement of consciousness, more intuitive, more decisive and in all likelihood, possibly more effective.

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Finally, in passing of course, one may say that there is a positive side even to the worst of calamities. It is a strange balance or recompense of Nature that cannot be overlooked. The Tsunami brought too in its wake a solidarity that cut across all outer and inner differences. All mass disasters have this effect of bringing out the hidden oneness of human beings. Let us hope that a day comes when we do not need Tsunamis to realise this. Let us also hope that strengthened by the storm the survivors not only have a better material future but having gone through the adversity have a stronger psychological future as well.

Let us also hope that one day man recovers the harmony he has lost, the harmony with all that surrounds him, by discovering a higher harmony within himself.

ALOK PANDEY

*...neither desire nor shun the world, but seek the bliss & purity & freedom & greatness of God in whatsoever state or experience or environment.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 93)*

## TSUNAMI, ANIMALS AND MAN

DIFFERENT kinds of animals react to external physical stimuli, each kind in its own characteristic and typical fashion. Most domesticated animals, when excited, make unusual noises and behave abnormally, such as breaking tethers and running away wildly, or biting each other and even inanimate objects. Birds leave their accustomed trees and perches and refuse to return, animals in zoos go out of control, fish migrate or jump out of water, snakes and other burrowing animals leave their hideouts and come out in the open even in winter, thus facing the risk of freezing to death; rats run helter-skelter, unmindful of well-known dangers, sometimes becoming so confused that they can be caught by hand easily.

The period of warning varies from a few hours to two or three months. Some fish are known to have indicated excitement one to two months in advance. Chickens, dogs, pigs and other domestic animals are known to have given warning 8 to 10 days in advance, rats have done this from a few days to a month beforehand. Quite a large number of animals show unmistakable signs a day or a few hours before the event.

**Tsunami:** A great sea-wave produced by a submarine earthquake or volcanic eruption. **Earthquake:** A spasmodic shaking, trembling or rupture in the earth's crust due to volcanic or tectonic activity. There are many stimuli to which animals respond, such as touch, vibration, light, sound, infra-sound and odour; also electrical, electromagnetic, magnetic, and microwave radiations, air and hydrostatic pressure, ionisation, changes in temperature and gravity, etc. Just as different species will respond differently, the individuals of the same species may perhaps respond differently according to their age, sex and any previous experience of similar situations.

Birds are sensitive to electric, magnetic and electromagnetic changes, to ionisation, anomalous lights and sounds, ultrasonic sounds, vibrations through the trunks and branches of the trees on which they are roosting and sudden weather changes, —all caused by physical precursors. Most animals are sensitive to vibrations, sounds and ultrasounds, smells, and vertical and lateral displacements of the ground beneath their feet. Fishes are perhaps the most sensitive to electrical, magnetic and electromagnetic stimuli as well as to vibrations, sounds, anomalous sounds and anomalous lights. Snakes as well as rats and other rodents are sensitive to vibrations, smells, earth sounds, and changes in air temperature and pressure.

## SIXTH SENSE OF ANIMALS

Apart from these known and demonstrable aptitudes, the animal world exhibits yet another faculty which can be characterised as a sixth sense. Homing pigeons exhibit uncanny powers of returning to their starting point, no matter how many twists and turns they have taken in their flight. Migrating birds cross thousands of miles and

alight at the same spot, usually lakes, every year at precisely the same time of the year. Wild animals leave one country and migrate to another, say from Tanzania to Kenya and back, precisely at the same time annually. Young ones of cows and buffaloes run to their respective mothers and only after recognition does the mother entertain the calf. Fishes migrate upstream for several miles, for annual spawning; salmon are particularly known for this. There are innumerable instances that flabbergast us. A mother bat can recognise the voice of her offspring. Birds and big insects recognise their food and go straight for it. The bats' ability to steer clear of obstacles in their flight is well known.

The most typical response of the animal world is fear. Fear of the unknown and of unexpected changes in their normal surroundings. The startle-response, which is spontaneous and uniform in almost all animals, is expressed. Some animals produce sounds peculiar to their own species, more intense and shrill than usual. Domestic animals like cows, horses and sheep tear loose from their tethers, refuse to enter barns, and run for higher elevations. Some, such as pigs, bite each other, or bite off each other's tails coming in the way of their flight. Some, such as dogs dig in unusual and sometimes belligerent postures. Fishes migrate from their habitat, jump out of water, bite each other, or bite aquatic plants and stay on the ground for unduly long periods, or migrate to distant places. Even the mating habits of some animals are reported to change during an earthquake. Alertness is the principal part of the defensive mechanism of the animal world. A wild animal has no second chance, its first mistake is usually its last. Several studies have been made listing how long before the real event the animals show their reaction. The sensitivity of animals can be judged from the distance away from the epicentre at which they start to react.

Table 1: How early animals react (R. Buskirk et. al., 1981)

Period before	Animals
Less than one hour	Horses, Chickens, Rats, Dogs, Cattle and some Fish
1-4 hours	Dogs, Rats, Horses, Deer, Chickens, Cats, Eels, Snakes, Cows
6-12 hours	Chickens, Dogs, Cats, Fish, Frogs
1 day	Cows, Rats, Fish, Chickens, Cats
A few days	Rats, Fish, Eels, Horses, Snakes, Chickens
A few weeks	Fish, Pigeons, Snakes, Rats

Table 2: Reaction by Distance from Epicentres (Buskirk, et. al., 1981)

Epicentre Area	Animals known to react
20-50 km (about 5)	Chickens, Pigeons, Flying Birds, Dogs, Fish, Frogs, Rats, Goats, Eels
70-100 km (about 5-6.5)	Horses, Chickens, Frogs, Deer, Cats, Goats, Snakes
150-200 km	Horses, Pigeons, Fish, Birds, Rats, Flying Birds, Eels

The general conclusion drawn by Buskirk and others is that:

- (1) Most of the animals prone to this behaviour react within the epicentral areas. They react up to two days before an earthquake. The common animals in this category are dogs, horses and chickens. Horses and pheasants responded 5 to 10 days before the earthquake. A majority of animals react only a few hours before the earthquake.
- (2) Animals perceive ‘P’ waves which are faster and less intense, while humans perceive the ‘S’ waves which are slower but stronger.
- (3) On all counts, whether it be the long distance from the epicentre or the longer interval of time before the quake, such animals as fish and rats are sensitive in a variety of ways and do exhibit anomalous behaviour.

These conclusions must be read against the background that not all earthquakes are similar. In fact, no two earthquakes are similar. In fact no two earthquakes are exactly alike. The micro-seismic shock waves, having the smallest amplitude and lowest frequency, also vary widely amongst themselves. And some animals are more sensitive to them than others. Again, the time gaps between successive fore-shocks are unequal.

**OLFACTORY SENSITIVITIES**

The sense of smell is well developed in almost all the animal world, being employed mainly in the search for food, tracing the opposite sex, anticipating the approach of a predator or prey or protecting young ones and home territory. The degree to which this sense is developed varies in different animals. The shape, size, construction and tuning of the olfactory organs differ from one species to another. Some insects perceive smell through a proboscis in the head, others through other parts of the body. Snakes

perceive smell through the tips of their forked tongues.

The olfactory sensitivity of animals is used by man in several ways. The favourite French and Italian delicacy, truffles, a well known fungus, is explored with the help of animals....

Diffusion of gas in the atmosphere is a phenomenon that stimulates the animal world exposed to the atmosphere. Burrowing animals and forms of aquatic life are less often subject to gaseous emanations unless the gases emanate from the rocks below their hideouts. In marine earthquakes, the sea creatures are affected by gases in some cases; but in many others, the gases seem to get dissolved in the water, and therefore exert no effect on marine life. The sensitivity of animals is sometimes amazing. For instance, dogs are perhaps 10,000 times more sensitive to smell than many other animals.... Mice can recognise their own species from some 15 to 20 known ones, by smell alone. Some birds (e.g. petrels) can locate their nests by the odour. Snakes, through their vomerobasal system, can smell minute amounts of odorants and thus recognise prey or predators in the vicinity. In areas where the rocks contain minerals with elements like sulphur, any disturbance by an earthquake may give rise to strong effusion of smells. Moulton (1980), writing on the influence of odour, gives long lists of animals such as bears, catfish, cattle, deer, dogs, eels, frogs, horses, pigs, pigeons, rabbits, snakes, tortoises and wolves which are sensitive to minute traces of odour.

Methane and similar hydrocarbons and radon are also associated with gases emanating before earthquakes. Gases, which are released by micro-fractures from the cracks within the rocks, also cause flames, lights, highly obnoxious smells, hissing sounds, fountains, bubbles in water, etc. And all these manifestations of earthquakes affect animals in their own way.

B. G. DESHPANDE

(Source: *Earthquakes, Animals and Man*, 1987; Courtesy AWBI)

[This article appeared in the February issue of *The Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) Newsletter*. Our thanks to the author and to Dr. R. Balasubramanian for permission to use it here.]

## TEHMI-BEN

“Writing once is better than reading five times”!  
Across the bridge of time spanning fifty-five long years  
Still I hear your voice delivering to us  
This piece of practical wisdom  
Which you had gathered in your youth  
From your venerable professor.  
And because we held you in great respect  
And your word was law,  
We wrote and wrote and wrote...  
Thick notebooks, now moth-eaten and sadly falling to pieces  
But adorned with the many gems of English poetry,  
Still bear witness to our diligence.

And when you set us subjects for essay writing—  
And tough they were  
For on the face of it nothing could be written on them—  
How we racked our brains  
And prayed to the nine Muses  
To send us some inspiration  
To fill at least eight foolscap sheets  
With “original, worthwhile, readable stuff”.  
For nothing less would please you  
And your satisfaction was our goal.

It was from you that in our formative years  
We learnt the inspiring words of Robert Browning:  
“A man’s reach should exceed his grasp  
Or what’s a heaven for?”  
And Ralph Waldo Emerson’s:  
“Hitch your wagon to a star”—  
Words that changed our outlook on life  
And made us realise that  
“A death-bound littleness is not all we are”...  
It was you who guided us  
“Through thrice a thousand years to walk the ways of ancient Babylon”  
And led us in a great golden dream  
“Where shining Popocatepetl  
The dusty streets did rule”.

And when you introduced us to the Hound of Heaven—  
 Oh, how thrilled we were,  
 How we identified ourselves with the poet  
 Dogged by that tremendous Lover  
 Who did not take “no” for an answer!

Much did we travel with you in the realms of gold  
 And toured among others  
 The prosperous kingdoms ruled by Shakespeare,  
 Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats  
 And trod the modern mazes  
 Of Browning and T. S. Eliot.  
 All the while we were gaining  
 Valuable experience and insight into English poetry.

Finally, when you thought that we were ready to some extent  
 You brought us to the shores of  
 “...moon-flame oceans of swift fathomless bliss  
 And calm immensities of spirit Space”—  
 Namely, Sri Aurobindo’s poetry  
 And especially his divine *Savitri*.

\*

Over the years so much you have given us—  
 How can we even dream of repaying  
 This immense debt of gratitude that we owe you?

But then a line from a poem  
 You had once quoted to us, comes to my mind:  
 “Lady, we but give what we receive”...  
 I confess that at that time  
 I did not quite understand what the words meant,  
 But now that the touch of life has turned them to truth,  
 In my small way I am passing on  
 All that wealth  
 To generations of young-eyed cherubims  
 Who are eager to receive it.

\*



Tehmi-Ben, I seem to see you still  
 Standing before us in the classroom  
 All in white,  
 A picture of purity and simplicity and dedication,  
 A white flame,  
 Ever guiding us, aiding us, willing us to progress.

ANIRUDDHA SIRCAR

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### A REFERENCE DATABASE

Scattered throughout Sri Aurobindo's writings are references and allusions to characters historical and mythological, places and events, familiar and not so familiar quotes and phrases, customs, traditions and symbols, as well as passages from a large number of authors, savants, etc.

Devoted and diligent readers must have tried to hunt them out in order to obtain a better understanding of what Sri Aurobindo was referring to. Or perhaps some might even have chanced upon these in their reading or research.

This material would be valuable for students of Sri Aurobindo's works and it would be worthwhile to try to gather all such source material referred to by the Master.

*Mother India* requests its readers to mail in any such material so as to build a database which could periodically be published in the journal, making it available to other students, scholars and devotees.

The material, with complete reference (i.e. book, author, publisher, year, page number. etc.) may be sent by post to

Mother India  
 Sri Aurobindo Ashram  
 Pondicherry - 605 002

or e-mailed to

archives@sriurobindoashram.org

with "Mother India - Reference Database" in the subject line.

Readers may be aware that a reference volume, *Glossary and Index of Proper Names in Sri Aurobindo's Works* compiled by Gopal Dass Gupta was published some time back. The scope of the present endeavour is somewhat larger.

## I'M LATE, BUT STILL...

I'M LATE but still within Amal's Centenary-year as I write, so I'd like to add my flower to the bouquet even if it has bloomed a little out of season. After all, Amal will be one hundred for almost another year.

When I first reached the Ashram (at last) at the beginning of 1960, in good time for that extraordinary, memorable golden first anniversary of the Supramental Descent (for which Amal had received a special signal from Mother) I met many people. The two who most amazed and left an indelible impression on me were Nolini-da and Amal. My heart opened to both of them and both enveloped me in their love in different ways. Nolini-da with that calm, silent warmth of his eyes. (At the age of 75 he asked me to teach him Spanish (!) and we had some memorable lessons.) But I am here to write about Amal.

I was introduced to him as a French writer from Africa who wrote in English. If I expected a literary exchange I was mistaken though not at all disappointed. The first thing that struck me was that Amal, who had been pounding away at his typewriter, immediately turned away from it to give me his whole attention. He was smiling and full of good humour. And this in itself was ground for admiration. I was to learn that he was never disturbed by such intrusions. His big heart did not consider them intrusions. Never once did I see him irritated by the many invasions from visitors though he was one of the most visited people in the Ashram. It still is a source of amazement to me that in spite of this, of the monthly responsibility of *Mother India* and of his what is commonly termed voluminous correspondence, he has published over fifty books and numerous articles. In all these forty-five years I have met no other writer who displayed such equanimity when interrupted at work.

To come back to this first visit. I remember him calling to his wife, Sehra, "Maggi has come all the way from Africa. She must be in need of refreshment." He emanated both hospitality and joviality and kept a protective eye over me during my first three months' visit. This protection extended to my departure via Madras where he had contacted someone to guide me around the city and to put me on a train for Bombay for which city he had also given me addresses of family and friends and letters of introduction.

The spiritual side of his influence can hardly be extricated from the very informal and humorous tone of our exchange, for it was woven into his conversation mostly in the form of anecdotes, reminiscences and quotations in the style with which readers of *Mother India* are familiar. But the great treasure which I took back to Africa after that first (and last) visit was, as well as his deep warmth, his book of poetry, *The Secret Splendour*, with which he had presented me. I read the poems over and over again on the plane journey back to Africa and they not only sustained me in my painful separation from Mother and the Ashram but seemed to be part of the air currents on which the plane sped.

...’tis with mouth of clay I supplicate:  
 Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,  
 And all Thy formless glory turn to love  
 And mould Thy love into a human face.

Those lines were so much my own aspiration as well as what had been experienced in my first meeting with Mother that they never failed to draw psychic tears. That poem became a prayer and a mantra for me. Perhaps I was not able to convey to Amal how much and how deeply his verse touched me and, I’ve no doubt, influenced me as a poet. I still find it difficult to do so now as I write.

When I returned nine months later, Amal was there for me. He visited me in the little house (it was the converted stable of the big colonial house next door on Balcony street) that Mother had restored for me. He made sure that all was well, that I was comfortable and that the servant was all right and of course he asked and I told how things had been for me while I was away from Mother and the Ashram and, after that truly close beginning, in all these years we seldom met. We hardly met on the physical plane, that is. For Amal slipped in under my door every month or through my letter box with each copy of *Mother India* or flung himself over the garden wall. Every issue of *Mother India* came like a personal message. With *Mother India* he introduced me to devotees who had left their bodies as well as those still living and whom I would otherwise never have met. They shared with me their intimate experiences and darshans of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, their difficulties which were sometimes mine and their victories which sustained me and gave me hope. I learnt of how others had arrived at my Master’s feet, in what intricate ways they had been drawn to join in our great endeavour.

The quotations in the first pages were always just what I needed to be told at that time. I was introduced to parts of the infinite path and surprised by new lights on epics and poems I had studied in a dry and analytical manner at University.

Yes, with each issue Amal sent there came new lights and delights, and, very important in those first years, a growing and heart-warming sense of community.

I read his published letters to others, often as though they had been written to me. Indeed their caring and sage advice served me often and well.

When eight years after my return I had a sudden opening in poetry he was there to receive and print and sometimes comment on my verse. And he still is there nearly half a century later.

Sometimes a person comes into your life and runs through it like a slender thread of light of which you’re often not aware until occasion or circumstance runs it between finger and thumb as it were or more correctly between brain and heart. There have been many such when I’ve read his books or articles. When I was researching my *The Light that Shone into the Dark Abyss* I came upon his article on the forces behind World War II. It was so good, so compelling that I quoted the

whole thing. I did an enormous amount of research in preparation for this book, a sort of document which had the purpose of revealing the occult war behind the war of 1939-45, (World War II) and Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's role in it and I found nothing to compare with Amal's insights and his exposition of Sri Aurobindo's Light on the subject. It was a source of inspiration and aroused my admiration for the extent and depth of his knowledge. It deserves the same comment as Sri Aurobindo passed on his essay on Freewill though I make it without equal authority (!) "The article is excellent. In fact it could not be bettered." One of the other occasions on which I felt that slender thread almost tangibly was when I was asked to write something for *Mother India* on its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1999. It was then as I wrote, as I conjured up the months and months and years and years of receiving *Mother India* of the Blue Map with Mother's Symbol at its heart on a pure white field that I realised how much it meant to me. And of course that meant Amal.

Yes, my heart still lifts every time I find *Mother India* in my letter box or slipped under my door. It has been an essential part of my life in the Ashram. Life would have been poorer for me had not Amal one day launched this venture. Readers of *Mother India* and those who visited his centenary exhibition must be aware of Amal's dizzying encyclopedic knowledge but when I think of Amal it is primarily of Amal the poet and Amal of the warm heart. A month before his hundredth birthday some of my new poems were read by him and with his usual kindness he took the trouble of dictating comments on them, comments which say as much about himself as about the verses. Of one of them he says, "It's a very strong-hearted yet gentle-handed work. I welcome it into my deepest self." Of another, "There is a brave beauty in the words that makes us bind the words to our hearts." At a hundred, Amal's heart is still green and responsive and as eternally young as his dear cherubic extraordinarily unwrinkled visage.

There is one subject on which I disagree with Amal. He seems like Nolini-da to think it unlikely that now that Mother has left her body the transformation can be progressing, while I belong to the school that believes it is in full swing, the Force working behind the veil to wake up cells here and there and everywhere and really when one looks at Amal's unlined face one has to wonder what *his* cells are up to but anyhow there should be many Amals, many Clear Rays in the world and they should all live to be at least a hundred.

So, for everything, thank you Amal and *Bonne Fête en retard*.

MAGGI

## THEY SAY AMAL IS A 100!

A HUNDRED... in terms of ‘years’?

Strange, very strange indeed! For he is a ‘friend’ of one’s youthful questing years... and the ‘youth’ and the ‘quest’ don’t seem to be measurable in a number of ‘years’!

He has always been a ‘friend’—eternally young—reaching out to understand as one was and where one was. This sense of ‘ease’ with him—‘ease’ within—is what makes of him a friend. And saying so even at the risk of sounding totally out of place! Perhaps, he wouldn’t have it said otherwise...

The early years of being with him—on the stonebench along the tennis courts, where Mother played her game. And pestering him with questions about ‘freewill’... Answering with a loving patience even when his concentration was elsewhere—far in other realms to which he was witness. One may not remember what he said—but one felt that the answers were given and one was satisfied! And eagerly asked for more...

Walking through the gate of the playground and finding that one was sitting right there, he shot, quick like an arrow, the question “What are sculptured waters?” Swift came the response, “Translucency given a form.” He was pleased.

Years—and years later—at the end of a talk given to the students in the Hall of Harmony, he quipped “What is an asterisk?” On receiving no immediate answer, he said, “Aster is a risk...” and he paused here for suspense, the audience waited, then he added, “...worth taking!”

And, in recent times, as one walks down the road, one is blessed to see him come rolling along—fullness brimming over the chair that glides on the tiled surfaces! One’s very being flows to meet him. His hand reaches out, telling you that he knows what is happening within. More than you know yourself! And he says, audible in his silence—go ahead! Making you feel that he is sharing a secret pact—happy in the sharing but the secrecy of which is his alone! And one is content not to know, but reassured that he has the secret...

How can one ‘dare’ to call him a friend? But one thinks of him in no other way... May be, because he loves our ‘daring’!

ASTER

# GRATEFULLY TO AMAL—A LETTER AND A POEM

## A LETTER

25.11.04

Dear Amal,

Elder brother and guide on the beautiful path of my literary creations in English, accept my gratitude on this great day of your centenary.

To some people, one cannot be grateful enough. You are such a one in my life.

Do you know that I might never have approached you, and would have remained a stranger to you? Of course, having been an avid reader of *Mother India* for decades, I knew who you were since long as I had asked people to point you out to me.

One day I wrote some poems in Hindi and showed them to Parichand. He surprised me by translating them into English. I was so awed by these translations that I felt they should be published in *Mother India*. So when you were seated in your customary place in the Ashram one evening, I shyly put those translations in your lap with a request to publish them. Almost as an afterthought, I had brought a notebook in which I had once written some poems in English and had sent to the Mother who had graciously written “Blessings” on that notebook. When I gave you that notebook asking you to take special care of it since it had been to the Mother, I remember how you raised your eyebrows. As if I needed to tell this to a person who had numerous letters, both from the Master and the Mother!

When you returned the notebook, it had a note by you: “Shyam Kumari, surely you are a poet.” Thus began our relationship that led me to write several books.

I had always been interested in English literature, and since my schooldays I had read most of the classics. Yet, in spite of my deep love of English literature, I had not dared to write due to my diffidence, and that is how things would have remained had it not been for the encouragement you gave me by publishing my poems, stories and essays in *Mother India*. In the joyful creative atmosphere of the Ashram, the poet in me blossomed and sometimes I wrote up to four poems a day, and you read and corrected and edited them often that very day, day after day. Sometimes you asked me to change a word, an expression or even a whole line and this, at times, even four times. If you commented “good” or “very good” or “excellent” or “charming”, my day would be made. “Fair” made me only moderately happy. I have preserved all those poems with your comments.

One day I requested the privilege of reading Sri Aurobindo’s *Collected Poems* with you. You graciously agreed to do so once a week. I eagerly looked forward to those weekly classes. That was early in 1982. You were nearing 80 yet you looked 60 or so. When I remarked how young you looked, you replied with your inimitable sense of humour, “I can’t help it.” After the *Collected Poems* I requested to read *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* with you. To this too you consented. I bow to your inde-

fatigable energy and your generous self-giving.

I was drunk with poetry, and it was frustrating for me not to be able to understand the early poems of Sri Aurobindo with their numerous Greek and Latin expressions. To clarify them to myself, I wrote a series of essays probably beginning with “Beauty in the Early Poetry of Sri Aurobindo”. This was later followed by “Humour in the Plays of Sri Aurobindo”. These were published in *Mother India*.

One day I recounted to you some stories told to me by sadhaks about their wonderful interactions with the Mother. You asked me to write them for the journal. I was full of my own bubbling enthusiasm and said without thinking, “I will publish them as a book.” You sent Shraddhavan to persuade me to write them for *Mother India*. Shraddhavan told me, “Shyam Kumari, you must never say ‘NO’ to Amal.” I at once agreed because my remark about publishing them as a book was made on the spur of the moment. Thus was born the series “Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.”

Nolini-da had told me once that the story of each sadhak, how he came to the Ashram, was beautiful. From my first visit to the Ashram, I used to ask the sadhaks about their coming to the Ashram. And the marvellous thing was that most of the persons whom I asked laid bare their lives to me. This was the inspiration behind the “How they came” series. You fully supported me in writing these stories for *Mother India*.

The years flew by. Then came the auspicious 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1994 when I wrote my first “Musings on the Mother’s *Prayers and Meditations*”. I showed you the first two essays and you liked them, and published them in *Mother India*, as well as about a 100 in the series. The ones that I wrote later were published as separate books. At the age of 90, in spite of your numerous responsibilities, you read and edited every one of them. Hardly ever did you keep them pending for more than a day. I eagerly waited for your comments and approval. When I expressed my gratitude and wondered how you could give them so much time, you remarked that it was a joy to read them.

The Divine Mother’s action is a marvel.

On this great occasion of your centenary I pray to the Mother to fulfill your highest aspiration. Holding your smiling face in my memory, I bow to you.

With deep gratitude,

Yours in the Mother’s love and service,

SHYAM KUMARI



## A POEM

### To Amal Kiran

A super lighting rod,  
A glorious conductor  
Of the Lord's splendours—  
Amal! You are  
A wonder of wonders.

Mental rainbows  
With psychic streaks  
Flash on all those who gather  
To taste your sweetness,  
To glow in your glamour.

SHYAM KUMARI

*The intellectual being too has to be taken up by the Shakti in the Yoga and raised to its fullest and its most heightened powers. The subsequent transformation of the intellect is possible because all the action of the intellect derives secretly from the supermind, each thought and will contains some truth of it however limited and altered by the inferior action of the intelligence. The transformation can be brought about by the removal of the limitation and the elimination of the distorting or perverting element. This however cannot be done by the heightening and greatening of the intellectual activity alone; for that must always be limited by the original inherent defects of the mental intelligence. An intervention of the supramental energy is needed that can light up and get rid of its deficiencies of thought and will and feeling. This intervention too cannot be completely effective unless the supramental plane is manifested and acts above the mind no longer from behind a lid or veil, however thin the veil may have grown, but more constantly in an open and luminous action till there is seen the full sun of Truth with no cloud to moderate its splendour. It is not necessary, either, to develop the intellect fully in its separateness before calling down this intervention or opening up by it the supramental levels. The intervention may come in earlier and at once develop the intellectual action and turn it, as it develops, into the higher intuitive form and substance.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, pp. 806-07)

## THE PURANAS AND OUR CENTURY

(Continued from the issue of April 2005)

### 18. Image of Dharma

THERE seems to be a wide chasm between the history of Rama as seen by lovers of literature taking their cue from Valmiki and by the lovers of the Divine who do not think that the Image of Dharma will do something as reprehensible as looking on silently when a woman commits suicide by jumping into the fire. Even Vyasa, when retelling the story of Rama in the Vana Parva of the *Mahabharata* avoids the fire ordeal in the Yuddha Kanda. Rama does say a few harsh words and Sita swoons. The coming of Brahma and other celestials eases the situation and Sita's purity is vindicated by a divine voice.

The theme of Rama rejecting Sita and allowing her to enter the fire in the Lankan battlefield has been widely used by writers with imaginative abandon. The scene of Agnideva refusing to act according to his nature (of burning up all that he touches) has been etched indelibly in our hearts with all the pathos and grief of the moment, even by a very recent poet:

She paused for a while to control her tears.  
Then turned to paled Saumitra;  
"Make a funeral pyre at once, my son:  
I have no desire to live."

Observing no hint of a change of heart  
On the set face of Rama,  
The miserable Lakshmana prepared  
A cauldron of blazing fire...

And calmly going round the altar-blaze  
In the poise of submission,  
With an incandescent resoluteness  
Sita stepped into the fire...

What was it but the beginningless One  
Singing the diapason  
Of the grand Affirmation of Sita's  
Transcendental purity?

The great lord of life and death, the Fire-God,  
 Approaching with Maithili  
 By his side, seemed to admonish Rama  
 For his crime and his folly.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of Valmiki's lengthy epic and the innumerable retellings, the story of Rama is simply told. Eldest of the four sons of King Dasharatha, Rama is exiled for fourteen years to satisfy the king's youngest wife, Kaikeyi. Rama is accompanied by his wife, Sita, and brother Lakshmana to the forest. The king of Lanka, Ravana, abducts Sita. Rama gathers an army of the monkey race from the forests, goes to Lanka, kills Ravana and returns triumphantly to his native kingdom of Ayodhya. As Dasharatha has died in the meantime, Rama is crowned king and all is well.

Thanks to Valmiki's storyline the triple rejection of Sita (in the Lankan battlefield, in the palace at Ayodhya and again after the birth of Kusha and Lava) has exercised the Indian consciousness in a very big way. Why was Rama so unsure of himself despite having "a gem of purest ray serene" as his consort? Was it that he could never forgive the one sentence of Sita challenging Rama's manhood on the eve of their forest sojourn?

*Kim tvāmanyata vaidehaḥ pitā me mithilādhipaḥ  
 Rāmaṁ jāmātaraṁ prāpya strīyaṁ puruṣavigraham.<sup>2</sup>*

We will never know. All that we know is that Sita had to endure thrice the challenge from her husband that she prove her chastity. Yet, not all the versions give credence to such rejections. In any case, the second and third rejections belong to the Uttara Kanda which is often not considered as part of the main *Ramayana* of Valmiki. Yet the first fire-ordeal remains as part of Valmiki's *Adi Kavya* which is used as a *prayāṇa grantha* by millions of devotees in India. How does the non-Valmiki strand view the first ordeal and which has proved to be an ineradicable question mark over the character of Rama as the defender of the weak and upholder of Dharma?

There is, of course the legend of Rama as recounted in the *Mahabharata*. When Sita is brought to the battlefield, Rama's welcome is unbelievably harsh. But it is obvious that he is feeling guilty for he says he is not sure whether her character is sullied or not. Yet consider the context; consider Sita's helplessness; consider her being a woman in the midst of all the army of men. Even Vyasa is not able to veil the words:

*Gaccha vaidehi muktā tvam yatkāryaṁ tanmayā kṛtam  
 Mamāsādhyā patim bhadre na tvam rākṣasaveśmani.*

1. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sitayana* (1987), Book Six, verses 173, 174, 182, 187, 188.

2. Is it that my father, the king of Mithila, found a woman in the form of a man as his son-in-law?

*Jarām vrajeta iti me nihato'sau niśācaraḥ  
 Kathaṁ hyasmadvidhau jātu jānan dharmaviniścayam  
 Parahastagatām nārīm muhūrtamapi dhārayet  
 Suvṛttāmasuvṛttām vāpyaham tvāmadya maithili  
 No sahe paribhogāya śvānevaīdam haviryathā.<sup>3</sup>*

Sita falls like a banana tree cut down. Regaining her poise she says that she is not angry with Rama as she is intelligent enough to know of the ways of women and men. Sita now calls upon the five elements to destroy her if she were really unchaste. Vayu, Varuna, Yama and others now manifest and assure Rama that Sita is spotless. Dasharatha also appears. Significantly enough, he does not say anything about Sita, but simply says: "My child. I am pleased. May all be auspicious with you. I am your father Dasharatha. I am giving you permission. Rule over the kingdom." Rama replies that since it is the paternal command, he will return to the city of Ayodhya and rule over it. Dasharatha speaks again: "Go to Ayodhya. Rule over the kingdom. O brilliant one! The fourteen years are now over." Of course, no word about Sita.

So when did the fire-ordeal come in? In Valmiki it is clear enough. Unable to bear the harsh words of Rama (rendered harsher in Valmiki's version) Sita pulls him up sharply ("these words are those of an uncultured man spoken to an equally uncultured woman", *prākṛtaḥ prākṛtāmiva*) and addresses Lakshmana: *Citām me kuru saumitre vyaśanasyāśya bheṣajam!* Rama stands silent as the sad Lakshmana piles up the wood and lights the pyre, for he recognises from Rama's face that this is pleasing to him:

*Sa vijñāya manaśchandaṁ rāmasyākārasūcitam  
 Citām cakāra saumitrimate rāmasya vīryavān.*

Sita rushes to the fire like the final offering of ghee poured into the sacrificial flames, *yajñe purnāhutimiva*. While Brahma appears and praises Rama in glowing terms as the incarnation of the Supreme, Agni emerges having heard the gracious words (*śubham vākyam*) of the Creator. He brings Sita and speaks to Rama. Being the witness of the entire creation (*sākṣī lokasya pāvakaḥ*), he is heard with respect and joy and all is well.

One cannot but wonder whether this dramatic scenario involving immortals, an entry into the fire and return from it unscathed, is part of an epic imagination. For, the fire-ordeal which has exercised much the mind of the Indian down the centuries

3. Vaidehi! You may go. You have been freed. I have done what had to be done. O auspicious lady! The rakshasa was killed so that you will not be made to grow old in his house, despite gaining me as your husband. How can one like me who knows of the firmness of dharma accept for even a moment a woman who had remained in the control of a stranger? Maithili! Though you may be pure in character or not, I do not wish to live anymore with you who are like the sacred offering that has been licked by a dog.

is absent from significant texts. The first full-length *Ramayana* available in Tamil is by Kulasekhara Alwar, who lived more than a millennium ago. His eleven-stanzaed narrative speaks of Rama being born in the Solar dynasty. Rama kills Tataka, guards the sacrifice of Vishwamitra, breaks the bow of Shiva and marries Sita, goes to the forest on the command of Kaikeyi, befriends Guha, gives Bharata his sandals, kills Viradha, receives armaments from Agastya, cuts off the nose of Surpanakha, destroys Khara and Dushana, pines over the abduction of Vaidehi, performs the final obsequies of Jatayu, befriends Sugriva and kills Vali, has Lanka burnt by Hanuman, humbles Varuna and builds the bridge across the seas, destroys Ravana and crowns Vibhishana, comes back to Ayodhya with his Lakshmi-like wife, listens to his life-story from the boys born to Maithili, kills Sampuka, puts an end to Lavana through Lakshmana, allows Lakshmana to go away and then gets back to his Eternal Abode with all living beings. Nowhere does Kulasekhara mention the fire-ordeal in the battlefield of Lanka, nor the second rejection in the Uttara Kanda (that was caused by a washerman's loose talk) nor the third demand that Sita prove her innocence in the royal court of Ayodhya. Kulasekhara was no doubt following the oral tellings of the Rama story available in his time.

The *Bhagavata* poet has given two cantos in the Ninth Skandha to the Rama story. In keeping with the atmosphere created by the Purana, Rama is seen as a divine incarnation even in the opening stanzas:

The Lord of all excellences, the Supreme Hari, the very Brahman, being invoked and prayed to by the celestials, was born by a fraction of Himself divided into four parts as the four sons of Dasharatha.

Like the “*sankshepa Ramayana*” in Valmiki, Shuka first gives a brief summary of the tale in a couple of verses:

He who gave up a kingdom to keep his father's plighted words; whose feet, though too soft to stand even the touch of his consort, nevertheless trudged through forest after forest along paths cleared by his brother and the monkey king; who frightened the deity of the seas by an angry frown and arching brows, consequent on the abduction of his wife Sita by Ravana who was earlier incensed by Rama's mutilation of his sister Surpanakha; who built the bridge across the sea to Lanka where he raged like a forest fire destroying the tribe of evil-doers—may that Rama, the king of Koshala, be our refuge.

In the course of the telling, the Pauranika gives special importance to Rama's subduing the pride of the sea-king. Rama's knitted eyebrows (*roṣa-vibhrama-vivṛṭṭa-kaṭākṣa*) is enough to prompt the sea-king to begin a panegyric followed by a detailed description of the destruction of Lanka. I would not be surprised if the 11<sup>th</sup> century

Pauranika was imaging an attack by the Indian army on the far away Turkoman palaces with their pleasure-domes to wreak vengeance on the manner in which the Hindu populace was being wronged by the foreign invaders at that time. Rama succeeds in his mission and we have an emotional lament by Ravana's widowed queens who have apparently no illusions regarding their Lord. He was one who succumbed to lust and failed to recognise the spiritual greatness of Sita, *tejonubhāvam sītāyā*. After Vibhishana performs the obsequies for Ravana, there is a very natural, tender, realistic scene about the reunion of Rama and Sita. It is Rama who goes to Sita in the Ashoka grove:

Next the Lord met Sita under a *Simsupa* tree in the Ashoka grove, almost reduced to skin and bones by the sorrow of separation from him. Rama felt great compassion for his most miserably placed wife, whose face now bloomed with joy at the sight of him. Installing Vibhishana as the king of the Rakshasas in Lanka, Rama along with Sita, Lakshmana, Sugriva and Hanuman got into the aerial car called Pushpaka.

The return to Nandigram and the coronation of Rama also give us information regarding the life of Bharata during the preceding fourteen years and his unalloyed joy and relief. We have an excellent, if brief, portrait of Rama-*rajya*. What about Sita?

And Sita by her humility, her skill in divining her husband's mind, her loving behaviour, ungrudging service, discrimination, good behaviour and modesty won the heart of her husband in every way.

So concludes chapter 10 of the Ninth Skandha. We are then told that after Rama's rule for a considerable time, one day when he was going around the city incognito, he happened to overhear someone speak ill of Sita. Terrified by such irresponsible criticism by the ignorant, Rama abandoned Sita, though she was in the family way. Sage Shuka quickly relates how Valmiki gave her shelter, and she gave birth to Lava and Kusha. Interestingly enough, the Pauranika avoids the long-drawn-out narrative in the Uttara Kanda of the twins reciting the *Ramayana* in the court of Ayodhya, Sita coming to the court and being asked to prove her innocence once again. In Valmiki Rama sends a message to Valmiki:

If Sita is pure (*yadi śuddha samācārā*) and sinless (*vītakalmaṣā*), may she purify herself as directed by Valmiki. I have known the rishi's wish and the thoughts of Sita. If she is willing to prove her purity, let me know at once. Let Maithili take an oath in this court tomorrow about her purity (*śapatham maithili janakātmajā karotu*) and for my good as well.

The courtiers and the sages attached to the court are all pleased. No one seems to have a thought to spare for Sita, though. Once again, such a public humiliation! So she has the last word on the following day. “As I have spoken the truth that I do not know anyone except Sri Rama, so I pray to the earth-goddess Madhavi to grant space to me.” It is one of those incredible scenes which have exercised the minds of Indians for a long, long time. Perhaps there was a rejection (though only one) in the original happening. The *Bhagavata* handles this solitary rejection with commendable dignity. It was no doubt a case of overreaction on the part of Rama when he heard the calumny and Sita accepts it as the way of the world (or the way of the male in a patriarchal society). Sage Shuka says:

She (Sita) entrusted her sons to the sage Valmiki. Unable to bear separation from Rama, she, it seems, entered into the bowels of the earth, contemplating on him. Hearing this, Rama, though he was the Lord incarnate, could not control his sorrow in spite of his best efforts, remembering all the great qualities of Sita. The intensity of attachment between man and woman is of this order, even in the case of those with mastery over their minds.

The *Bhagavata* version is closest to life as we know it, and when we hear Shuka’s words quoted above, we just sigh, say “fate is incorrigible” and recognise the “touch of tears in mortal things”. It is heartening to note that the bhagavatas or devotees have preferred not to probe into the domestic tragedy of the past nor embellish it further as to make it unrealistic. This is life, and we accept it: “Ripeness is all!” By the sixteenth century, the pressure of the Valmikian approach must have had a slight effect on some of the regional variations. Thus the Telugu poet Pothana speaks of Rama meeting the wan and emaciated Sita under the *Simsupa* tree, feels compassionate, recognises her purity demonstrated by Agni (*bhāryavalana doṣambu lekunduta vahnivalanani prakatimpa jesi*) and takes her hand to return to Ayodhya. The rest follows the *Bhagavata* in the narrative.

Another beautiful regional variation is in Tamil by Sevvai Chooduvar. After Ravana’s death, we have here Rama accepting Sita, “considered queen among women”, and returns to Ayodhya by the Pushpaka aerial chariot. The rejection of Sita after she becomes pregnant is on the same lines as in the original *Bhagavata* but goes back to Valmiki when Lava and Kusha appear on the scene. Rama continues to rule with a golden image of Sita to accompany him when performing sacrifices. He listens to the twins reciting his life story. Sevvai Chooduvar introduces his own drama. Rama tries to give gifts to the twins which they reject and Rama vows to bring back Sita to Ayodhya. His messengers speak to Valmiki who conducts Sita to the court. But like the noble Sita in the Uttara Kanda, she says:

I have never strayed from the path of chastity. Hence Mother Earth will show me the right path to traverse henceforth.



The earth sunders, and the Earth Goddess takes away Sita. For once Rama is defeated and rises in all fury against Bhu Devi. Brahma appears and calms him down and tells him that Sita has reached the Supreme Abode (Vaikuntha). The time has now come for Rama also to follow. And so it comes to be. The incarnation of Rama is over.

It is a great story and one cannot dissect the vast canvas. Sri Aurobindo himself did not try to do so but flung his vast, poetic look on the epic narrative and wrote in *The Foundations of Indian Culture*:

The work of Valmiki has been an agent of almost incalculable power in the moulding of the cultural mind of India: it has presented to it to be loved and imitated in figures like Rama and Sita, made so divinely and with such a revelation of reality as to become objects of enduring cult and worship, or like Hanuman, Lakshmana, Bharata the living human image of its ethical ideals; it has fashioned much of what is best and sweetest in the national character, and it has evoked and fixed in it those finer and exquisite yet firm soul tones and that more delicate humanity of temperament which are a more valuable thing than the formal outsides of virtue and conduct.<sup>4</sup>

Such is the *Bhagavata* tradition. What have we to do with the discussions regarding the right or wrong of the ordeals, of the oppressions of a male-dominated society, of a time past and lost? Rama as the image of dharma (*vigrahavān dharmah*) and Sita as the patient, compassionate mother fill our hearts belonging to the race of devotees. In this world of human affairs we need the *karuṇā* of Mother Sita who could yet pull up Hanuman who wanted to punish the demonesses for torturing her. Who is in this world who has not committed a wrong? The ideal for the noble human being is to shower compassion on those who have sinned and even those who deserve to be punished with death!

*Pāpānām vā śubhānām vā vadhārhanām plavaṅgama  
Kāryam karuṇamāryeṇa na kaścid nāparādhyati.*

If it were so, did not Rama deserve forgiveness from her?

Sri Aurobindo did translate a few passages from the *Ramayana* which seemed appropriate for his mood in Baroda. Those were the days when he was coming face to face with the great past of India and comparing it with its curmudgeonish, sleepy present. Hence he felt happy translating a description of Koshala and its people, real heroes worthy of the nation in the first decade of the twentieth century:

4. *The Renaissance in India*, CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 350-51.

...her sons  
 Were noble, warriors whose arrows scorned to pierce  
 The isolated man from friends cut off  
 Or guided by a sound to smite the alarmed  
 And crouching fugitive; but with sharp steel  
 Sought out the lion in his den or grappling  
 Unarmed they murdered with their mighty hands  
 The tiger roaring in his trackless woods  
 Or the mad tuskèd boar.<sup>5</sup>

The most interesting of the fragments is the translation of passages from Ayodhya Kanda when Sita pleads with Rama to be taken to the forest. Sri Aurobindo was obviously not interested in Indian women being meek and weak, entering the fire to satisfy men or accept a calumny and allow themselves to be banished. Sita in Sri Aurobindo is “a princess in her mind and mood”, is prepared to aim “fierce reprimand” when it is needed; she has been trained to be a worthy Indian woman by Janaka:

My father’s lap, my mother’s knees to me  
 Were school of morals, Rama; each human law  
 Of love and service there I learned, nor need  
 Thy lessons. All things else are wind; I choose  
 The inaccessible inhuman woods...<sup>6</sup>

Later on Sita (as in Valmiki) wonders whether Janaka had erred by choosing “no man but woman in a male disguise” and assures Rama that her love for him is greater than that of Savitri for Satyavan. Sita’s words pouring scorn on Rama for suggesting that she live as a slave in Bharata’s camp make it clear that this is the ideal that Sri Aurobindo wanted his people to adhere to, and remain free, even if it meant exile in the forest or imprisonment in Alipore Jail! The *Bhagavata* ideal of seeing Sita as the Divine Mother full of love and compassion towards her children and the patriot’s ideal of the motherland as Shakti coalesce in his approach to Sita, the Daughter of Earth.

*(To be continued)*

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

5. *Translations*, CWSA, Vol. 5, pp. 8-9.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

## STUDENT OF QUESTIONS

Once,  
Asked a wandering voice,

Have you ever climbed your lowering frowns?  
Seen a bird losing the path to horizon?  
Wondered at a spider, weaving a universe?

The air whispered—  
Have you ever  
Painted a dream with colours of earth?  
Rhymed a song to the symphony of falling leaves?  
Or ever  
Walked a mile without looking at the stone?

I murmured,  
Reflecting on those seven stars  
On a starry book—  
Bless me, Sir,  
May I be a student of questions?

RAJAT KUMAR MISHRA

## NAVANIT STORIES

### NOT THAT—SOMETHING ELSE

A YOUNG man once came to a Yogi and said: “Gurudev! I seek refuge in you. Be gracious to accept all I am and have in your service. To obey your *adesh* will be my sole occupation. Command me, Gurudev!”

“Child, concentrate exclusively on your sadhana.”

“But that is too arduous! Please assign some other task, I will do it wholeheartedly.”

“Do not even glance at sinful acts.”

“But that is impossible! Please enjoin something else.”

“In that case, do not speak or hear any ill.”

“But that is involuntary—beyond my control! Have pity, Gurudev, isn’t there anything else?”

“All right then, can you pay attention to what I shall say?”

“Why not, Gurudev? I am your servant, always ready to do your bidding.”

“Listen carefully, then,” said the Guru and recounted the following parable:

An enthusiastic young man, in search of a job, came to the shop of a big trader. Cart-loads of goods were coming in and going out. Huge transactions were taking place. It was a flourishing establishment worth lakhs. Would be worth settling here, the young man decided. He entered the shop and greeted the trader:

“Sir, I have come seeking work. Would you be so kind as to employ me?”

“Well, there is plenty of work here. But tell me, what work do you wish to do?”

“Anything. I will serve you in whatever capacity you decide, sir. Your command shall be my work.”

Ah, an idealist, thought the trader: “Very well. But what would your salary be?”

“Whatever you give, sir. I am interested only in work. What I should be paid is for you to decide.”

What an admirable attitude, thought the trader; impossible to find another like him: “All right, I am hiring you immediately. Let us sign the agreement.”

The young man wrote down: “Work—Whatever the boss asks. Salary—Whatever the boss gives.”

The trader asked: “I suppose you want to start working immediately?”

“No sir! Not today, from tomorrow.”

“All right, from tomorrow.”

The next day, the trader took him to his office. “Well, here is a register of our customers’ accounts. Go round to each one of them and collect the outstanding dues.”

“Oh, I can’t do that, sir! Tramping round town the whole day will wear out my legs. Isn’t there something else to be done?”

“All right, then, go and help in our accounts office.”

“Oh, no sir! Poring over account books the whole day will strain my eyes and tire my brain; besides, I might fall asleep. Isn’t there any other work?”

“Come out on the shop floor, then. You see those weighing machines? Stand beside one of them, and make sure the bags are correctly weighed.”

“Oh, that is impossible, sir. I will feel giddy working the whole day standing all the time. Isn’t there any other work?”

“Well, young man,” the trader sighed, “the only other work I can now ask you to do for me is to step out of my shop.”

PUJALAL

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

*When I give work to someone it is not only for the sake of the work but also as the best means to advance on the path of Yoga. When I gave you this work, I was quite aware of your difficulties and shortcomings, but at the same time I knew that if you opened yourself to my help and force you would be able to surmount these obstacles and at the same time to increase your consciousness and open yourself to the Divine’s Grace.*

\*

*If anyone were capable of seeing the welfare of the work quite independent of his preferences and without turning everything into a personal question, then most of the difficulties would be solved.*

\*

*Here, for each work given, the full strength and Grace are always given at the same time to do the work as it has to be done. If you do not feel the strength and the Grace, it proves that there is some mistake in your attitude. The faith is lacking or you have fallen back on old tracks and old creeds and thus you lose all receptivity.*

\*

*Take up the work and have faith, the force will come in proportion to the need; and your receptivity depends on your faith and confidence.*

*The Mother*

(CWM, Vol. 13, p. 164; Vol. 14, pp. 336, 338, 342)